



Big Stone Gap

Adriana Trigiani

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Millions of readers around the world have fallen in love with the small town of Big Stone Gap, nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, and the story of its self-proclaimed spinster, Ave Maria Mulligan. In the series' enchanting debut, Ave Maria reaches her thirty-fifth year and resigns herself to the single life, filling her days with hard work, fun friends, and good books. Then, one fateful day, Ave Maria's past opens wide with the revelation of a long-buried secret that will alter the course of her life. Before she knows it, Ave Maria is fielding marriage proposals, trying to claim her rightful inheritance, and planning the trip of a lifetime to Italy—one that will change her view of the world and her own place in it forever. Full of wit and wonder, hilarity and heart, *Big Stone Gap* is a gem of a book, and one that you will share with friends and family for years to come.

Big Stone Gap Details

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Author : Adriana Trigiani

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From Reader Review Big Stone Gap for online ebook

♥ Sandi ♡ says

3.5 stars

Wonderful book about the life and times of a backward coal mining town in Virginia. The author brings the characters alive. Very funny in parts and then gentle, tender and heart breaking in other sections. It will take you back to a simpler time, when doors could be left unlocked and peoples first thought was not "what does he want"?

This is the beginning of a series. One that is well worth the read, giving a person a well deserved break from the hectic rush and the over whelming sense of threat in today's world.

Mara says

I started this book with high hopes; I'd heard such good things about Trigiani's other books (especially Lucia, Lucia). But I was more than a little disappointed. I found the writing to be trite, and the characters' behavior too often inexplicable.

This book is supposedly about how Ave Maria, the "town spinster" of Big Stone Gap, finds herself and finds love over the course of a year. I suppose that she does, but there were too many improbable things in the story to make either of her discoveries believable.

One discovery that is believable: after her mother dies, Ave Maria is given a letter that her mother wrote and left in the care of her lawyer. The letter explains that the man Ave Maria has thought of as her father (who died many years before the story begins), isn't, and that her real father is an Italian man that her mother had to leave behind when she became pregnant. So far, fine. Part of what results is that the family of her erstwhile father come clamoring for what they see is now their inheritance, including the house Ave Maria grew up in and the pharmacy business she now owns and runs. What does Ave Maria do? Rather than fighting this based on the fact that her father's will gave all of his property to her mother, who then gave it to her (although this is mentioned), Ave Maria chooses to protect the assets from the grubbing relatives by transferring the whole thing to her 16-year-old assistant! And as if that weren't improbable enough, she then begins to separate herself from the every-day running of the business and leaves it in the teenager's "capable hands"!

Moving on. At 35, Ave Maria is thought of by the town and by herself as a spinster. She prizes herself on her independence, although she wishes she could fall in love with someone who would want to marry her. But, when someone she's known since childhood suddenly proposes to her, she says no, thinking that he's only asking her out of pity, or is playing some kind of trick on her (this I found eminently believable, because if someone up and proposed to me without any sign that they had any special feelings for me, I'd feel the same way!). The man in question gets mightily offended, but doesn't stop trying. Unfortunately, he also doesn't really do anything to demonstrate that he's loved her since they were children (we don't find this out until much later). So why should either we, as readers, much less Ave Maria, believe that he's madly in love with her? Apparently, all her friends knew he was in love her, but we're not told any single thing that he did to

demonstrate it. What's more, they apparently knew that she was in love with him, even though we're not told what she may have said or done to give that away. And, none of them will tell her what they've so sneakily observed. Ave Maria does eventually feel all the love, and they get married quickly, and seem very happy. Which is great. Except I don't believe it.

B says

This book started off great and Whoopi Goldberg loves it, so who am I to contest Whoopi?

Then it got me thinking that maybe I'm the town spinster who everyone is outwardly fond of, them swinging by and being quirky, but inwardly...Inwardly they pity her.

Then she goes and falls in love and left me being the REAL town spinster and I got depressed.

This was one of those books that ended a chapter and a half before it ended. I mean, it was over. Everything was tied up nicely, but then they had to go on a vacation and end with a chapter and a half of "How I spent my summer vacation". Totally unnecessary.

Sorry, Whoopi.

But parts of it were great!

Though I shant be reading the remaining two in the trilogy, I don't think. But who knows? I'm the town spinster after all. I'll probably have some time on my hands...

