

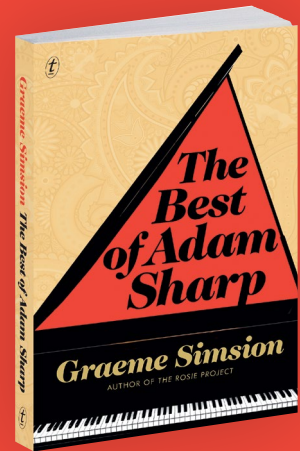
# The Best of Adam Sharp



Graeme Simsion

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FICTION, TRADE PAPERBACK

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## Praise for *The Best of Adam Sharp*

'[A] poignant glimpse into human relationships—what it is to love and to be loved...*The Best of Adam Sharp* hits you right in the morals and leaves you thinking—how far would you go for a second chance?' *Books+Publishing*

'How does Graeme Simsion follow-up his dual smash-hits of *The Rosie Project* and *The Rosie Effect*? By penning a novel that is just as funny and poignant, but with a tumultuous moral core...it will resonate long after you've closed the book.' Simon McDonald, bookseller

'Warm-hearted and perfectly pitched, with profound themes that are worn lightly.' *Guardian*

'An extraordinarily clever, funny, and moving book about being comfortable with who you are and what you're good at.' Bill Gates on *The Rosie Project*

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## About Graeme Simsion

Graeme Simsion was born in Auckland and is a Melbourne-based writer of novels, short stories, plays, screenplays and two non-fiction books. *The Rosie Project* began life as a screenplay, winning the Australian Writers Guild/Inscription Award for Best Romantic Comedy, before being adapted into a novel. It went on to win the 2012 Victorian Premier's Literary Award for an unpublished manuscript and was ultimately awarded the ABIA Book of the Year for 2014. It has since been sold around the world to over forty countries. The sequel, *The Rosie Effect*, was released in 2014.

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## A reader's introduction to *The Best of Adam Sharp*

'What Is Love' isn't one of the songs featured in this music-laced novel, but it might well be the backing track to these reading notes. *The Best of Adam Sharp* is about

the guises love can take, the obvious or inexplicable ways it springs into being between people, and the different ways it can go wrong—and right.

Twenty-two years after he left his 'Great Lost Love' in Melbourne following an intense affair, Adam Sharp gets a chance to see her again. He hesitates, but—feeling that his comfortable yet staid long-term relationship with Claire is at its natural end—he leaves his home in Norwich, takes up Angelina's invitation to 'live dangerously', and agrees to see her again.

The novel takes the form of Adam looking back on his first encounter with Angelina, as well as his more recent life with Claire. In the novel's second section, we get to see what happens when Adam explores the possibility of a second chance with Angelina—with Angelina's husband, Charlie, looking on. As Adam falls in love again, it seems he and Angelina are destined to be together for ever. But, of course, in the end this is not to be.

Music is not just a background to all this: it's an integral part of the characters' lives and loves. Singing a duet is what first brings Adam and Angelina together, and later Adam woos Claire with his playing. Music then plays a crucial part in the novel's denouement, coming to the fore in the final scenes featuring Adam, Angelina and Charlie.

Destiny versus free choice. Companionship versus passion. Selfishness versus self-sacrifice. These tensions are all felt deeply by the various characters in relation to romantic and sexual love. Just as the novel takes some unexpected turns, Adam too makes some unexpected choices. What choices would you have made?

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## Questions for discussion

1. Angelina twice tells Adam he is her soulmate. Are they soulmates? Are Adam and Claire soulmates? Does *The Best of Adam Sharp* suggest that

soulmates do or don't exist? What do you think: do you believe in soulmates?

2. Music initially draws Adam and Angelina together, and Adam worries that music might be the sole basis of their relationship. What else is there? Can you ever define what makes people fall in love?
3. Adam also worries that Angelina is 'out of his league' (21). If so, why is she, and why would she choose him? Or is the concept of 'leagues' fundamentally wrong?
4. The psychologist Robert Sternberg writes about three 'components' of love: passion, commitment and intimacy. Some relationships have none, some have one or two, and some have all three. What components do the important relationships in this novel—Adam and Claire, Adam and Angelina, Angelina and Charlie—have?
5. Is being in love different at different ages? If Adam and Angelina had first met in their forties, how might their affair have been different? Or, if they had stayed together after their affair, would their love be as passionate two decades later?
6. Even after he realises that his fear of not being good enough for Angelina is holding him back, Adam keeps missing Angelina's signals that she wants him to come and 'rescue' her (141). Why?
7. Adam comes to believe that proposing to Angelina would have been the only way to keep their relationship alive after he left Australia, as the owner of the antique shop had advised him. Would this be the case in real life?
8. After the pair meet again in France, does Adam decide not to pursue a relationship with Angelina because he cares for her and makes a selfless decision that she will be happier with Charlie? Or does he make his decision because he can't see things working out between him and Angelina, and realises he was always going to be happier with Claire?
9. Describing his relationship with Claire early in the book, Adam talks of not fighting, enjoying meals together, looking out for each other, being good friends. 'Nobody writes songs about those things, but there is a lot to be said for them,' he says (10). Should songs be written about those things? Is this novel about them? Do we, individually and societally, value them enough?
10. Graeme Simsion has said that he doesn't write 'evil' characters, and that all his characters are just trying to do their best in sometimes difficult circumstances. Are there any characters in *The Best of Adam Sharp* you can't sympathise with?
11. Adam is one of Simsion's flawed characters. How does the novel maintain your sympathy for him? Or did you struggle to sympathise with him?
12. Adam didn't feel he should tell Claire about his nostalgia for Angelina. 'Surely all of us have private thoughts that would only create conflict, make laughing stocks of ourselves or hurt others if we shared them' (141). Do you agree? How much should you share with your partner? And, late in the book, Claire tells Adam she doesn't want to know about his week with Angelina. Is this a sign of strength or weakness? Is it a good or bad basis for Adam and Claire's renewed relationship?
13. According to Graeme Simsion, an early reader told him: 'I'd let my husband cheat if he made me lobster with guacamole.' Can fidelity be traded for other things in a marriage?
14. When hearing the young busker playing a song by Adele, in the novel's opening scene, Adam is taken to a 'higher plane' (2). Why is music so important to Adam? Is it a universal feeling to be so moved by music?
15. How did the musical references affect your reading of the novel? Do you think you have to appreciate the music Adam loves to fully appreciate the book?
16. At one point in France, Adam looks in the mirror and sees his father. How much do you think being reminded of his father affects his decisions about his future with Angelina? How do you think his childhood more generally has affected his decisions as an adult?
17. Both Angelina's and Claire's mothers are portrayed negatively, and Adam's mother is also far from ideal. Why has Simsion chosen to write such difficult mothers? Do you get any sense of what kind of mother Angelina is?
18. Why do you think the author chose to make Angelina an Equal Opportunity Commissioner: what point is he making? Does this novel have any feminist sensibilities?
19. Adam tells Angelina, 'You have to trust the spontaneous song test. It's like word association.' (31) In the closing passage of the book, he plays, spontaneously, 'The Pretender'. What is he telling us?