

Forgive Me, a short play
By Jake Alexander

(Lights up on a small apartment, some city. All we see is a small coffee table with a laptop on it, a couch positioned behind it. BEN sits facing the laptop. The laptop is closed. He can't quite bring himself to open it. He takes a deep breath. He clicks the laptop to start a video recording. We see a black screen with "video recording in process" across it.)

BEN

Hello. Hi. Ben here. I hope you all are having a...blessed day. I wanted to- nope. That was stupid I didn't want to say that. *(He turns off the camera. We see "video stopped" on the screen. He composes himself, cleans the camera's lens. He sighs deep and starts the recording again. We see "video recording in process" on the screen.)* Hey guys, Ben here! Just wanted to give a quick update! Ah, fuck. Too giddy. It's about death. *(He stops the recording, we see "video stopped" on the screen. He sighs deep. Starts the recording again. We see "live video in progress". The "LIVE" remains on the screen throughout the following.)* Hi guys. Well. Ben here. I wanted to do a video on this GoFundMe page to update you all on Hannah's condition, her, well, her illness-her wellness. The point is, she's uhm, she's not well. She's, in fact, she just, today- What I mean to say is she. She, uhm, she. She. *(BEN smacks the laptop, though it doesn't turn off the LIVE feed. He's on the verge of tears. He sighs deep and stands up, paces. He disappears from the stage, then re-enters with a beer. He takes a big gulp. He starts to cry, falls to the floor. He can't breathe, is having an anxiety attack. He reaches into his pocket and takes out a bottle of pills, removes two and goes to swallow, but realizes he can't take them with alcohol, and he quickly looks around for a glass. He exits again quickly. He re-enters having taken the pills, and pockets the bottle. He goes over to the laptop.)* Oh. Shit. This is "live"? How did I-? *(He attempts to stop it but can't figure out how. He hits the keyboard a few times to try to end and erase the video. The video continues to film No! No no no. Fuck. How do I end it? (He clicks around the keyboard. He realizes it's no hope.)* Well. This is not what I wanted to say.

(The video ends. We see "Live video ending". Maybe the numbers of viewers is visible. Lights down. Lights back up; the apartment is a little more in disarray.. A few 2-liter bottles of diet coke are next the couch. BEN sits on the couch, another diet coke bottle in his arms that he occasionally drinks from. He composes himself, and clicks the keyboard to start recording. We see "video recording in progress" on the screen.)

BEN

Well. Hi everyone. First off, I want to apologize for the other day. I didn't even realize that I had started a live video? That's a thing on this site? Truthfully, Hannah did all of the recording, and I guess I never picked up all the "tricks of the trade" from her. How did Hannah do this, like, everyday? I wish I was more tech-savvy, and there's just so many accounts she had. She had been YouTube-ing her visits and doing her "unboxing" videos of stuff you guys would send to her, and I know she found a great comfort in sharing her experiences. But I'm just- I dunno...I'm not very good. *(He chuckles a bit, clears his throat)*. Anyways, sorry. I just wanted to send another video because I didn't get to thank you guys before, for supporting this campaign. *(He pauses, trying to figure out what to say next or if he has anything to add at all.)* I didn't know Hannah had like, over 30,000 followers. From all over too! There's a guy who comments... his

name is Harold- Harry, I think, on all of her videos. Or, he used to. He lives in Wisconsin.

Anyways. Thanks for the support, Harold. Harry. And there was a woman, really sweet, I remember she used to send Hannah books of crosswords and Jumbles and stuff for when she was in treatment. Susanne? If that's you, Susanne, thank you. I guess...well. I was going to shut down this campaign, now that, ya know, now that she's. Gone. And I guess I'll just say, one last time Thank You. From both of us. For your support, and your kind messages, and your donations. And I hope these videos, the ones Hannah used to make, anyways, I hope these videos have provided. Something. I know they have for me. I guess, yeah...I'll leave the comments open on the site for the next week or so, just so you guys can say what you want to say, and yeah. If anyone needs anything, don't hesitate to reach out.

(The video ends. We see "Video upload successful". Maybe the numbers of viewers is visible again. Lights down. Lights back up; the apartment is a little more in disarray. There are piles of bills on the table, and a small stack of condolence cards next to the laptop. A few garbage bags, full, in a space nearby that we can see. BEN sits on the couch, he looks tired.

