



## My Most Treasured Moment as a Writer

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Linda Hoy

I WAS TEACHING ART at the time — a subject about which I knew absolutely nothing.

I'd been a hardworking English teacher in a local comprehensive, but after the success of my first teenage novel, I'd made the daring leap of diving into the world of the self-employed.

Not so daring, however, that I was prepared to risk my mortgage. And so I'd enrolled as a supply teacher — which is how I came to be teaching a subject about which I knew nothing in a decaying comprehensive on the edge of nowhere.

Teaching Art, however, was a doddle as the pupils took out their various assignments, selecting brushes, mixing paint and leaving me to wander round exclaiming, 'Oh, I do like that!' and 'That's a lovely colour...'

I can't remember what Lisa was painting. I just remember her looking thin and frail and undernourished.

'Are you a proper teacher, Miss? Or supply?'

'Well, I used to be a proper teacher...'

Lisa mixed her paints. 'And what do you do when you're not here?'



I paused, unwilling to share my private life with this stranger.  
She looked up.

‘Well...I write books...’ I offered.

‘What kind of books?’

I took a deep breath. ‘I’ve been writing books for teenagers...’

Lisa continued with her painting. ‘Anything I might have heard of...?’

It seemed unlikely. But then I remembered a poster I’d seen outside the school library on the way up to the Art class. ‘There’s one of my books on a poster downstairs,’ I confessed.

I announced its name.

Lisa stopped painting and stared. ‘You wrote *that*?’

I nodded.

Her eyes grew wide. ‘*That* book?’

‘Have you heard of it?’

‘It’s the only book I ever read.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I read it and when I get to the end, I go back to the beginning and I read it again. Over and over.’

‘The same book?’



'Yes.'

'You don't read any other books?'

She shook her head.

'Why not?'

'Because that book's all about me.'

She stopped and gazed out the window and took some time to think.

'That girl in the book – the way her mind works – *she* thinks the way that *I* do. I didn't know there was anybody else who thought like me.'

I waited.

'You see, I never thought I was important. People in books — they're important. So, when I found a girl in a book who was like me, when I read about *her*, that makes *me* feel important. So I just keep reading about her. When I get to the end, I just go straight back to the beginning again.'

Supply teachers aren't supposed to scoop up children in their arms, fly home with them and sit them on the mantelpiece, but that's what I did with Lisa. Metaphorically speaking of course. She became my inspiration. Whenever writing got tough, I would look up from my computer and imagine her sitting there on my mantelpiece...

...feeling Important.