



The Hidden Hand: Or, Capitola the Madcap

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E.D.E.N. Southworth was one of the most popular and prolific writers of the nineteenth century and her Capitola Black, or Black Cap - a cross-dressing, adventure-seeking girl-woman - was so well-loved that the book was serialized three times between 1859 and 1888 and was dramatized in forty different versions.

When we first meet sharp and witty Capitola she is living among beggars and street urchins, and dressed as a boy because a boy can get work and be safe, whereas a girl is left to starve for want of "proper" employment. Unknown to her, Capitola has a very rich elderly guardian who finds her at a providential moment and takes her back to his palatial mansion where she finds herself "decomposing above ground for want of having my blood stirred." But not to fear. There are bandits, true-loves, evil men, long-lost mothers, and sweet women friends in Capitola's future - not to mention thunder storms, kidnap attempts, and duels. The pace is fast, the action wonderfully unbelievable. This is escape literature at its nineteenth-century best, with a woman at its center who makes you feel strong, daring, and reckless

The Hidden Hand: Or, Capitola the Madcap Details

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Author : E.D.E.N. Southworth , Joanne Dobson (Editor)

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From Reader Review The Hidden Hand: Or, Capitola the Madcap for online ebook

Laurie says

I enjoyed this republished book from the 1800's very much until the last page, when I discovered that it continues in another book, Capitola's Peril, that I don't have! Arggggh! Capitola is a great female protagonist--smart, defiant, witty-- refreshingly different from the typical submissive women of that era. The author weaves many threads of mystery throughout--and I wanted to see how they resolved. But alas, the book ends in the middle of the story.

Scott Stroven says

I read this book in two days. Once I picked it up I couldn't set it down. I'm not a reader, but this book kept me wanting more. The suspense, the drama, the danger. Also the contrast between good vs evil. I enjoyed the characters with contrasting personalities. It was also a great reminder of who's hand we are in. At the same time suffering and evil are a part of this world and we don;t always escape it, but we have to learn how to respond to it. I highly recommend this book.

Lora says

Ok, I am just interested enough to continue the story (which does NOT end in this volume) in the next book. Some of the characters are interesting, and yet this is set off by a plot that runs almost entirely on coincidences. Wild coincidences! The kind one needs a special license just to keep them in a cage! Yikes! So, on to the next book on Kindle.

Linda DeYounge says

I expected something so different from what this was. When I read the title, I expected it to be full of flowery language, fainting women (although I was right there), and droll conversations. What I didn't expect was a full-packed adventure story with a stubborn and wild young lady who cross dresses and becomes best friends with a crazy renegade criminal. This semi-gothic story was written by a single mother who was loved and criticized in the same breath. I'm in love with these characters and the action-packed storyline.

Gary Bower says

Among my daughters' this is a unanimous favorite. Young Capitola is a feisty spitfire of a girl who would rather face danger than avoid it. In many ways, she has the spirit of another orphan girl (Anne Shirley), but demonstrates her boldness in far more serious, even perilous, situations. Set in pre-Civil War Virginia, this story draws the reader in by means of a relentlessly deepening plot that weaves together the hidden pasts of a

fascinating cast of characters. Despite the 500+ page count and an 1800s descriptive writing style (that can be a bit loquacious), each of my daughters (including some who struggle a bit with reading) kept taking the book from each others' bedrooms to read ahead. This story inspires through examples of sterling character, and reveals both the depravity of the human heart, and the providence of a loving God.

Dorcas says

It somehow doesn't seem right to review a book that's really only half a book (The "sequel" *Capitola's Peril* is the other half, and both are available free on kindle).

Well, I didn't love this. I'm not even sure if I *liked* it. It's a strange little book and has its share of devoted fans but for one reason or another IT and I just didn't 'click '. Some books are like that and you can't force the relationship. It either is or it isn't.

At its beginning, "The Hidden Hand " is a mystery. Then it's a comedy. Then a romance, next a sermon and then...it ends. No character felt real enough for me to care what became of them. And primarily for this reason, although the book takes us to a cliffhanger ending where nothing much is resolved and Black Donald is still on the loose, I'm ok with that. I know the answers are all in the sequel but I'm not sure I'm that bothered to find out, even though it's free. Isn't that awful?

Please read other reviews for this because I am definitely in the minority on this one and I'd hate for you to bypass a book that may be a winner for you. It's free. Give it a go.

MY RATING: G

AGES MOST LIKELY TO ENJOY: 11-17

Jesse says

It is really stunning to encounter such a high-spirited and defiantly independent female character in a novel written over 150 years ago, and, more importantly, is allowed to remain so from the first moment we meet her (disguised as a boy on the mean streets of New York City) to when her remarkable story neatly concludes on the last novel's last page. After encountering so many blonde, wan "angels in the house" in contemporaneous literature, adventurous, dark-haired Capitola Black is nothing less than a revelation. And she's funny too, with a relentlessly sharp tongue, can ride her horse in a way that most men envy, and is even willing to fight a duel when her honor is called into question and no male relative is willing to step in on her behalf.

