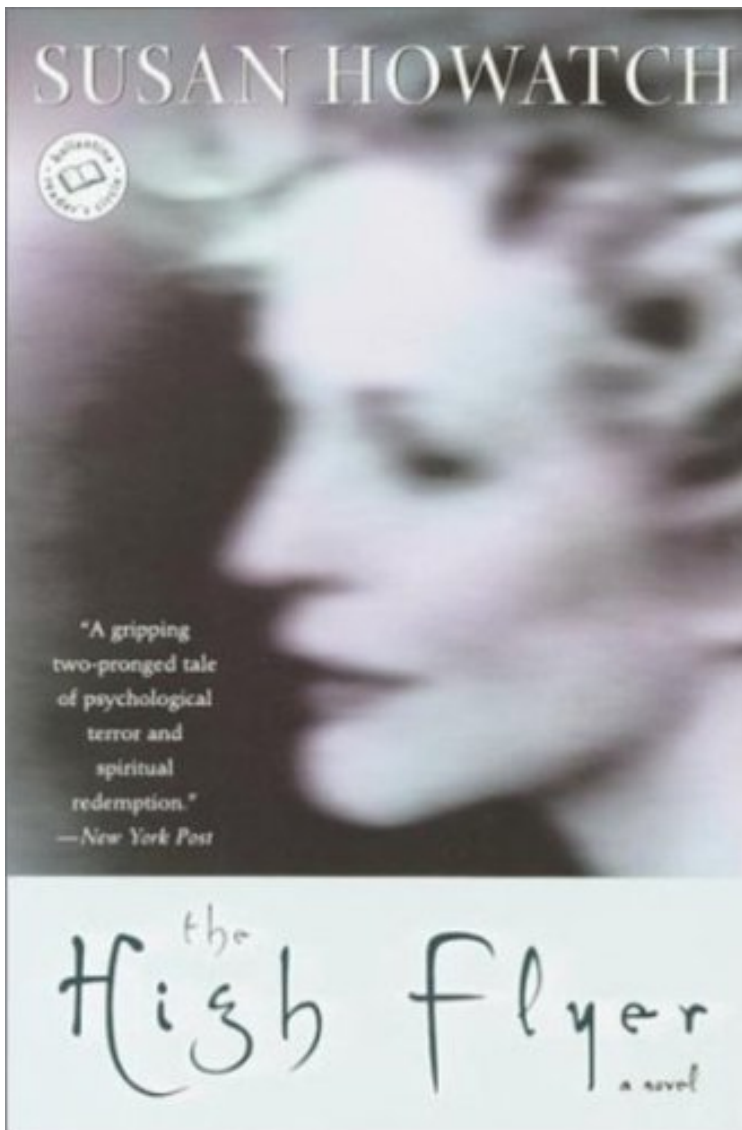


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# The High Flyer



*Par Susan Howatch*  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurSuccessful London lawyer Carter Graham has power, sex appeal, and a well-ordered life. Everything has gone according to plan, including her recent marriage to Kim Betz, an investment banker with the right combination of looks and position. On the surface it appears to be a match made in heaven. The only problem is Kims ex-wife. Sophie begins to follow Carter like a shadow, making outrageous claims about Kims involvement in the occult.Convincing herself that Sophie is mad, Carter moves ahead with her life. But something is amissand as Sophies stories are corroborated by other unwelcome disclosures from Kims past, Carter is thrown into a terrifying web of suspicion and betrayal, pushing her sanity to the edge. In desperation, Carter seeks help from Nicholas Darrow, the charismatic priest of St. Benets Healing Center. Though a religious skeptic, Carter hopes to stem the tide of darkness that

threatens to envelop her life and begins a compelling journey into the very nature of good and evil, wisdom and redemption. . . .

**Extrait** Flirting with the Enemy There is no shortage of highly individualised beliefs. In fact I am constantly amazed at what people do believe; half-remembered bible stories, odd bits of science fiction, snippets of proverbial wisdom passed on through grandmothers or glossy magazines. \*\*\* We are bombarded with different beliefs, different values, different customs, different interpretations. Experts give us different and incompatible analyses. We are faced with a kaleidoscope of different images. And the overall effect, I suggest, is to reduce all differences to the same level, to make us immune to real distinctions, to imply that the most we can hope for is not truth but mere opinion.

**john habgood** Confessions of a Conservative Liberal One helpful exercise is to ask ourselves what our main life-shaping desires are. What do we most want to do and be? What are the priorities we feel most deeply about?

