



The Bequest of Big Daddy

Jo-Ann Costa

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Ratio Janson, the crusty patriarch with an infamous background and a hair-trigger temper, is reverently referred to as Big Daddy by his family clan. His feisty great-granddaughter Jo-Dee overhears shocking gossip at Big Daddy's funeral and is determined to plumb his murky past, from Reconstruction to the present day.

From a vast turpentine industry to the ruins of a decaying plantation with its feudal order a memory, Jo-Dee explores the complex nature of family and self, only to make a startling discovery. Will she betray her great-grandfather and disgrace the family name, or will she preserve his shameful secret?

And on the ancient grounds of the family mansion destroyed in the Civil War, will Big Daddy's spirit claim her even from the grave?

The Bequest of Big Daddy Details

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Author : Jo-Ann Costa

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From Reader Review The Bequest of Big Daddy for online ebook

Maureen Timerman says

Big Daddy aka Horatio “Ratio” Janson story begins before he was born. We meet his Grandmother and grandfather. A Mother who wanted the very best for her son Clay Man Janson, she let him go live on a plantation to grow up. The Southern Aristocracy before the War.

The story does open with Jo-Dee and the Summer of 1953. She is with her Dad to say goodbye to her Great Grandfather Ratio, he was dying at the age of 91. Thus begins Jo-Dee's search for answers about her families history, mainly Big Daddy.

The book is about the colorful life of Ratio...and boy was it. He looked at a lot of adversity, but eventually he seemed to come out on top. His father died in the Civil War, before he was born. His Mother Mina, is one spoiled woman, she barely looks out for her son.

When the Yankee's come to burn their plantation, Mina, Ratio, and two former slaves go to Alabama to live. He is brought up there, mainly by Janie. As he grows, he becomes a handful, and the things that happened to him follow him, he was assaulted at the circus. His Mother takes a lover, a Senator, who then takes Ratio to teach him the life of a worker. Thus begins the Big Daddy, with his driven personality.

After he is almost murdered by the Senator, his life takes up turns and down turns. He does seem to come out on top. He marries a sweet delicate woman, and has eight children, but enough is never enough for him.

We travel with him through the South, that isn't seen in the movies, or heard of in the papers. Where just being black is reason to be arrested for a made up crime, and put in a chain gang!

Follow Big Daddy as he goes through his life, unfortunately there is a lot of sex in the book, and a lot of woman, and illegitimate children. It is one of his big undoings..he does not mind killing, he goes to prison.

Follow Jo-Dee as she unravels the puzzle of her Great Grandfather, the ending is so heartwarming!

I received this book through TLC Book Tours, and was not required to give a positive review.

Pamela (Lavish Bookshelf) says

Written in the vein of the famous Southern novels, The Bequest of Big Daddy is a debut novel that is as inviting as those wide Southern porches. From the very first page, Jo-Ann Costa's writing reeled me into this story. The characters are larger than life, especially the patriarch they call Big Daddy. Ruling the family even from beyond the grave, Big Daddy is a totally flawed nasty foul-mouthed man whose life was filled with more than one life-altering secret.

The Bequest of Big Daddy travels through time from the 1840s to the 1980s as Big Daddy's entire lineage is explored and explained. For my tastes, the chapters written about the Civil War era seemed to be more interesting and enthralling. I didn't relate to the great-granddaughter Jo-Dee as a character as much as I understood the larger-than-life Big Daddy.

Which isn't to say that Big Daddy is really all that likable at all. He's really not someone that one would typically think would be able to rule the family seemingly after his death. It was the mystery of his life that was compelling. Consequently, the mystery of whether Jo-Dee will reveal those secrets decades later is also just as compelling.

Like all good Southern novels, The Bequest of Big Daddy relies on deep characters with more than a few skeletons in the closets. It's a book with a dark mystery and a family with strong southern ties. Parts of the book are difficult to like, however Jo-Ann Costa has created a story that's difficult to forget.

Rating: 4.5 of 5 stars

I received this book complimentary in exchange for an honest review but the opinions in this review are all mine.

Jessica Mancini says

I received this as part of a goodreads giveaway. I definitely recommend that you check it out. The author has a gift for engaging storytelling. Her ear for language and portrayal of region dialects is excellent. I think you will enjoy this introduction to the progenitor of the Janson clan.

