

# HANNAH EDWARDS

## SECRETS OF RIVERWAY



**ASHLEY  
HARDS**

Advanced  
Reader Copy

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# HANNAH EDWARDS SECRETS OF RIVERWAY

Ashley Hards

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3  
SCHOOL  
OR AS I LIKE TO CALL IT:  
BEING TRAPPED IN  
A NUTSHELL

WARNING!

STOP RIGHT NOW.

TRESPASSER, THIS IS MY JOURNAL, AND  
IF YOU'RE READING IT, YOU'D BETTER HAVE  
MY PERMISSION. AND IF YOU HAVE MY  
PERMISSION, YOU'D BETTER KEEP ALL THIS  
CONFIDENTIAL! OR ELSE . . .

Dear Journal,

In Ms. Luna's class today, we were learning about the different kinds of sentences and where to add commas. This sentence is called a simple sentence. There are lots of types of sentences. Another one is the compound

sentence. That's a pretty easy one to make. Just add *and*, *but*, or *or* and a comma to connect two sentences instead of separating them with a period, but somehow nobody else in Ms. Luna's class gets that. (Haha! That last sentence I wrote is a compound sentence.)

It's hard to describe exactly what it's like for me to sit in class. Just imagine that every class—no matter how new—feels like it has been repeated a million times. And the teacher—no matter what—is speaking too slowly. You know you should pay attention because *technically* you haven't learned this before, but no amount of concentration or active listening or note-taking can make you focus. So you let your hand robotically move across the page, writing whatever the teacher is saying, but the words are just scratching the surface of your head. They aren't being absorbed into your brain. What's going on in your brain? Why does it feel like it's being stabbed by the shrill whining of the classroom's ancient fluorescent lights? How does nobody else hear this? Have you always heard this—did you just ignore it, drown it out up until now? How can you sit still when you want to escape the lights and the slow speaking and the repetitive material because, after all, there are bigger things to do—more urgent things—and if they are not done RIGHT NOW, then they may never get done?

But you don't want to leave class because then you

would be a *BAD KID*, and that would probably cause the world to explode. Because if you're usually a *GOOD KID* and you've gone and done something they think is bad, there's all this worry that you're becoming a *BAD KID*. And they'll treat you like you are a carrier of the plague or, as teachers say, "a disappointment."

Next, they will call your parents and warn them that you were acting like a *BAD KID*, and if you aren't careful, you'll become a *problem child*. A problem child is a kid so infected with *badness*, they are beyond saving. There is no cure for being a problem child. Teachers will dismiss you, other kids will avoid you, and your future boss will never trust you (or so they say).

Becoming the problem child must be avoided at all costs. It is a label you can never shake off—a permanent disfigurement, a scar on your soul that says, "This person is trouble, and they will always be trouble." Therefore, no matter how boring the class, no matter how unbearable it is to sit still, no matter how glaring the lights, I always try to pretend to be a *GOOD KID*.

I've never told anyone about my problem. Not Mom. Not Dad. Not anyone. I need to keep it a secret. I don't want anyone to think I'm a *BAD KID*, and I don't want the kids in school to think I'm weird. And I'm doing a good job hiding all of this. After all, as far as Ms. Luna can tell, I am actively listening.

To prove my point: This is what happened today when she called on me.

“Tim, good try, but that’s not quite right. Hannah? Can you answer the question?” I didn’t hear the question, but I couldn’t say that because Ms. Luna thinks I *always* hear the question.

“Can you rephrase the question, Ms. Luna?” (Great move—she will never know!)

“Absolutely. I was just asking the class where to put a semicolon in a sentence.”

I quickly glanced down at my notes. “Well, a semicolon is used in a compound sentence as a replacement for the comma and the word *and*.”

Mary turned around and gave me a dirty look. We’ve been in an unspoken competition since she moved here in second grade. It’s clear that she was the teacher’s favorite at her old school, and she resents my reputation as the smart kid. Even though I find her to be a bit annoying, I like the way she beads her box braids. She uses only silver and gold beads, and they shimmer when she moves her head. They also clack together, which isn’t great because I find that kind of distracting. And I really admire her perfect color-coded notes. I used to make notes like that. Lately, mine are covered in barely legible writing and a lot of bird drawings. Color-coding is what you do when you really care about the material—when you need to try

hard to remember it. Now the material glides through my brain—it's just not worth the extra effort. Besides, I have bigger things on my mind. Like, you know, the whole “missing father” thing that everyone seems to have forgotten about.

“Great job as usual, Hannah!” Ms. Luna gave me an encouraging nod and turned back to the whiteboard, placing a semicolon where I had suggested. These things happen all the time. I am not paying attention, but nobody can really tell. It's very stressful, covering up all the time, pretending everything is okay.

Journal, at this point you might be wondering why I'm writing all this here since I promised I was going to use you for my investigation into my dad's disappearance. Well, that's exactly what I'm doing, because my investigation started at this moment in this classroom—when my friend Sam Castillo passed me an unbelievable note.

“Psst. Hannah. Hannah. Hannah.” Sam poked me with his pencil. Sam is my best friend on the entire planet and a rare phenomenon: a quiet jock. He's got two older sisters, and they introduce him to their friends, so it feels like the whole school knows who he is. I wouldn't say that he's popular, but everybody likes him. I mean, who wouldn't like a guy who will teach you to throw better instead of making fun of your bad aim? He doesn't usually try to talk to me in class, so I knew it was important. I felt



a piece of paper tickling the back of my neck and casually reached over my shoulder to grab it.