**david f. ford** The Shape of Living I When I first saw my temporary secretary it never occurred to me to flirt with him. Even in 1990, when suing for sexual harassment was still considered to be primarily an American activity, an office flirtation would have been considered unwise for a high flyer, and besides, this particular male hardly struck me as being irresistible. He had curly hair, chocolate-coloured eyes and a chunky, cherubic look. My taste in men has never encompassed overgrown choirboys. Walking into my office I found him stooped over my computer, and since I was not expecting a male secretary I assumed he was someone from the maintenance department. I did notice that he was dressed as an office drone in a grey suit, drab tie and white shirt, but maintenance men often resembled office drones these days; it was a side-effect of the technological revolution. Abruptly I demanded: Whats the problem? and added for good measure: Who the hell are you? I always feel irritable on Monday mornings. He glanced up, decided I was just another dumb blonde hired to massage a keyboard and made the big mistake of adopting a patronising manner. Relax, sweet pea, he said casually, Im the temp from PersonPower International! Ive been assigned for two weeks to Mr. Carter Graham. I dropped my bag on the visitors chair, folded my arms across my chest and dug my high heels into the carpet. Then I said in a voice designed to bend nails: Im Carter Graham. The man jumped as if stung by a bee, and as his head jerked up I realised that his square jaw was incompatible with the choirboy image. I beg your pardon, maam, he said at once. I must have misunderstood the lady in personnel who directed me here. The lady in personnel must be suffering from amnesia. She knows I only work with female temps. Im sorry to hear that, maam, but let me reassure you by saying Youre gay. No, but I can do everything women and gays can do with computers, and Ive even taken a course in DTP. I saw no reason to put up a front by pretending to know what this latest technological time-waster was. DTP? Desk-Top Publishing, maam. I dont approve of dubious activities taking place on a desk-top. Are you seriously trying to tell me that PersonPower International have had the nerve to send a heterosexual white Anglo-Saxon male to work in my office? Maybe they see it as their contribution to multiculturalism, maam. Worried about my ability to keep a straight face I turned aside, tramped to the window and stared at the crowded street four floors below. Only after I had carefully counted to ten did I swing back to face him and say: All right, so be it. Welcome to Curtis, Towers. Thank you, maam. But now you listen to me, and you listen well. This is a first-names office but you and I are going to use surnames for the duration of your time here. Im not having all those hormones and pheromones stimulated by any pseudos-corner office intimacy. In that case would you care to be addressed as Miss Graham, Mrs. Graham or Ms. Graham? Well, I certainly didnt go through a wedding ceremony only to be called Miss at the end of it, and Im not Mrs. Graham, Im Mrs. Betz. But my marital status is hardly your concern. Right, Ms. Graham. And your name is Eric Tucker. Okay, Tucker, get me unsugared coffee, black as pitch and strong enough to make an elephant levitate. Then well start to flay the fax till it screams for mercy. He never asked where the coffee machine was or where he could make coffee or whether he would be able to obtain a takeaway from the cafeteria. He just responded smartly: Yes, maam, and zipped out of the room. That impressed me. But I also heard the note of amusement in his voice and knew I was not the only one who had played the scene poker-faced but tongue-in-cheek. That alarmed me. Sharing the same sense of humour can be a snare in an office setting. Humour leads to intimacy which leads to loss of detachment which leads to bad judgement which leads to a mess. I resolved to be on my guard. I wished he were much younger than I was, but I thought he too was probably in his mid-thirties. Younger men were easier to muzzle and keep on a short leash; younger men were less likely to think a womans place was not in the boardroom; younger men were easier to intimidate, control and organise. But this smooth-talking item was not a younger man. Nor, I was sure, was he ever again going to remind me of an elderly cherub or an overgrown choirboy. At that point I spent three seconds wondering why he was working as a temporary secretary and three seconds wondering, in the casual way one does with new acquaintances of the