Audra (Unabridged Chick) says

Spanning 1843 through 1981, this novel follows the Janson family, through Jo-Dee Janson Cipriano (a fictional take on the author, Jo-Ann Costa, I presume), a young woman fascinated by her great-grandfather, Big Daddy -- Horatio 'Ratio' Gage Janson. Rude, unruly, wild, downright 'randy' (according to her mother), Jo-Dee knows Big Daddy only as a wizened old man on the verge of death. His passing prompts her to seek out the truth of his story, propelled by a curiosity to know just how bad, how wild, and how randy he really was.

In proper gothic tradition, the circumstances of Big Daddy's birth are shrouded in secrecy and lies. His mother, the stunningly gorgeous and staggeringly selfish Mina Satterley is a Southern belle forced into exile from her family's plantation with the arrival of the Civil War. Her husband, sweet Clay Man Janson, besotted with her since a boy, has become a soldier and is presumed dead, unloved by Mina and unknown by Ratio. Mina has taken up with an Alabama senator for her keep, a man who loathes Ratio but offers employment to keep the boy out of trouble. Charmed, perhaps, with a good luck amulet from a childhood incident with the circus, Ratio manages well -- but still gets himself into trouble with the surety of a compass finding north.

Some of the characters -- Ratio primary -- are hard to like. They're cruel, mean, rude, ignorant, violent, selfish -- but they are fascinating. Like a car accident or a sordid argument, you can't look away -- and really, why look away?

Costa has a sharp sense of her characters and the appeal of a sordid, tangled drama, but I occasionally found the writing clunky. I preferred the historical sections as the more contemporary ones rang a tad awkward. I also have to confess that the use of dialect in dialogue was off-putting and distracting for me; I appreciate the desire to indicate a different style of speaking, but as all her white Southern characters speak grammatically correct English, it was noticeable that the slaves and freed people of color all spoke something more muddled and broken.

Still, there's a lovely kind of spoken rhythm to the story -- mimicking in some ways the storytelling that we see happen in the book, as happens at the Janson's reunion in 1981, relatives replaying and rehashing their

shared familial memory -- and the reader is invited into that circle. If you like tawdry Southern family drama that steers toward Capote-meets-Leonard rather than V.C. Andrews, this is your book.

Jackie says

The Bequest of Big Daddy is a fantastic historical fiction novel. Jo-ann Costa really brings the life of a strong-willed, no-nonsense, rough around the edges southern patriarch to vivid reality. Horatio "Ratio" Janson lives such a varied life that it is almost too much for one person to endure. He experiences everything from the scant love of a mother to charges of a heinous crime to the love of a good wife to the conviction of an unforgivable act. Ratio lives to see many women in and out of his bed and many legitimate and illegitimate children through out his life. Most of this story is the illustration of a man who must weather many storms and face many enemies. He comes out of each challenge a harder yet wiser man.

Jo-ann Costa's ability to bring these long forgotten, unless seen in movies, characters is phenomenal. Her illustration of the deep south in a time of turmoil and change for both white and black people brings to mind the movie Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. The larger than life Ratio is a character that epitomizes this life and era. Overall, one of the best historical fiction books I've read in a while. I can't wait to read what Jo-ann writes next. If you liked the movies Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and Gone with the Wind then you will love The Bequest of Big Daddy.

Meagan Myhren-bennett says

The Bequest of Big Daddy

By Jo-Ann Costa

Jo-Dee Janson Cipriano is out to discover the truth behind her great grandfather. Who was Big Daddy? Was he truly born mean and profane as family legend painted him or was there something more to the man? Jo-Dee's search began because of attending Horatio "Ratio" Janson's funeral in 1953.

Big Daddy swore with a vengeance before it became common, it was just his way to use "outhouse language". And he was known for his temper, even shooting off the mailman's hat for waking him from a nap. He was also a womanizer with a "passel of yard chillin'" as one great aunt stated.

Ratio's mother was a spoiled manipulative brat who deserved to be turned over someone's knee and given a major tanning. Perhaps she might have been a half-way decent person with some discipline, but I doubt it. I have to be honest, I personally think if I had met Big Daddy I would have run the other way and never looked back. But this book takes a look at the factors made him into the man he was. But there is too much sex and innuendo for my tastes in books, but I know others won't and don't find this offensive.

I found Jo-Dee's search more interesting than the sections that actually dealt with Big Daddy. The people that she interacted with and spoke with were interesting. The truth about her heritage is something that she and her family never suspected, but can she bring this secret to light or protect the family legend so that Big Daddy will remain bigger than life.

