

BOOK REVIEW

An American family suffers in 'Unsheltered'

Mark Athitakis
Special to USA TODAY

The world is crashing down on Willa, the hero of Barbara Kingsolver's earnest and ambitious new novel, "Unsheltered" (Harper, 496 pp., ★★★☆).

Journalism cutbacks have ravaged her income. Her professor husband, Iano, lost tenure when his university became insolvent. Their son's wife has killed herself, leaving behind an infant child. Their daughter is skeptically re-entering American life after a stint in Cuba. Iano's emphysemic father is a bigoted fan of the "Bullhorn" running for president in 2016. And their New Jersey home, built in the 1870s, is rapidly collapsing.



Barbara Kingsolver

"How could two hardworking people do everything right in life and arrive in their fifties essentially destitute?" Willa thinks.

Kingsolver doesn't want you to read that line solely as a cry of despair. She takes the question seriously: What forces threaten to wreck the American family, and what can help stave them off? To answer that, Kingsolver alternates her narrative between 2016 and 1874, where on the same patch of Pine Barrens land a schoolteacher named Thatcher is befriending Mary Treat.

Mary, based on a real person, is an uncredentialed but serious naturalist who has published widely and corresponds with Charles Darwin. But accepting the theory of evolution is all but a crime in town. Cutler, headmaster of Thatcher's school, thunders on creationism's behalf, backed by a mayor

who treats the town like a fiefdom.

"When men fear the loss of what they know, they will follow any tyrant who promises to restore the old order," Treat intones.

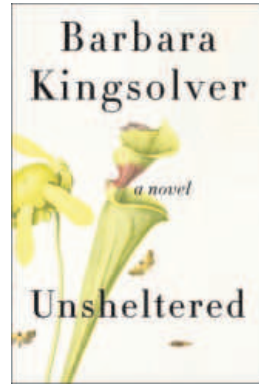
Kingsolver's point is clear: The American experiment, then and now, frays whenever its most fearful citizens take comfort in their own ignorance. Kingsolver, a biologist by training, has been attacking myths about the just-so nuclear family since her 1988 debut, "The Bean Trees," and most powerfully in 1998's "The Poisonwood Bible."

"Unsheltered" works similar thematic turf, and it has the virtues of her best fiction: a compassionate portrait of

parenthood in all its complexity, rich historical detail and a gift for a piercing satirical line.

But the novel also is Kingsolver at her most didactic. Willa's children arguing over global economic policy resembles the luke-warm banter of a think-tank podcast, and extended debates between Thatcher and Cutler are cartoonishly binary. Only the rules of historical fiction prevent Kingsolver from slapping a MAGA cap on Cutler's head.

The book's title suggests a roof gone missing. But it also is a resonant call to be more alert to our social predicaments, to "stand in the clear light of day."



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CROSSWORD

EDITED Fred Piscop
BY Fred Piscop

GRIN AND BEAR IT

ACROSS

- Squandered, as a lead
- Jared of "Lonely Hearts"
- Credit card action
- Suffix denoting wealth
- Weights, slangily
- Clad like many superheroes
- He caught Don Larsen's perfecto
- Manage to avoid
- Saw wood, so to speak
- Submitted, as a 40-Down
- Send to blazes
- Usual tic-tac-toe result
- Leader of Motown's Miracles
- Reflexology place
- "Born Free" 2-Down
- Neanderthal's abode
- "Finding Dory" studio
- CPR pro
- Maris who surpassed Ruth
- Kept from swelling, perhaps
- Often-buggy software version
- Comics bark
- Rough Riders leader, informally
- Geological stretch
- Manx cat's lack
- Cosmetic that's sometimes flavored
- Shopaholic's binge
- Standard Windows font
- "The Seasons" composer, affectionately
- Barista's artistic creation
- Carrier with blue and white jets
- "Enough ___!"

DOWN

- Baffin and Hudson
- Big cat
- Descartes' "therefore"
- Queer duck
- Factor in club selection
- Drop an easy one
- Grounds for a civil suit
- Running by itself
- First part of an act
- What a surfer may catch
- Device for an Apple Pencil
- Mani-___ (salon job)
- Forbidden fruit site
- Chemistry lab vessel
- BBQ slab unit
- Gibson of "Lethal Weapon"
- In ___ land (spacey)

Answers: Call 1-900-988-8300, 99 cents a minute; or, with a credit card, 1-800-320-4280.