The story itself occasionally gets bogged down when it meanders onto the plight of other characters--most particularly the dull male ones off fighting valiantly in the war-- and it can come off as stilted and antiquated as melodramatic potboilers of that era almost inevitably do, but that can hardly dim Southworth's impressive proto-feminist achievement in the character and story of Capitola Black.

Jessica says

I LOVE, LOVE, LOVE this book!!! (Thanks SO much Lily for lending it to me!!!) A fascinating mystery/drama set in what I'm guessing is the 1800's. (You can read the entire book here: [\[http://digital.library.upenn.edu/wome...\]](http://digital.library.upenn.edu/wome...))

Here are two descriptions of it that I found:

The Hidden Hand is an exuberant action comedy, featuring fearless Capitola Black, a self-styled female Don Quixote, and the prototype of innumerable adventure heroines.

Rescued from life on the streets in New York by a southern plantation owner, with his own reasons for befriending her, Capitola is too active and adventurous to settle for the life of a southern belle. Besides, the neighborhood is infested with evil-doers--Black Donald, the notorious bandit, and Gabriel Le Noir, the owner of the plantation adjoining--combine to make her life full of excitement and peril.

Serialized three times by popular demand before appearing in book form, The Hidden Hand exudes irresistible high spirits and cheer, and still retains the capacity to surprise and delight that enchanted its first readers.

This is NOT your typical Lamplighter Rare Collection book! Strewn with mystery and suspense that never lets up, The Hidden Hand will keep you on the edge of your seat! There are not many books that make me laugh aloud (even when I'm alone!) Truly, laughter is like medicine, giving health to the bones! But please don't let the feisty, mischievous character of 17-year-old Capitola and the cantankerous personality of Old Hurricane derail you from seeing the gracious providence of an all-wise God in the way He works all things out in an amazing way. A perfect book for older readers to see consequences to actions, and how God uses events and lives to work His sanctification in our lives. A delightful story that will keep you guessing.

bird says

I first read this book several years ago at the age of twelve and I fell in love. I've always been a fan of "older" books and for the first time since Little Women and Anne of Green Gables I fell in LOVE with a female character! Capitola and I are two peas in a pod. She isn't a namby pamby princess, she does things.

Granted she might not be the best role model for younger children, but she will keep you highly entertained. Whenever I'm sick or need a laugh I will read this book. It truly is a gem and Mrs. Southworth's best work in my mind. :) If you don't have a copy of this then pick up a leather bound one from Lamplight Publishing.

Ronald Morton says

First, this book is well out of copywrite, and is available (amongst probably plenty of other places) here: [Archive Link](#)

It also has a sequel: Capitola's Peril

And a play made after it: The Hidden Hand: A Drama in Five Acts

So, there really isn't any reason – besides the crushing obligations of time – to not read this massively enjoyable book. Though, I do recommend picking up a copy through Rutgers' "American Women Writers" series, as it's a series well worth your time and patronage.

This book has a strongly Dickensian feel to it – at times, especially early in the book, it relies a bit too heavily on Dickensian coincidences, where everyone who shows up is known to everyone else, typically either by reputation or prior acquaintance – but still retains a firmly American literary feel as well. Even being set in Virginia, it has the feel of a western, though that has more to do with the characters who inhabit it than the setting (in fact, the setting, especially the Hidden House feels like it would be at home in a Bronte book). All that sounds a bit jumbled, but it's not, all of those facets work well together – the work as a whole is a great deal of fun, with some wonderful characters and a (mostly) breezy plot. E.D.E.N. Southworth created a decidedly non-stereotypical lead character in Capitola, especially for when the book was written; the book does not ignore gender stereotypes, but it does revel in subverting them – it is humorous to see Capitola continuously get the better of the men who underestimate and overlook her due to her gender.

The book is slightly overlong at times – much of the non-Capitola scenes feel like they drag on more than necessary – but that really only applies to a few sections, and most are in some way necessary to move the plot along. The villains are all mostly "bad guy" stereotypes (Donald feels a bit more fleshed out), but it's a joy to see them get what's coming to them. Overall a fun and quick-moving read.

Sylvester says

Now I'm ticked. This is the third time I've tried to "save" this review, and it's been swallowed up by some glitch in the system. One more try. One.

Capitola is pretty much the woman I want to be. Her adventures, from the New York City street to face-offs with her Uncle Hurricane (well-named) to her tricks to evade would-be kidnappers, not to mention her duel with Black Donald (now my all time favorite duel in literature), she is audacious as all get out and funny as heck.

The rest of the book paled wanly in comparison, even though there was enough action to choke a goat, yes, I do mean that. It seemed to go on forever, and was pre-dict-a-ble. Back in the day it was popular, but look, when you've got Nathaniel Hawthorne for competition...well, I'll leave it at that. I don't need any more Goodread enemies. I'm giving this book only two stars out of sheer disappointment that there was not more of Capitola in it.