The Bequest of Big Daddy spans the years before the Civil War and ends with Jo-Dee's search for answers in 1981. If you go on this search with Jo-Dee you will discover the unglamorized truth of the South.

I received a copy of this book through TLC Book Tours in exchange for my honest review.

Michael Murphy says

Jo-Ann Costa's debut historical novel skillfully weaves a vivid tapestry through generations across the South. Costa takes readers on a colorful ride from pre-Civil War Georgia, the war and reconstruction and through the first half of the twentieth century. Her literary style paints characters as solid and vivid as the red clay of Georgia. *The Bequest of Big Daddy* is an epic tale of sex, murder, revenge, and passionate ambition readers will long remember.

The story begins when eight year old Jo-Dee Janson meets her larger-than-life great-great grandfather, Ratio (Big Daddy) Janson. The encounter and a conversation overheard at his funeral four days later, sets in motion a mission that dominates her life. Jo-Dee's quest to learn about the family patriarch uncovers shocking details of Big Daddy's colorful life and countless buried family secrets.

Ratio is born a child of decaying Southern aristocracy before the Civil War. With a father missing in the war and a beautiful self-indulgent mother adjusting to life's disappointments, Ratio Janson becomes inquisitive young boy. His childhood independence is shattered by a brutal assault that changes his life forever.

Driven by revenge, Ratio and his mother grow apart. As a young man he's accused of rape, but escapes certain death. Over the years he plots revenge against two men who've ruined his life. He seeks wealth and happiness, but after killing a man, Ratio is sent to prison. Only after he escapes, does he begin to acquire the life he's sought. As the decades pass, Ratio becomes Big Daddy, financially independent, feared and influential, but love and happiness elude him to his death.

As Joe-Dee's quest comes to an end, she understands Big Daddy like no one else in the large southern family. Her final act is the discovery of Big Daddy's long lost treasure which she buries along with his biggest family secret.

Lynn Lund says

I have received a free copy of this book through a GoodReads First Reads giveaway.

A delightful book of gorgeous scenery and such intriguing characters, you'll find it hard to put down.

I have one little criticism, and that pertains to the final chapter. In my opinion it could have been edited down a bit because frankly it felt a bit like it dragged on.

Despite that, I have and will continue to recommend to anyone who enjoys a damn good story.

Shannon says

The Bequest of Big Daddy offers the reader a magnificent peek into the workings of a Southern family patriarch. Big Daddy is one of those swearing, fear inspiring relatives many of us who have been raised in the South remember with both nostalgia and regret. Big Daddy was born Horatio "Ratio" Janson and lives many more lives than one. He experiences parental neglect, is wrongfully charged with a heinous crime, experiences the love of a good wife but ultimately does the unforgiveable. While Big Daddy is inspirational as a survivor of many tempests he is certainly not without horrible faults.

I appreciated Costa's ability to create characters so human and yet so complex. I suppose the ultimate compliment would be that several of the characters found within The Bequest of Big Daddy truly brought to mind several members of my family as I remembered them from childhood. Costa vividly brings to life the tension, turmoil, triumph and tragedy of the Deep South from Reconstruction to the present day.

I found The Bequest of Big Daddy an engaging read and enjoyed the novel initially as a look into the history of the South but primarily as an exquisitely crafted character study. I would recommend The Bequest of Big Daddy without hesitation.

In full compliance with FTC Guidelines, I received a free trade paperback edition of this book from the author and Historical Fiction Virtual Book Tours in exchange for a fair and honest review. I was in no way compensated for this post, and the thoughts are my own.

Kathleen Kelly says

The story starts in 1953 at the last family gathering that the patriarch, Ratio Janson, better known as Big Daddy. Told in granddaughter Jo-Dee's voice, who decides to do a little more digging into the life of her grandfather and how he came to be the formidable man his family and others knew him to be. The book takes the reader from when Ratio is a child, with an uncaring mother and an absent father through the Civil War and the Reconstruction, and further on we find out how Big Daddy makes his money any way he can whether it is legal or on the wrong side of the law. The reader is taken through Ratio's life including his married life, his children and his quest to find his father...

This is a story full of wonderful characters, great story line that kept me reading until the end...I enjoyed the authors writing style and the way the story flowed. A great Southern novel that left me wanting more. I look forward to the next book by this debut author.