Scrawled on a ripped-out sheet of notebook paper in Sam's loose, wide writing were eight words:

Saw a ghost last night. Meet after
school?

Was he kidding? You can't just send a note like that and not expect a zillion questions. Here's what went back and forth between us. (I pasted it here with some new purple glue that's perfect for the job.)

Saw a ghost last night. Meet after
school?

A real ghost?! Will ask Mom—Fergus might be
making dinner >:(

Real ghost! Looked like your dad.
My mom can make dinner.

I know Sam didn't mean to upset me, but a ghost that looks like my dad is a pretty upsetting thing.

So I stared at the paper for a moment, letting my eyes go out of focus. Doing that helps me concentrate. Ideally,

I'd close my eyes completely, but that would attract Ms. Luna's attention. Relaxing my eyes was good enough. Once they lost focus, I could think clearly.

First, did I really think that Sam had seen a ghost?

Yes and no. I think Sam saw *something* he thought was a ghost. But our minds can play tricks on us. And it couldn't have been a real ghost. Because I'm old enough to know that ghosts aren't real—and that's a FACT.

Second of all, even if ghosts were real, the ghost couldn't be my dad. Because my dad is missing. And a ghost would mean something much worse. So it was obvious that Sam did not see a ghost. And the ghost he did not see was definitely not my dad.

But then I realized maybe he saw my dad in some kind of disguise that made him look like a ghost. I tapped my pen against my lips, mulling that over, when Ms. Luna broke into my thoughts.

"Hannah? Sam? Do either of you know the difference between an independent and dependent clause?" Ms. Luna was looking at us disapprovingly, her hands on her hips. My usual note-taking trance had been completely interrupted by Sam's message. I had no notes to glance down at, no previous memory to call on.

"Well, if you can't answer my question, is there something else that you'd like to share with the class?" Ms. Luna peered at my desk. Did she see me sliding the

note between the pages of my book? Not sure.

“No, Ms. Luna,” we said. I’d like to say that Sam and I are such close friends that we responded in perfect unison, but that’s more like something that would happen in some sappy romance novel, not in real life. In reality, Sam spoke just slightly before me, making us sound all mashed up, like “NoMsNosLuMsNasLuna.”

Mary’s hand shot up like an arrow, and her beads clacked as she bounced in her seat.

“Yes, Mary?”

“Ms. Luna, an independent clause is a sentence. A dependent clause is a fragment.” She turned toward me, victory scrawled across her face. One point for Mary.

“Correct. Now, one last thing—” Ms. Luna was interrupted by the piercing bell. “I guess we will save that for next class. See you tomorrow, everyone!”

During the ruckus of papers sliding into backpacks and chairs being pushed back, nobody noticed that I was more or less glued to my seat. Passing notes in class was “not like me.” It was a *BAD KID* thing to do. It signaled disrespect—or at least that’s how Ms. Luna would see it, and I actually *like* Ms. Luna because she always wears such cool dresses and has a little gecko tattoo on her ankle that makes her seem mature and worldly, like some explorer turned English teacher. And most of all, I thought Ms. Luna liked me, but would she still after catching me

in the act? Once I start worrying about things, sometimes my thoughts swirl and build and it's hard for me to move on while they pile up.

My heart was spiraling—no, it was racing—and right when I thought I would never move again, Sam spoke up.

“Hey, sorry we got caught. I know that you hate getting in trouble. Nerd.” He smiled, lightly punching my shoulder.

“No problem, but you could have told me during recess. Slacker.”

“And miss out on the world's most intense round of soccer? No way! So, do you think you can get out of having dinner with Chef Spaghetтини's evil twin?”

“I'll ask my mom.” I swung my backpack over my shoulders, securing both straps. We were the last kids to leave, and I could see Ms. Luna smiling at us. She didn't hate me! The spiraling sensation went away.

I wanted to ask Sam more about the ghost to figure out what he really saw, but he was already rushing off.

Ms. Luna waved at me as I walked out of the classroom—but I was too deep in thought to wave back. My head wasn't up in the clouds; it was down in the graveyard, thinking about ghosts and why Sam would think that something (that didn't even exist) would look like my missing dad.

Journal, I'll update you later. I'm home now and Mom just walked in, and I need to ask her if I can go to Sam's. I'll be back later with some answers. Maybe I'll even be able to tell you a real-life ghost story. But don't count on it.

# HANNAH EDWARDS

## SECRETS OF RIVERWAY

AUTHENTIC NEURODIVERSE REIMAGINING OF HAMLET

UNCONVENTIONAL MYSTERY AND COMING-OF-AGE STORY

Hannah Edwards has a lot on her mind. For starters, her father—the Canola King—has been missing for months. And not her distracted mother, her meddlesome guidance counselor, nor her evil Uncle Fergus seem to care. Luckily, she has her secret journal and her best friend Sam Castillo for support. So when Sam tells Hannah he thinks he saw her father’s ghost down at the old Riverway Mill, Hannah decides to take matters into her own hands. She soon learns that Uncle Fergus has a plan to steal the family farm, drain the river, and find a hidden treasure.

On the edge of going from being a GOOD KID to a BAD KID, Hannah stops pretending to pay attention to her endlessly boring classes. With Sam, her journal, and eventually a whole lot of Riverway frogs, Hannah sets out to solve the mystery of her father’s disappearance. A heartfelt story of a young neurodiverse girl with a whole lot of determination to do the right thing.

Debut author Ashley Hards was declared to be “gifted” at age 8 and was diagnosed with ADHD at age 22. She received both her BA and MA in English Literature from McGill University where she now teaches writing and continues her research on Shakespeare. She grew up in Calgary, Canada.



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