

# Flung Out of Space: Inspired by the Indecent Adventures of Patricia Highsmith

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ILLUSTRATOR  
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**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Mid to Upper Secondary  
(Language, Violence, Sexual Content)



## SYNOPSIS

*New York Times* bestselling author Grace Ellis and illustrator Hannah Templer have teamed up to tell Patricia Highsmith's story through the author's eyes—reimagining the events that inspired her to write *The Price of Salt*, the book that would become a foundational piece of queer literature. *Flung Out of Space* opens with Pat begrudgingly writing low-brow comics. A drinker, a smoker, and a hater of life, Pat knows she can do better. Her brain churns with images of the great novel she could and should be writing, what will eventually be *Strangers on a Train*, which would later be adapted into a classic film by Alfred Hitchcock in 1951.

At the same time, Pat, a lesbian consumed with self-loathing, is in and out of conversion therapy, leaving a trail of sexual conquests and broken hearts in her wake. However, one of those very affairs—and a chance encounter in a department store—give Pat the idea for her soon-to-be beloved tale of homosexual love that was the first of its kind: it gave the lesbian protagonists a happy ending.

This is not just the story behind a classic queer book but also of a queer artist who was deeply flawed. It's a comic about what it was like to write comics in the 1950s, but also about what it means to be a writer at any time in history, struggling to find your voice.

Author Grace Ellis contextualises Patricia Highsmith as both an unintentional queer icon and a figure whose problematic views and noted antisemitism have cemented her controversial legacy. Highsmith's life imitated her art with results as devastating as the plot twists that brought her fame and fortune.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Grace Ellis has made a name for herself in the industry by creating unforgettable, loveable and funny characters. She burst onto the comics scene with *Lumberjanes*, which she co-created and co-wrote. It was a *New York Times* bestselling, Eisner and GLAAD Media award-winning comics series that broke the mold of both YA and superhero comics. She is also the author and creator of the Image Comics series *Moonstruck* and writer of *Lois Lane and the Friendship Challenge* for DC Comics.

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Hannah Templer is a cartoonist and has worked as a colourist, cover artist, and interior artist on series and titles such as *Glow*, *Samurai Jack*, *Jem and the Holograms*, *Captain Marvel* and *Tomb Raider*. She is also the creator of *Cosmoknights*,

an original graphic novel series published by Top Shelf Comics. Her clients include Dark Horse, IDW, Valiant, BOOM! Studios, Marvel, HarperCollins and Abrams Books.

## STUDY NOTES

- Before reading, ask the students do some brief research about Patricia Highsmith. Each student is required to share one piece of information they have learnt about Highsmith. Create a mind map on the board which creates a 'picture' of the life and works of Patricia Highsmith.
- After reading the graphic novel, facilitate a group discussion using the following prompts:
  - What is the story about? (plot/events) What is it really about? (themes)
  - The author describes the novel as a 'fantasia' rather than a biography. Consider all that you've learnt about Highsmith from the previous activity.
  - What has the author chosen to include? What has not included?
  - Did you think Patricia Highsmith was a nice person? Why/Why not? Does it matter?
- Consider the subtitle: Inspired by the indecent adventures of Patricia Highsmith. What do the authors mean by 'indecent'?
- Why couldn't Patricia Highsmith get her novel *The Price of Salt* (later retitled *Carol*) published?
- Consider the response from the lesbian community to Highsmith's novel. Why was it important that the story had a positive ending?
- What was Highsmith's attitude towards writing comic books? Why doesn't she put her name on her comic books?
- Why is Patricia Highsmith attending therapy?
- Patricia Highsmith is often left feeling isolated. How does the illustrator in *Flung Out of Space* depict this isolation? Provide examples from the text.
- Patricia Highsmith had many flaws—she was racist, anti-semitic, misogynist and cruel. Provide examples of these from the text.
- Once permission is given to all students, watch the 2015 movie *Carol* which is an adaption of Highsmith's novel, *The Price of Salt* (later retitled *Carol*) and then answer the following questions:
  - Consider Patricia Highsmith's life as depicted in *Flung Out of Space*. What parallels are drawn between Highsmith's life and the life of her characters? Provide examples from the text.
  - Carol tells Therese that she is 'flung out of space'. What does she mean? (Consider the graphic novel and the world Highsmith was living in when she wrote *The Price of Salt/Carol*.)
  - When Carol is negotiating custody of her daughter she asks, "What use am I to her if I'm living against my own grain." What does she mean?
  - Did you find the ending of *Carol* satisfying? Why/why not?
- Below are some essay prompts that can be applied to *Flung out of Space*:
  - Highsmith's novel, *The Price of Salt*, was considered a fundamental contribution to lesbian fiction. Why was this novel so important? Use examples from *Flung Out of Space* to support your arguments.
  - In *Flung Out of Space*, author Grace Ellis has created a wholistic depiction of Patricia Highsmith with all her flaws. Yet we, the reader, are empathetic to Highsmith. Discuss using examples from the *Flung Out of Space* to support your arguments.
  - 'Art imitates life.' Discuss using examples from *Flung Out of Space* to support your arguments.
- Ask students to obtain three newspaper articles from different newspapers that discuss the issue of conversion 'therapy'. They are to provide the following for each article:
  - Title:
  - Author:
  - Type of article (news, opinion piece, feature article):
  - Summary of the article (topics discussed, main points):
  - Source (examine the source, is it reliable? Why/why not):

Ask them the form their own opinion around the issue and write a Letter to the Editor of the newspaper the articles are from about an issue around conversion 'therapy'.

- Write a diary entry by Patricia Highsmith after one of the following events:
  - Attending a psychologist appointment
  - Ending a homosexual affair
  - After her book *The Price of Salt* has been rejected by a publisher.

Creative responses should demonstrate an understanding of Patricia's mindset, the time in which she was living and writing and her attitudes towards the events in her life.