

The Rosie Result



Graeme Simsion

ISBN 9781925773477
FICTION, TRADE PAPERBACK

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PRaise FOR THE ROSIE NOVELS

'[Don Tillman] has almost transcended the boundaries of fiction to become a geek icon.'

GUARDIAN

'Deals with issues of nature, nurture, gender, free will and the vagaries of the human heart with a deceptively light touch.'

EVENING STANDARD

'One of the most endearing, charming and fascinating literary characters I have met in a long time.'

THE TIMES

ABOUT GRAEME SIMSION

Graeme Simsion is the internationally bestselling author of *The Rosie Project*, *The Rosie Effect*, *The Best of Adam Sharp* and *Two Steps Forward*, which he co-authored with his wife, Anne Buist.

A READER'S INTRODUCTION TO THE ROSIE RESULT

In *The Rosie Project*, the first book in the trilogy that *The Rosie Result* concludes, Don Tillman gives a lecture on Asperger's Syndrome. This opening sets up the premise that Don has autistic traits but doesn't recognise them in himself. By the end of *The Rosie Result*, though, both Don and his son Hudson identify as autistic.

If the storylines in *The Rosie Result* centre on Don's challenges in trying to parent the son who shares many similarities with him, the main theme that the novel grapples with is labelling and identity, specifically in relation to autism, but more broadly too. The novel also directly questions many people's assumptions about

autism – what autistic people are like, how they behave, what they understand and who they are.

This questioning takes place most obviously in the support-group scene, where the mother of a previously non-verbal daughter and an autism activist articulate the different ways they approach autism. But the questioning can be found throughout the book, including in Don's thoughts. Should he and Rosie have Hudson assessed? What are the benefits and disadvantages of a diagnosis? Should autistic people have to adjust their behaviour and thinking to match neurotypical norms? Does it make their lives better or worse if they do?

As Don ponders these questions, he is trying to be the best parent he can be. He remembers his own experiences as a child and an adult, wondering what would have made things better for him. And he starts thinking about his father too, understanding and valuing some of what his father did for him, but also trying to come up with a new and better way to be a parent – more specifically to be a parent to Hudson. And he realises that Hudson is similar to him, but not the same as him.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Much of the humour in the Rosie books comes from Don misreading social situations and cues. How does Simsion make us laugh at Don's interpretations and the comedy that follows from that without making us laugh at Don himself? Or doesn't he?
2. Don has previously not seen himself (or perhaps not allowed himself to see himself) as autistic. Why does that change in *The Rosie Result*? Why has Simsion decided to have Don be open to the idea of himself as autistic?

3. How do you think that changes in how people understand autism in the last few years since the first Rosie book was published are reflected in *The Rosie Result*?
4. When trying to work out whether Hudson fits on the autism spectrum, Don sets his behaviour against common ideas about how autistic people behave. For example, when Hudson makes a plan to secretly take Blanche to an eye doctor, Don contrasts that with the idea that 'autistic people are poor at deception' (191). How do Don, Hudson and Blanche conform to and challenge stereotypes of autistic people? What does this say about the similarities and differences between autistic people?
5. Don's confidence that he is a good problem-solver wavers. Do you think he is a good or bad problem-solver? Is this because of or despite of his autistic traits?
6. Don is 'conscious of the human propensity to see patterns where they do not exist' (1). Does Don share this trait? Do you agree that it is an essentially 'human propensity'? Is it a necessarily bad trait?
7. Don values rational thinking as 'arguably life's most important skill' (117), and sees emotion as its opposite (182). What do you think?
8. Rosie imitates Don as a 'sign that she's in a good mood' (2). Does Rosie make fun of Don? Is that okay? Does Rosie seem happy in her relationship with Don?
9. Don fixes on the idea of 'If I knew then what I know now' (87) as a way to help Hudson – by explaining the wisdom he has gained over the years. Can any parent deliver this wisdom to their children?
10. When thinking about his parenting, Don thinks about what he would have wanted at Hudson's age, and decides 'I would have wanted to be treated as an adult...to be properly informed, listened to and involved in decisions affecting me' (73). Is this what most children want? Is it possible to give it to them?
11. Discuss what else the book says about parenting. Consider, for example, Don's recognition that he needs to 'outsource' some of the support he gives Hudson. Or how one's parenting is influenced by one's own parents.
12. Professor Lawrence tells Don that as a 'straight, white, middle-aged male who's spent his life in top western universities', he is 'the definition of privilege' (23). Do you agree? Does his autism affect his status?
13. One of the themes of *The Rosie Result* is the sexism that many working women encounter, and Rosie herself works hard to balance her roles. What do you think the novel says about women's roles?
14. How does Simson use debates typical of the 'culture wars' – such as the Genetics Lecture Outrage and the treatment of women in the workplace – both to illustrate Don's character and to make political points?
15. Don had previously seen social skills as unimportant, but comes to see a deficit in social skills as potentially damaging (60). What do you think? What purpose do social skills serve? Are they overrated?
16. Don has spent a lifetime trying to fit in (368), but eventually realises he doesn't want Hudson to have to do the same. How much should people – whether autistic or neurotypical – try to 'fit in' and modify their behaviour to get on with others? How much should the world accommodate difference?
17. If Hudson hadn't had the 'fitting in' lessons from Don and his friends, would he have been as easily able to reject 'being normal', as he does in his school speech?
18. Do you agree that autism is 'your choice, your identity' (69) as activist Liz puts it? This seems to be the conclusion Hudson, Blanche and Don all come to. Is this what the novel concludes too? What do you think about Margot's concerns for her previously non-verbal daughter?
19. Why might people embrace or reject autism as an identity? If you are autistic, what was your choice and why? Or didn't you have a choice?
20. Why do you think the Rosie books have been so popular?