Laura says

3.5 Star Rating. Fun, light read with some good humor. I am anxious to see the movie. It has been a while since I read a book where I was rooting for a particular love match, so that was fun! This was a great filler read between all the heavy stuff I've been reading. Nice, humorous references to Knoxville.....my college town and home of my Tennessee Vols! Update: Saw the movie, not bad, but of course, the book is better. (2/12/16)

Heather says

Read Sept. 2016

Just finished a re-read of this and loved it all over again! Fun to revisit the quirky group of characters. :)

Read Jan. 2011

Original review:

I absolutely loved this book! Great characters and story...a total comfort read. I'm moving right on to the next book in the series because I'm not ready to say goodbye to the characters or the Blue Ridge Mountains yet!

Debra Anne says

This feel-good story is set in the Virginia hills, with a charming cast of small-town personalities that revolve around the narrator, one Ave Maria whose Italian mother had her out of wedlock and brought her up in bluegrass country. So why didn't I give it a higher rating?

Despite the exuberance of the narrator, this is still basically a book with a plotline I hate -- Whiney bitch out to find herself. Typical of these plotlines, Ave Maria, has at least one person madly in love with her -- to the point that the poor fellow sells his spanking new pickup truck in order to buy her an expensive surprise. As usual, I have trouble relating to the problems that push these personalities to the brink. Okay, her beloved mother has recently died, and she has discovered that her stepfather isn't her real dad, and she has a wicked step aunt lurking at the edges of the narrative trying to take her step-inheritance away from her. But honestly, is this enough to make someone collapse into a seven-day sleep? Not in my universe.

In fairness, I will say that Ave Maria's narrative voice is too exuberant to qualify as pure whiny bitch, and she manages to give a lot to the community and people around her despite her preoccupation with herself and her apparent frailty when it comes to dealing with life. Maybe it's because up until her mother's illness, she hasn't had any real blows except for a gnawing suspicion that the man she thought was her father didn't love her. The father issue, by the way, seems to be the underpinning of the whole narrative -- because she didn't feel "protected" by a father figure, she cannot commit to love.

I think that is the other problem I have with this cheerful, easy-reading book. Everyone in it is too darn nice, and they all watch over Ave Maria, waiting for her to come to her senses -- not just one village of Ave Maria admirers, but two, one in Italy and one in Big Stone Gap. Ave Maria is the center of everyone's universe as well as her own, and I found that plain irritating not to mention downright unreal.

?Emily says

This is a 2 1/2 star read. This book was being promoted by the publisher in conjunction with a movie debuting in October 2015. I have heard nothing about the movie, so I am assuming it was a flop. After reading this book, I am trying to think of a reason for making a movie of it. The leading character is nearing her 36th birthday, but seemed as childish as a 15 year old. Ave Maria Mulligan (isn't that an awful name?) apparently is beautiful, smart and industrious, but has never had a boyfriend. The reasoning given is as clear as mud. Why Ave Maria makes the decisions she makes in her personal life are incomprehensible. Many of the characters are caricatures of southern hillbillies, which should insult the inhabitants of southwest Virginia.

I would not have finished the book if it were not being discussed at our local library book club this month. I found it a wonderful book to read if you are fighting insomnia, so I gave it an extra 1/2 star.

Snap says

I really enjoyed Big Stone Gap and was delighted to learn that this is the first in the series of novels featuring

the folks of Big Stone Gap, Virginia. It is a feel good novel with a strong southern story line that includes Chinese face reading and a bookmobile! (Remember the bookmobile?) Family secrets, generous hearts, self-discovery. A sit back and relax with a glass of ice tea book ... Perfect summer read.

Olivermagnus says

I was searching for a book set in Virginia for a reading challenge and came across Big Stone Gap by Adriana Trigiani, set in the late 1970's. The main character, Ave Maria Mulligan is a 35 year old self-proclaimed spinster and the local pharmacist in Big Stone Gap, a small town in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Ave Maria gets called over to the local lawyer's office where she receives a letter from her recently deceased Italian mother. Her mother tells her the secret of how she came to America and who her real father is. Even though Ave Maria fills her days working in the pharmacy, volunteering with the ambulance squad and directing a local outdoor play, this letter leaves her with some unsettling questions that could change her life. There are plenty of outrageous characters and the locals of Big Stone Gap will leave you smiling in every chapter. I couldn't stop laughing during the big production number the local residents put on for a campaign visit from John Warner and his wife, Elizabeth Taylor.