Brenda says

In the "Bequest Of Big Daddy" a story that opens in the summer of 1953. We meet Jo-Dee and her father as they are what turns out to be the final visit to Horatio "Ratio" Gage Janson also known as Big Daddy, who is essentially on his deathbed. A few weeks later he dies and we meet several of the extend family at the funeral, and when inquisitive Jo-Dee overhears something at the funeral it sets her on a journey of finding answers, and knocking a few proverbial skeletons out of Big Daddy's closet, but will she share what she or allow family secrets to remain just that a secret?

It isn't often that I read a book where the author's writing has me laughing within the first few pages but "The Bequest Of Big Daddy" did just that. Now let me say, that this isn't a comedy by any stretch of the word, but it was the way the author allowed me to see and hear things thru the eyes and ears of Jo-Dee that was funny. Some of the comments that she repeated that her mother Kate made about "Big Daddy" was just over the top funny. I would have to say southern fiction is one of my favorite genres to read, and when the story takes us back in time, especially around the time period of the civil war it's even better. I really felt like Jo-Ann Costa did an amazing job of pulling us back to the mid 1800's , her descriptive writing brought the historical

aspects as well as the contemporary portions of the story to life. As "Big Daddy's" story unfolded he became a larger than life figure for me, I could easily envision him. Overall, interesting characters, a southern flavor, along with an intriguing story made this a top notch read for me, and I think anyone who enjoys historical southern fiction with a bit of mystery, that also deals with family issues will enjoy "The Bequest of Big Daddy" as well. On a scale of one to five I would easily give this one a six, because it's just that good!

Darlene says

The Bequest of Big Daddy is the debut novel of Jo-Ann Costa and she is a natural born storyteller with characters that are larger than life and not soon forgotten. The Southern family of the Janson clan has Big Daddy, Ratio Janson, at its helm ruling his family with an iron fist. Now that sounds bad and while Big Daddy has a lot of bad habits he's actually good to those who are family although family also knows to get clear out of his way when the warning signs are there to do so. Big Daddy has a bad temper and it can snap at a moment's notice so when Jo-Dee goes with her daddy to visit the aged Big Daddy it is no surprise when he flies off the handle and they have to leave. He passes a few days later and between the funeral and Jo-Dee's natural curiosity she finds herself under the spell of this Big man who was her great grandfather and this curiosity about him lasts well into her adulthood.

The family secrets harbored within this Southern family began generations before Jo-Dee came to be. They started with Ratio and his birth and a mysterious gravestone in the family cemetery. Ratio's father goes off to war so he's left to be raised by his mother Mina and she isn't much of a mother being much too self-centered for mothering. Ratio is left on his own for the most part and really doesn't have a hard time finding trouble from a young age which finds him in a situation that ultimately changes him. While working in a sawmill Ratio gets a little too close to the owner's daughter and is thrown in a cell to die but Ratio is much too smart for that and finds a way to escape. From this point on he meets his first wife and has quite a few kids but Ratio also has a wandering eye and it isn't long before that eye and his bad temper lead him to do something he can't fix easily. He ends up being sentenced to hard labor but even that doesn't really stop him and eventually he is free. Of course Ratio doesn't do anything the normal way so he takes advantage of the black markets going strong after the Civil War and makes his fortune all the while keeping a close eye on his ever growing family.

While not an honest man and certainly not the nicest one around when in a temper Ratio was a character that grabbed me from the very beginning. Despite seeming to be such a hard man he also had a softer side that fiercely protected those he loved. He was not a man to be wronged and if he was he exacted his revenge no matter how long it may have taken. Ratio, having been raised by a woman who didn't show him affection had a hard time showing it himself and yet he loved his family. He arranged a family reunion on July 4 of 1908 which was the anniversary of meeting his first wife Eugenie and he held fast to all those in the family attending every year. While I was horrified and shocked by some of the things that Ratio did I felt that his beginnings had a lot to do with where he went in life. What direction would his life had taken if he had love instead of neglect?

As the novel slides into 1981 we find Jo-Dee all grown up and still just as curious as she ever was to know more about this man everyone called Big Daddy. After the annual family reunion she sets out to find out what she can about this mysterious grave and man who has so occupied her thoughts. Many things come to light on her trip and secrets are unburied but what will she do with these secrets? Ultimately she knows she can't destroy her family with them but for Jo-Dee this journey brought her closer to the man who had been Big Daddy.

