

'The Fall of Lisa Bellow' has new take on teen trauma

Abduction tale is more of a character study

Steph Cha
Special for USA TODAY

There are countless stories about tragic missing girls, the sweet high school beauties whose disappearances haunt fictional communities all over the world.

But *The Fall of Lisa Bellow* (Simon & Schuster, 352 pp., ★★☆☆ out of four), the new novel by Susan Perabo, is not about the abducted Lisa Bellow.

It's about Meredith Oliver, her less popular eighth-grade classmate, who is traumatized when a masked gunman holds the two girls hostage at a sandwich shop



Author Susan Perabo.

hours and fifteen minutes on stage, with two brief intermissions during which she sat on a stone-cold toilet in a tiny stall cursing herself for all the missed cues and blown lines."

She resents Lisa and her clique — she's sharply aware that she and Lisa haven't exchanged a word all year despite having adjacent lockers.

Her fortunes change after

Lisa's kidnapping. As the last person to see Lisa alive, Meredith gains a certain level of social cachet.

She starts ditching her best friends to hang out with Lisa's friends; she buys golden gladiator sandals, the trendy shoes she mocked as "stupid and phony" when she didn't dare to wear them.

But while her star rises, her inner life goes to pieces. She spends more and more time in an alternate reality in which she and Lisa are both abducted, locked in a dingy apartment, sitting with their legs intertwined in a cramped bathtub.

Her trauma divides her from her family, which already was struggling for equilibrium after her brother Logan, a promising baseball player, was half-blinded by a foul ball six months earlier. "How were you supposed to help the girl not taken? There was no

group for this. No best practices." While their father, Mark, is a force of optimistic will, their mother, Claire, finds herself unanchored, unable to reach her children and unable to relate to her husband.

Half of the novel is told from Claire's point of view, and she's really the main attraction — a flawed but loving woman, not above using her position as a dentist to punish the occasional schoolyard bully.

Despite the central crime element, *Lisa Bellow* is more character study than suspense novel. Unfortunately, the prose isn't quite strong enough to make up for a languid plot.

Nonetheless, Perabo makes some interesting observations about character and family life, and her book should have some emotional resonance with anyone who's felt out of place or left behind.

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Race: White
Missing: Mar 23, 2016 **Hair:** Brown
Age Now: 16 **Eyes:** Green
From: Detroit, MI

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CROSSWORD
BY Gail Grabowski

CHEEKY APPROACH

ACROSS

- Slams into
- Does hip-hop
- Olive Garden offering
- Broken mirror, to some
- Fifty-fifty
- Like Super Bowl numerals
- Not fooled by
- Suffix for the well-to-do
- Make jubilant
- Gridiron Hail Mary, e.g.
- Like veggies served with dip
- Seemingly unemotional sorts
- Started a hand
- Can't do without
- Mouse actions
- Flow back
- Many a newspaper
- Alternative to a text
- Like the Clampetts, at first
- Batch of Brownies?
- Folksy Guthrie
- Twiddled one's thumbs
- "Animal House" getups
- Web address component
- Sources of aromatic wood
- Repair-shop stock
- Flannel pattern, often
- Don't set lofty goals
- Part of HRH, at times
- Five on the Beaufort Wind Scale
- Live and breathe
- Far from sociable
- State firmly
- Zellweger of "Chicago"
- Natural skin soother
- City near Lake Tahoe

DOWN

- Places for urban gardens
- Response to "Are too!"
- D.C. rails
- Strand, as a winter storm
- What no production Corvette has
- Like diehard fans
- Cop's collar
- "Slamin' Sammy" of the links
- Event for select customers
- "You've got mail" ISP
- Many an ATM insert
- "Toodle-oo!"
- From the top
- Scored 100 on, say
- Not as dry as brut
- Succotash bean
- Gossip that's "dished"
- The John B of song, e.g.
- Drug bust unit
- Opening for Il-Down
- Many a Charlton Heston movie
- Act the 14-Across
- Attention-grabbing lettering
- Exercise system with poses
- Not imagined
- "The Prodigal Son" and others
- Selected by an NFL team, say
- Show signs of life
- Arthurian address
- Mascara mishaps
- Car window stick-on
- Flood zone structure
- Gas in a layer
- Victors' shout
- Subway fare?
- Biz bigwig
- Jazz jam highlight
- "___, mon" (Scot's words)
- Red, Yellow or Black

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

WORD ROUNDUP
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek 3/23

Find and Circle:
Six weather adjectives ending with Y
Five pieces of furniture
Two sports ending with Y
Two U.S. coins
What bees make

Wednesday's answer: NEPTUNE SATURN VENUS MARS / MAINTAIN MOUNTAIN SHIPMENT THEORIZE / GALLON QUART LITER PINT / GUITAR OBOE TUBA / UNWISE

QUICKCROSS
By John Wilmes 3/23

Mideast strip
Consumer
Actor Neeson
Chums
Big swallow
Europe's neighbor
Enthusiasm
"A Farewell to ___"

Wednesday's Answer
CHAT
IOWA
OHIO
SONS

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

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

3/23 DIFFICULTY RATING ★★☆☆☆

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

				5		2
		3				
5			3			
				6		1
						4
4	1					

3/23 DIFFICULTY RATING ★★☆☆☆

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UP & DOWN WORDS
By David L. Hoyt and Russell L. Hoyt 3/23

1. GIFT

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

BRIDGE

Clues:
1. Container for a present
2. Enclose; confine
3. Clandestinely
4. Classified assignment
5. NASA command center
6. Tall airport structure
7. It crosses the Thames

Wednesday's Answer
BREAKING / BAD / COLD / FRONT / DESK / JOB / SEARCH / FOR

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TXTPERT

Across
1. 7678786
5. 283
6. 426
8. 2527
9. 9274
12. 24368

Down
2. 773324
3. 73432773
4. 6463
7. 269
10. 228
11. 448

Today's theme
Theater

1 a d 2 abc 3 def
4 ghi 5 jkl 6 mno
7 pqrs 8 tuv 9 wxyz

Use the phone keypad to decode the clues.
For example: 2 could be A, B or C ... and 5/6/7 could be LOST

DON'T QUOTE ME

Journalist Mignon McLaughlin talks about married life.

Rearrange the words to complete the quote.
ALWAYS FALLING LOVE MANY MARRIAGE PERSON SAME SUCCESSFUL

“ A _____ REQUIRES _____ IN _____ TIMES, _____ WITH THE _____ ”

3/23

Wednesday's Answer: "If there is magic on this planet, it is contained in water." - Loren Eiseley

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