There was a touch more romance in this novel than I usually enjoy but overall it was a fun, fast read that kept me interested. This is the first book in the four volume Big Stone Gap series.

Laura says

This was a very light fun book to read. The story is set in the 70's in a very rural mountain town in Virginia. If there was a list called: "Books set in small quirky towns," I would add this book to it. The cast of characters includes all the quirky lovable types that you would expect in a book like this. The story follows Ave Maria, a single Italian-American woman, as she turns 35 and the following year in her life. I found her character to be very likable and could easily relate to her. The discoveries Ave Maria makes about herself and women in general I thought were insightful and interesting.

I liked this book because: (1) the character has several love interests that are all really good guys. No one ruined their chances with Ave Maria by doing something wrong. I had no idea who she would end up with until the very end. (2) It was a good romance book that was rated PG.

I only gave it 4 stars because although it was a fun read, it wasn't incredibly mind-blowing. In a year, I probably won't remember the plot.

Overall a fun fast read. Looking forward to the following books in the series (so far there are 3 more after this one).

Laura says

4.5 stars. I really enjoyed this book. I don't think it belongs in the chick-lit or romance genre, because to me, it is so much more than either one, but "heartwarming" definitely fits. Lots of surprises and a whole cast of

quirky, small-town characters to fall in love with. This book made me laugh and cry, even while trying to fall back to sleep listening to it in the middle of the night. The town and its people became real to me and Ave's story is worth reading. The audiobook is performed by the author, and I can also highly recommend it. A great escape read that explores some of life's questions in a deceptively light way, this one may make you stop and think a few times while reading. I'll definitely continue with the series.

Booker Hookers says

As a group, our overall rating for Big Stone Gap is 3 stars.

Things we liked:

Every member of our book club enjoyed the realistic description of the setting and small town vibe. We have one particular member who is from just outside the real city of Big Stone Gap, and she fully related to every detail, especially the characters, who reminded her of actual people she knew. She pointed out that Appalachian people were represented realistically, as hard-working folks with hopes, dreams, and big hearts. We all also found the last 3/4 of the book to be the best, the romance giving us the warm fuzzies.

What we didn't like so much was that it was so sloooooow to start with. We didn't find any big "oh, wow" moments to sink our teeth into from the get-go. Some of the scenes did also feel choppy, bouncing around a bit with no discernable destination. Also, since we are nurses by day, we all found ourselves a bit thrown by the non-realistic way some things were portrayed. (No spoilers.)

General thoughts: Big Stone Gap is a leisurely book with some enjoyable bits and fun characters that's true message is about a woman's journey to find herself, reminding us to take part in our own lives instead of just watching it slip by. It did manage to evoke some emotion, but lacked the "wow" factor for us. Instead, it was more like a homecooked meal by the fire with hot cocoa...simply, nice.

Stina says

I am so sick of female characters who are confused with their lives and themselves and have to stomp off when someone is trying to tell them something. I think miscommunication is a weak plot point and this book would have been better if the author had the balls to give the main character some balls as well.

Vasia says

I read this book a few years back in a single day, and though i'm hazy on the details , it has left me a warm and fuzzy feeling. It's a very charming book, set in a small town nestled somewhere between mountains, and our protagonist is a very likeable single woman in her mid-thirties who has found herself in a soap-opera like situation (the specifics of i can't remember). At the same time she finds true love in the face of her childhood friend, who is amazing and i fell in love with and the scene where he confesses his undying and eternal love is romantic, and funny and sweet and full of puppies and rainbows and made me squeel into my pillow. i just found out there is a sequel to the story and i'm planning on finding it and devouring it as well.

Karen says

Just loved this book!!!

Caroline says

If you haven't read and of Adriana Trigiani's books, you MUST put them on your list and then make it a priority to read this entertaining series. Although, not imperative to following the plot, I suggest reading them in order, starting with this one. The simple ups and downs of a woman living in a small Virginia town are delivered with charm and poignancy and I found her writing addictive. I loved the characters and the setting.