There. This better work now.

rebecca says

One of the longest "just-for-fun" books I've read! It was a very interesting story line, but dragged on a bit too

much.

Hayden says

Though there's no rule against it, as a general thing I don't like re-arranging or substituting books in my classic club's list. However, when my sister read (and went into raptures over) Lamplighter's classic *The Hidden Hand* by E.D.E.N. Southworth, I changed my mind- and this book was so worth the read.

Though I found the first few chapters a little slow going, once I passed the first third of the book, I literally couldn't put it down. (this included diving behind my bed to hide from chores so I could finish "just one more chapter") Similar in setting and writing style to Martha Finley's *Elsie Dinsmore* series, the similarities end there- for our feisty heroine Capitola is certainly no Elsie. In fact, an alternate title for this book is *Capitola the Madcap*, and it certainly fits! I can't really say that Cap is a good role model or a perfect heroine, but she certainly is a satisfying one. There are so many times when bad guys use intimidation to control people and I'm just like "No! that's what he wants! STAND UP TO HIM!" And Cap did. Oh my goodness, Cap wasn't going to let villains boss her around, not a chance! And I must admit that I also had a really sneaking liking for Black Donald. :)

The one thing that did bother me (but might not some people) was that the author used quite a lot of (unnecessary) exclamation points. However, as a whole I quite loved this book, and my sister did too. There were so many times my mouth dropped open in shock at certain plot twists (one word: Alfred. Two words: Cap's duel) and I had cases of the giggles during the course of this book as well.

(oh, and before Em and I started reading this book {we borrowed it from a friend and so had it in our possession} we went to an antique store and actually found a copy of *The Hidden Hand* from the 1800s! But we hadn't yet read it and so didn't know how good it was....so we didn't buy it. The moral of the story, children, is if you find an original 1859 copy of this book, BUY IT)

Julia says

I love this book! I've read it three times!

Jessi says

This was the first million seller book in America. Oh, you've never heard of it? Nor had I until very recently. Southworth was one of the "scribbling women" whose blazing popularity kept poor Nathaniel Hawthorne's publishers too busy to bother with his fluff. Featuring a brazen girl who dresses in boys' clothing, with a razor sharp wit, this book is also engrossing, but it might take awhile for it to grab the reader. I read it for a class, and may have struggled with it had I stumbled upon it myself. Just a warning. If you do read it, perhaps you could explain to me why Hawthorne is canonized and not Southworth.

Shelly says

This book is really long, but entertaining enough to keep you engaged the whole way through. I read it for a 19th century women writers class (yawn, I know) and liked it so much compared to the other books we read because the heroine (Capitola) is so funny and brave and I just thought how cool it must have been to escape in her misadventures during a time when women were taught the most important attributes we things like submissiveness to man and god, domesticity, piety, purity, and all that. The Hidden Hand was published (as a series) on or around the same time as Uncle Tom's Cabin and was just as popular but a lot less sentimental and preachy--which was a bold move on Southworth's part since sap and god stories played so well at that time.

I love Capitola's spirit and believe her story (with some updating) would play just as well today as it did back then.

Alicia Willis says

This was an ok book. I was actually surprised that Lamplighter not only published it, but promotes it so highly. The main character is in no way maidenly, nor does she set a good example in any way for her readers. Also, a witch is in one chapter and is rather spooky. (Not to mention, she really has nothing to do with the story - she was just randomly thrown into one chapter.) Over all, this book had the feel of a secular book with a few "character-building" attributes thrown in to make it "Christian".

However, on the positive side, the friendship between two soldiers (I forgot their names!) is very heartwarming and is an excellent example of loyalty. There is also a lot of adventure and it is definitely a page-turner. (You can decide for yourself if that is a good thing or not!)

I would rate this book 16+.

Lydia says

Love! Love! Love this book!

Catt says

I LOVE Capitola!!! :) What Spirit! Spunk! Clear thinking, priorities in order, unafraid, unwavering - what a GREAT character! :)

Fabulous story - would make an amazing movie or even better, weekly TV series.....could hold an audience for years! :)

evil, deception, heartbreak, unconditional love, brilliant, thoughtful, emotional characters

just loved it!!!

Sally says

The Hidden Hand is a wonderful story of good triumphing over evil. Written in 1859, The Hidden Hand contains a wealth of vocabulary from a century ago. It is also interesting to note that the protagonist of the story is a young woman, who through her wit, wisdom, and common sense, makes for a captivating and charming heroine. I also found the minor characters to be equally as engaging. Lamplighter Publishing is a company whose mission is to bring to light hidden treasures of Christian family literature from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. This is filled with moral values and hope for those who endure life's hardships with faith. Thank you, Teri, for this lovely gift!
