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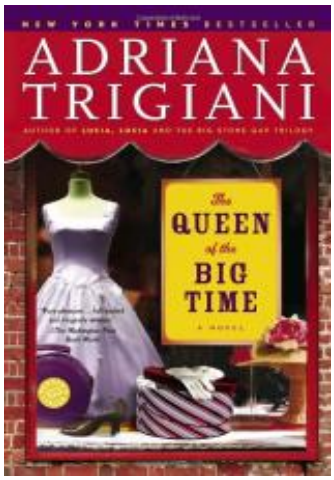
The Queen of the Big Time

by Adriana Trigiani



About the Book

Known and loved around the world for her sweeping *Big Stone Gap* trilogy and the instant *New York Times* bestseller **Lucia, Lucia**, Adriana Trigiani returns to the charm and drama of small-town life with **The Queen of the Big Time**. This heartfelt story of the limits and power of love chronicles the remarkable lives of the Castellucas, an Italian-American family, over the course of three generations.

In the late 1800s, the residents of a small village in the Bari region of Italy, on the shores of the Adriatic Sea, made a mass migration to the promised land of America. They settled in Roseto, Pennsylvania, and re-created their former lives in their new home-down to the very last detail of who lived next door to whom. The village's annual celebration of Our Lady of Mount Carmel --- or "the Big Time," as the occasion is called by the young women who compete to be the pageant's Queen --- is the centerpiece of Roseto's colorful old-world tradition.

The industrious Castellucas farm the land outside Roseto. Nella, the middle daughter of five, aspires to a genteel life "in town," far from the rigors of farm life, which have taken a toll on her mother and forced her father to take extra work in the slate quarries to make ends meet. But Nella's dreams of making her own fortune shift when she meets Renato Lanzara, the son of a prominent Roseto family. Renato is a worldly, handsome, devil-may-care poet who has a way with words that makes him irresistible. Their friendship ignites into a fiery romance that Nella is certain will lead to marriage. But Nella is not alone in her pursuit: every girl in town seems to want Renato. When he disappears without explanation, Nella is left with a shattered heart. Four years later, Renato's sudden return to Roseto the night before Nella's wedding to the steadfast Franco Zollerano leaves her and the Castelluca family shaken. For although Renato has chosen a path very different from Nella's, they are fated to live and work in Roseto, where the past hangs over them like a brewing storm.

An epic of small-town life, etched in glorious detail in the trademark Trigiani style, **The Queen of the Big Time** is the story of a determined, passionate woman who can never forget her first love.

Discussion Guide

1. Describe the relationships within the Castelluca family. Do you think families today possess similar values? How does Nella relate to her sisters, in particular Assunta and Elena?

2. When Nella first meets Renato Lanzara, she thinks, "This must be what love at first sight feels like." Do you think Nella's first encounter with Renato Lanzara is really love at first sight? What is it about him that is so attractive to her? Do her feelings signify more than simply an adolescent crush?

3. By setting up an arranged marriage between Assunta and Alessandro, Nella's parents are employing a tradition from their past in Italy. Does this practice gel with their new existence in America? How does Nella's generation view this arranged marriage? How does Alessandro's arrival change the dynamics within the Castelluca family? How does Allesandro regard his sisters-in-law?

4. Upon meeting at the Columbus School, Nella and Chettie quickly become friends. How does their relationship compare to those that Nella has with her sisters? What qualities does Chettie have that differ from the Castelluca girls'? How does the quarry accident affect their friendship?

5. In the 1920s, it was rare for a woman to receive admiration and respect in the workplace, especially from a man. What is it about Nella that impresses Mr. Jenkins?

6. How are issues of class and race explored in The Queen of the Big Time? How do you think the Castellucas' lives would differ if they didn't live in their transplanted Italian enclave?

7. When tragedy hits, how do the Castellucas deal with change and adjust their roles within the family? How do the ways they rely on one another change?

8. Why isn't Nella interested in Franco at first? What are the qualities she's looking for in a man? How do Franco and Renato differ, and why do you think she ends up choosing Franco over someone like Renato?

9. Religion plays a large role in the townspeople of Bari. How big a part does it play in Nella's life? When does she turn toward her religious values? Did your view of clergy members change after Nella and Renato's encounter in Italy?

10. In many of her novels, Trigiani has explored the complicated dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship. How would you characterize the relationship between Nella and her mother, compared to that of Nella and Celeste? How does Nella and Celeste's relationship change as Celeste grows older?

11. Do you think it is possible for one to find true love more than once in a lifetime? How is Nella's love for Renato different from her love for Franco? Are both loves "true"?

12. In what ways can Nella be considered a "Queen of the Big Time"?

Author Bio

Adriana Trigiani is the *New York Times* bestselling author of 21 books of fiction and nonfiction. Her work has been published in 38 languages around the world. An award-winning playwright, television writer/producer, and filmmaker, Trigiani wrote and directed the major motion picture of her debut novel, BIG STONE GAP; adapted her novel, VERY VALENTINE, for television; and directed the documentary, *Queens of the Big Time*, among others.

In 2023, President Sergio Matterella of Italy awarded Trigiani the *Cavaliere dell?Ordine della Stella d?Italia*. The Library of Virginia bestowed their highest honor, the *Patron of Letters* degree, to Trigiani in 2024. She received the 2025 Ellis Island Medal of Honor for her significant contributions to literature, culture, and communicty.

Trigiani grew up in Appalachia, in the mountains of Virginia, where she co-founded The Origin Project, a year-round, in-school writing program that has served over 25,000 students since its inception in 2014. Trigiani is proud to serve on the New York State Council on the Arts. She lives in Greenwich Village with her family.

Critical Praise

"Full-bodied and elegantly written ... Trigiani builds [**The Queen of the Big Time**] around an old-fashioned love story ...Pure pleasure."

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