opposite sex, what he was like in bed. Then I said to myself impatiently: Bloody sex! Why are we all so obsessed with it? and focused my mind instead on the intricate fiscal affairs of my major clients, the Unipax Transworld Corporation. II Arriving home at seven I mixed my first drink of the day and moved out onto the balcony to survey the sky. It was pale blue with puffs of wispy white. The sun was still some way from the horizon, but in the distance the gothic towers and spires of the Palace of Westminster were already forming a shadowy mass streaked with slanting shafts of gold. I breathed deeply, swallowed a mouthful of my vodka martini and turned my attention from the City of Westminster to its neighbour, the City of London. The square mile of the capitals financial district stretched to the south and east far below; I saw it as a dense, man-made jungle knifed by skyscrapers which reflected the powerful rays of the setting sun as if they were shards of mirrored glass rising from a dung-heap. Half a mile away the dome of St. Pauls Cathedral appeared to float above the canyons of Cheapside and Old Bailey like an exotic mushroom blooming on an unkempt lawn. The phone rang. Stepping back into the living-room I grabbed the receiver. Hulloo? There was no reply. My right hand tightened its grip on my glass. Hulloo? I repeated sharply, but when the silence remained unbroken I hung up. Immediately the phone rang again. This time, without waiting for the silence, I snarled: Get a life! and slammed the receiver into its cradle. Seconds later, to my disgust, the bell rang yet again, but this time I merely picked up the receiver and waited. Sweetheart? Kim! My God, was that you a moment ago? It sure was! Whats going on? Just some nutter misdialling forget it. Hows New York? Cant wait to step into Concorde tomorrow! Hows life at Curtis, Towers? Lurid as ever and to cap it all Ive got a male temp for two weeks. Any good? I hate to admit it, but hes better than any female PA Ive ever had. Men always outperform women whenever they take on womens jobs. So when are they going to take over pregnancy and childbirth? Kim, if you were on this side of the Atlantic Id bet. And while were on the subject of slappable behaviour, let me tell you this: if the new hired help makes a pass at you Ill have his balls on toast for breakfast. If the new hired help makes a pass at me, Ill have his balls on toast for breakfast! And talking of sex, darling . . . The conversation slid into an exchange of private intimacies. After I had hung up I returned to the balcony to watch the next stage of the long sunset. Years ago, on my arrival in the capital I had not realised how many Londons there were; the place which I had always thought of as London I had quickly learned to call the West End. That was where the tourists went to see the sights and squander money on shopping. Then there was the East End where, before the Docklands redevelopment schemes, no one from the West End ever went, a huge impoverished territory where fierce indigenous tribes warred with successive waves of immigrants. And finally, between the rich West End and the poor East End, like a jewel wedged between a marble slab and an earthen floor, lay the fabled City, the oldest London of all, Roman Londinium, sacked by Boadicea, ravaged by the Saxons, plundered by the Vikings, conquered by the Normans, decimated by the Plague, razed by the Great Fire, blitzed by the Luftwaffe, but surviving all this radical pruning to flourish more fiercely than ever. In the 1980s, fired by the Prime Minister whom it revered as a goddess, it had gone mad with excitement and mushroomed into the greatest money-market on earth. Sparse on regulation, prolific in financial opportunities, it had become a gold-plated circus stuffed with predators from all over the globe. Of course the doomsters had said the money-miracle would never last, but who had had the time to listen? The great goddess would take care of the City, that huge jewel in the forefront of her tiara, and the great goddess had expressed her intention of being worshipped to the end of the millennium and beyond. But there was a chill wind now whispering up the Thames from the east and laying icy fingers on all those unsold new developments in Docklands. The great roulette wheel of the property market had ceased to spin. The 1980s were over, and an unknown and perhaps very different decade lay ahead. Mrs. Thatcher, the great goddess, was still behaving as if she could take care of everything, but her nemesis, the poll tax, was pushing her deeper and deeper into the political quicksands, and recently there had even been riots in Trafalgar Square. Mrs. Thatcher was starting to look fallible at last, and once confidence in her was lost, the political predators would tear her apart. Female high flyers could plummet to earth faster than any man; the men surrounding them would always make sure of that. I shuddered as I thought of that long fall, and as I looked down on London that evening from the thirty-fifth floor of Harvey Tower, I noted again that the giant building cranes were disappearing from the landscape as the economy halted, inflation rose and darkness began to fall at last on the City. The river was glowing in the dusk like molten lava snaking from a volcano. Back in the living-room I sat at my telescope and focused it on the Houses of Parliament upstream in Westminster. The towers and spires were now as black and jagged as a tramps teeth. I decided it was time to think about dinner. I ate some sardines and a medium-cut slice of wholemeal bread, toasted but unbuttered. It was an austere meal but the very act of eating reminded me of

the dinner-party which we were planning to give at the end of the week. To crown Mrs. Thatchers troubles, the beef market had collapsed. Could I really foist portions of a potentially mad cow on my guests in the manner of the Minister of Agriculture who had recently attempted to proclaim the safety of British beef by ramming a hamburger into the mouth of his four-year-old daughter? No. I tried to console myself by thinking that all over England menus were being reduced to chaos by bovine spongiform encephalopathy, but this hardly made my ordeal easier to face. It would be the first dinner-party Kim and I had given since our wedding, and although I had researched the subject of etiquette with a lawyers attention to detail, I still felt that the whole exercise resembled sitting an exam where one small slip meant total failure. In addition to the menu I was worrying about the wine. I knew a good claret had to be at least ten years old, but Kim had said we could serve a 1985 St. Julien. I realised that 85 was a good year, possibly the best year for claret in the eighties, but could we really get away with cutting such a corner when at least one of the guests was an oenophile? It was all very well for Kim to glide around the conventions; everyone knew he was only a naturalised Englishman and allowances were always made for foreigners, but as a woman I had to get everything not only right but perfect. That was how I had survived in the City among all those sabre-toothed male predators. Survival meant being in control of every single detail of every single project and I was still a long way from being in control of this dinner-party looming at the end of the week.

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