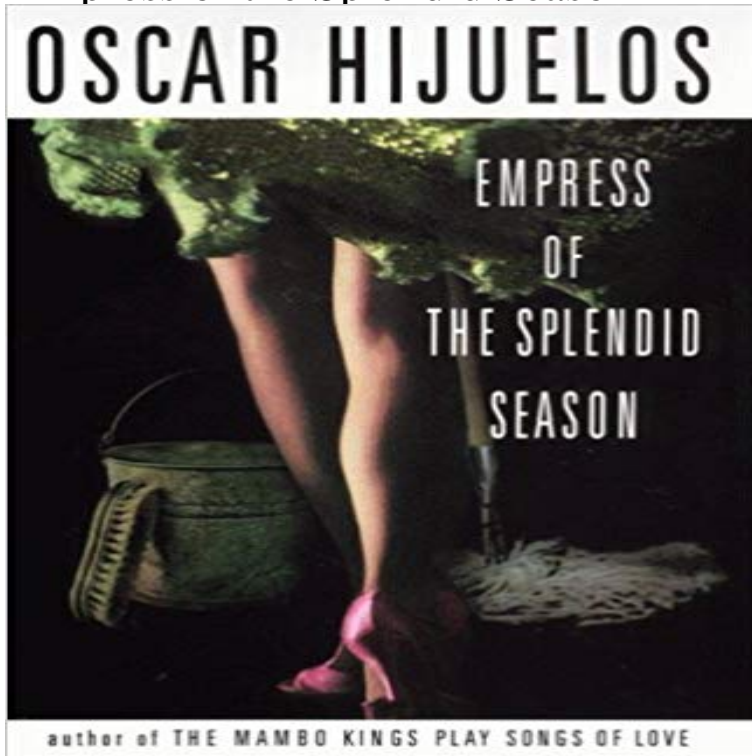


Empress of the Splendid Season



Through four novels in the last decade, Oscar Hijuelos has produced a body of work that is without rival in contemporary literature, both in the lush, incantatory rhythms of his extraordinary prose and in his profound and heartfelt vision. In his transcendent new novel, Hijuelos tells the story of Lydia Espana, a beautiful and formerly prosperous emigre from pre-Castro Cuba, who becomes a cleaning lady in New York. Once the spoiled, pampered daughter of a small-town mayor and adored by mena queen of the Congo lineshe is forced because of a youthful sexual indiscretion to leave home and, in 1947, finds herself suddenly living the life of a working poor. In time she falls in love with Raul, a humble waiter. One night in a Manhattan ballroom, in the middle of a bolero, Raul purposes marriage, for Lydia is his empress of the most beautiful and splendid season, which is love. A life of promise is disrupted when Raul falls ill and Lydia, finding employment as a domestic, becomes the head of the family. Striving to educate her town children, Rico and Alicia, in the style of the upper class, she must endure a lesson in humanity, cleaning the homes of New Yorkers much better off than herself. Among her employers is Mr. Osprey, a reserved and kindly lawyer, who eventuality takes an interest in her familys well-being and, during the turmoil of the 1960s, intervenes at a critical juncture in the life of her teenage son, Rico. Throughout this novel Lydia remains a sensual and powerful woman who meets the trails of a lonely life with humor and a gleam of triumph in her eyea sense that she is someone specialan empress of fortitude, of dignity. Hijuelos genius for evoking the heart and soul of his characters has never been more vivid, moving, and impassioned than in Empress of the Splendid Season. A master of eloquent detail, Hijuelos allows Lydia to open up, alive and vibrant on the page. No one writes better of love or the

pulse of the city. And no one has better captured the complexity of what happens to generations of people who come to America: how assimilation is at once the achievement of dreams and yet, sometimes, a loss of what has rooted us to the past. Lydia, I am to you, as a sparrow adoring the sky; Lydia, you are as the moon reflecting upon the water, which is my soul; Lydia, you are the queen of beauty, the Empress of my love, and you preside over the splendour of my feelings for you, like the morning sun on the most glorious day of the most beautiful and splendid season, which is love... Raul Espana to his future wife on the night he proposed marriage, 1949, from Empress of the Splendid Season

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