This was a great read for me and one I would recommend to those of you who like Southern tales as well as family dramas. Big Daddy was such a dominating force but there were many characters in this novel from big to small who are also well fleshed out and intriguing. The author Jo-Ann Costa writes in such a way that she fully draws you into the drama of her story and holds you there. I can't wait for more from this fabulous debut author!

Rob Slaven says

As usual, I didn't pay anything for this book but instead it arrived happily in my mail because of a GoodReads giveaway. Despite this very kind consideration I give my candid opinions below.

As the book begins we meet Big Daddy, an irascible and taciturn old man who would as soon tell someone to "F*** Off" as look at them. Big Daddy is a beast of a man with a huge progeny because of a life of casual infidelity to every woman he's ever been with. The balance of the book explains this horrid man's history and how he got to the man he turned out to be.

On the positive side, Costa gives us in Big Daddy a wonderfully disgusting and controversial character. His opportunism and disregard for anyone but himself is infuriating in many ways but as we are told more of his history we begin to understand why he became the insufferable brute that he is. Clearly Big Daddy was an ass of major proportions but given the situation he was put into by fate, one couldn't really expect much better. The author gives us a great rendering of a rather hateful character and a delightfully dark history to boot. His supporting cast is also wonderfully vivid with unapologetic portrayals of former slaves in the post-war South.

On the negative, Costa's writing does sometimes suffer from a few problems with continuity as I found myself flipping back to try to piece together some event that had taken place without any proper introduction. Also, bracketing the narrative of Big Daddy we have the story of Jo-Dee, one of his modern-day descendants who is looking back and getting to know her frightful long-lost ancestor. She makes an appearance narrating the end of Big Daddy's life in the first chapter and appears again in the last chapter describing her unearthing of family history. Frankly, the beginning and ending chapters detract from the story that one really wants out of this book. They introduce a level of soft and gauzy mysticism and "magic" to the story that makes for a rather unpleasant non sequitur.

In summary, loved the bits of the book centering on Big Daddy but, like a cigar, the whole thing would have been more enjoyable with the end cut off. There's a seed of a great story here if only one can remove the husk.

PS: It is my endeavor to provide reviews that are succinct, honest, balanced and above all help the potential reader to answer the simple question, "Do I want to read this or not?" Any feedback you can provide about how you feel I have accomplished those goals (or not) is immensely appreciated.

Sharon Chance says

I found "The Bequest of Big Daddy" an intriguing and very interesting look at a multi-generational family of the South. Author Jo-Ann Costa takes her readers on quite a fascinating journey through time as she tells the story of the Jansen family from the beginning of the Civil War to present time.

This story is a very frank, often very gritty look at one man's battle to establish himself and his family in times that were very rough and very gritty. This is a very mature story with some explicit situations and language, but it lends realism to the story that is very necessary to the plot. The characters are fascinating and the plot moves along quickly, making this novel a lively and quick read.

I loved that Ms. Costa took inspiration for this book from her own family's legacy of storytelling. As a fellow Southerner, I can appreciate taking those mesmerizing old stories and creating new ones. This is the first book in Ms. Costa's Longleaf Legacy series, and I look forward to the next book to see what the rest of her "family" gets up to!

I highly recommend this novel to anyone who is interested in the history of the Civil War-era, both pre and post, and in tales of family.

Kate says

** Please note that I received this book for free from Goodreads First-reads **

This was my first book by Costa, which left me not knowing what to expect. Books set in the South always fascinate me because that region typically sets up to feel like a different world. This one was no exception.

The Bequest of Big Daddy was not exactly a fast read, but it did hold my attention. The story opens and closes with a modern day character who is determined to dig into the past of her deceased Great Grandfather. The reader is then transported back through time from the Civil War up through the 1960s. Big Daddy is a glorious larger-than-life character and Costa paints a picture of him that causes him to leap right off the page. Additionally, bearing witness to a female author creating such a distinctly masculine, rough, man's man type of character was interesting in and of itself. I wonder if the character was based on someone she knew, or a pure figment of her imagination. Either way, she created an incredible character.

Parts of the book wandered a bit for my taste, since they didn't seem to relate directly to Big Daddy's story. But, the way the author tied everything together at the end was elegant in its simplicity.

Overall I would recommend this book to fans of (loosely) historical fiction, Southern settings, and stories that focus on the explicit development of a single character. Definitely an interesting read, and well worth the time.