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69 Started the kitty
70 Lockup unit
71 Addition column

27 Kitchen rack item
28 ___ out (at the limit)
29 Stallone's one-man army

30 Sgt. or cpl.
31 Katey of "Sons of Anarchy"
32 For all to see
33 Maker of squishy balls
34 BBQ rod
38 Introduce to the mix

40 Course conclusion, often
41 Hold spellbound
44 Oolong or gunpowder
47 Cried out loudly
48 Young friend of Pooh
49 Like freelance work, often
50 City on the Rio Grande
53 In ___ land (spacey)

54 1979-81 hostage site
55 Brad of "Moneyball"
56 Scandal suffix
57 Black Friday event
59 Strikeout king
60 Brickell or Sedgwick
61 Phases out
64 Norton, to Kramden
65 The whole shebang

Monday's Answer

M A S O N S C A T S T A Y
I M A G E P A T H M E R E
Y I I A F R I F A S K S
I N T E R N E T R O L L
S O Y B E D S E N L A C E
S E E D O E C A B
W H I T E D W A R F H O P S
R E C U R I R A M O I R E
I R A N A M C G R E M L I N
F O N M V P U T E
E N T R E E S C H O I L L
W A L N U T B R O W N I E
S E A L G L U E I R A T E
P A I L E N D S S A N E R
A R T Y S A S E M Y E R S

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WORD ROUNDUP

By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek 10/16

Find and Circle:
Four parts of the eye
Four eight-letter words
Australian state: New ____
Two continents
Throw with effort

Monday's answer: MOCCASIN SNEAKER SLIPPER LOAFER
SANDAL SOCK BOOT CLOG / NORTH SOUTH / EMPIRE STATE / GOLDEN GATE / HUSTLE

QUICKCROSS

By John Wilmes 10/16

Celestial light
Humorist Bombeck
Celestial light
Part of MIT
"Half" prefix
1982 Disney sci-fi flick
Old Testament book
Marathon tirade

Monday's Answer
L A S T
U B E R
C L E O
K E P T

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UP & DOWN WORDS

By David L. Hoyt and Russell L. Hoyt 10/16

1. GOING

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

REEF

Clues:
1. Performing well
2. Typhoon, for example
3. Type of weather bulletin
4. Omen
5. Nonverbal communication
6. Linguistic hindrance
7. Australia has a "Great" one

Monday's Answer

HEALTHY / LIVING / SPACE / MOUNTAIN / LION / KING / CRAB / RANGOON

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SUDOKU

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 (no repeats).

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 3 | | 2 | | | | | |
| 1 | | 8 | | 3 | | 4 | 5 | |
| 2 | 9 | | | 8 | | | | 3 |
| | | 2 | 7 | 9 | | | | |
| 6 | | 5 | | | | 9 | | 1 |
| | | | | 1 | 5 | 8 | | |
| 4 | | | | 7 | | | 9 | 6 |
| | 8 | 1 | | 6 | | 3 | | 5 |
| | | | | 5 | | | | 7 |

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SUDOKU

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x2 box contains the numbers 1 through 6 (no repeats).

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 3 | | 5 | |
| | 4 | 5 | | | 6 |
| | 5 | | 6 | 2 | |
| | | 2 | 3 | | 5 |
| | 4 | | | 3 | 5 |
| | | | 1 | | 6 |

Monday's Answer

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | 4 | 7 | 5 | 6 | 8 | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| 2 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 9 | 4 | 8 | 6 | 7 |
| 8 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 7 | 1 | 9 | 5 | 4 |
| 5 | 8 | 4 | 6 | 1 | 9 | 2 | 7 | 3 |
| 6 | 1 | 9 | 7 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 8 | 5 |
| 7 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 8 | 5 | 1 | 9 | 6 |
| 1 | 2 | 5 | 9 | 4 | 7 | 6 | 3 | 8 |
| 3 | 7 | 8 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 9 |
| 4 | 9 | 6 | 8 | 5 | 3 | 7 | 2 | 1 |

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TXTPERT

Across
2. 73275
5. 7673
7. 62473
9. 4747
10. 86729

Down
1. 62466542
2. 73224
3. 29873
4. 483
6. 73742
8. 7878

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Today's theme
Colors

1 a.o 2 abc 3 def
4 ghi 5 jkl 6 mno
7 pqr 8 tuv 9 wxyz

Use the phone keypad to decode the clues.
For example: 2 could be A, B or C... and 5678 could be IOST

Yesterday's solution

DON'T QUOTE ME

Baseball player Hank Aaron talks about physical exercise.

Rearrange the words to complete the quote.
FEEL LEAST SPORT SWEAT UNLESS UP WORK

I DON'T _____ RIGHT _____ I HAVE A _____ TO PLAY OR AT _____ A WAY TO _____ A _____

Monday's Answer: "Without art, the crudeness of reality would make the world unbearable." -George Bernard Shaw

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