Michael says

A good choice if you want to escape into a small town in the Appalachian part Virginia with some colorful, gossipy characters and want a few laughs. Ave Maria is in her mid-30s and is worried about becoming an old maid, so gets serious about acquiring a love life. I appreciated some of the details of her life as a pharmacist, town theater producer, emergency response team member, and all around do gooder. Her lusty friend who runs a bookmobile, Iva Lou, advises her on romance strategies:

“There ain’t nothing like a working man..When you’ve known as many men as me, you start making lists. The working man is a solid man. They can fix things that are broke. They’re practical. ...Those men that sit behind a desk all day, the office types, stay away from them. They are the weirdos of the world. They don’t get out and get air and get physical every day, so their blood pools in their brains, and they get very strange sexual ideas, believe you me. Kinky. I mean it.”

Yet the men of interest seem to zig when she zags, and she eventually comes to believe commitment requires tracking down her biological father in Italy first. I didn’t really understand that. A number of decisions by the characters are abrupt and implausible, leading me more toward mystification rather than humor or wisdom. By comparison, I get more of both from the work of Billie Letts and Alexander McCall Smith, which both work a comparable cozy world of quirky characters. For rural life, I get more wisdom of the heart from the work of Kent Haruf.

Marleen says

This is the second time I read Big Ston Gap and I remember why I enjoyed it so much the first time around. The funny thing is that I have evolved in these past years and I have enjoyed this book for different reasons. I like and I don't like Ave Maria because she's too hard on herself and sometimes even, contrary to what the book pretends, on others. I understand protecting yourself out of self preservation, but in my mind Ave Maria acts more out of ignorance. She's so naive at times! Luckily Ave Maria is growing up. I was thoroughly touched by the reflections that were made about knowing your parents and then knowing yourself.

It truly remains a charming book with true and flawed characters, I highly appreciate the ensemble of

colorful & amazing characters.

Florence (Lefty) MacIntosh says

Rate 3.5 - This is such a sweet enjoyable read, chalk full of great humour and wonderfully eccentric characters. The main one, Ave Maria Mulligan is okay but I prefer the supporting cast. Her best friend Iva Lou, a bookmobile driver & God's gift to men for one. Another is Fleeta, the chain-smoking pharmacy cashier who loves pro wrestling, such a hoot. The author's choice of locale adds the perfect ambiance.

bup says

I have a copy of this book I'd be willing to sell/swap, but it's covered with the dried flecks of my vomit.

Normally I just like or dislike a book, but this book actually made me angry. I wanted to like it - popular book set in small town Virginia - I like Virginia, I miss Virginia. I'd really love a good book set in Virginia. Someone let me know where I can find one.

Partial list of things I hate:

- 1) The voice seems fake. I know the author grew up in Big Stone Gap. I know people in Virginia are *out to* whatever location they're *at*. There's still something so fake and...fake...about the narrator's voice.
 - 2) After I read a lot of it, I noticed that the quoted blurbs on the cover are from - Whoopi Goldberg. Fannie Flagg. Rosanne Cash. I respect Whoopi Goldberg, but if I ever get a book published, I hope to have something better to put on the cover than "Whoopi Goldberg liked it."
 - 3) There's a reader's guide in the back. I hate those. And an interview of the author - by a character in the book! How ~~clever~~ smug!
 - 5) A short passage from late in the book, as we travel Italy with the narrator: "The people here are so animated; they raise their voices to make a point, they use their bodies for emphasis; they are so full of life and comical! It is no surprise that the *commedia dell'arte* theatrical tradition started here in the fourteenth century." By the way, this book has *nothing* to do with *commedia dell'arte*. **NOTHING**.
 - 6) The main character's behavior and motivations are beyond stupid. A guy sells his truck to buy plane tickets for relatives to visit her, and she doesn't know if he loves her. Also the man she *thinks* she loves is ostensibly not gay, but is gay, but even the author seems not to know it. Honey, whoever you based this character on in real life is gay, and that's OK, but you probably should know that. Writers are supposed to be perspicacious and all.
 - 7) You know what never grows deep inside caves? **ANYTHING** (including moss).
 - 8) It was a best seller, and led to a series, apparently. I think I'm going to vomit again.
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