BEN

Okay then. Hi everyone. So many folks have reached out about my videos- well, the Live one, which I swear was like, a total accident. But there's been such an outpouring of love and, ya know, support. So I was just hopping on to say I guess I'll leave them up? For everyone? Yeah. And I wanted to read some of these really nice cards that I've been getting. This will probably be the last video I'll send so... *(He picks up a card on the top of the pile.)* This one is from- oh, I should probably show you the front of it- this one is from Jennie and Tom, and they wrote "Thinking of you and Hannah during this difficult time. Hannah was always a beacon of light: so thoughtful and caring. She loved you so much and she will always be with you." That was. Thank you, you guys. And this one. *(He picks up another card.)* Is from my parents, Bridget and Stephen. It says "When we saw how Hannah looked at you, we saw how much you meant to her. You were her soldier. And the love you shared will remain eternal, always in God's eyes." That's, that's very. Nice. Thank you, mom and dad. And I really love the design of this one, it's from, uhm, *(He looks at the next card on the pile.)* Oh! It's from Tyler, a friend from Chicago, who we have known forever. Tyler wrote "Ben- please accept my deep, deep condolences on your loss of Hannah-Banana. Smiley face." He always, uhm, he always called Hannah "Hannah-Banana". And, yeah. To everyone who donated on this platform to help pay for some of Hannah's treatment, I can't thank you enough. I feel like I'm saying "thank you" a lot? I guess that's part of this. *(A beat. He thinks.)* For those who weren't at the memorial, I told this story, it's about. Well. So. Hannah was always just so "lucky", I guess. That sounds horrible, but it's true. She would have these moments where it absolutely shouldn't have gone her way, and it just ALWAYS did. There was one time, maybe you guys know this story, I don't know if she shared it, anyways, okay. One time we were at my parent's lake house, upstate on the lake, and there was this really old tree with a rope swing on it. And it went out over the water, so you could hop off the ground, swing out, and then just drop in. And the water was like, thirty feet deep? So my dad had told us when we got there, you know we're like 20 at the time, he said not to use the rope swing. We hadn't touched the thing in years, but the tree it was tied to, was completely dead. Like rotten, and no leaves on it anymore, and just totally decrepit, but Hannah really wanted to. And I tried talking her out of it, but I just couldn't. She gets her bathing suit on, and we are sitting out there and Hannah grabs onto this rope, and she gets a running start and goes

flinging herself into the air over the water and all we hear is this giant CRRRRACK. And I look up and the tree, like the trunk of the tree has just split in half and is falling and Hannah is out over the water and then the tree, just like, caves in after her! And it was terrifying. We honestly thought she had been crushed, and I was so scared and a few second go by and the tree has like sunk into the water and Hannah just pops up like a few yards away from it and she rubs her eyes and she just goes “whoa.” Just like that. “Whoa.” Like she is just-as surprised that she didn’t end up under the tree. She had landed in the water, and swam straight down to touch the bottom and then *popped up*. But she was like thrilled she got to try to swing. And even to her last day, consciously, I mean- even when she was last “with me”- she stayed positive. That must be why so many of you stuck around. Anyways.

(He turns off the recording. Lights down. We see “video successfully uploaded” on the screen. Lights up again: the apartment is in even more disarray. More bags of trash have piled up next the couch. There are even more empty 2-liter bottles of diet coke. The mail has now covered the coffee table. BEN is recording another video. We see “video recording in progress” across the screen.)

BEN

Hey guys. I know I said, uh. Oh shit. *(He realizes that there’s a stain on his shirt. He turns off the recording and starts to scrape at the stain, to no avail. He walks off stage and comes back with a wet paper towel and is dabbing at the stain. Instead of getting the stain off, his shirt just looks really wet now. He sighs. He turns off the recording. We see “Video stopped”. He starts a new recording. His wet shirt is very noticeable. We see “video recording in progress” on the screen.)* Hey guys. I know I said that the last video would be my last recording, but I was reading the comments and some of you are asking how Hannah died. And I went back, and I realized that it didn’t say anything in any of the videos or even in the obituary. So. Hannah, as you know was experiencing kidney failure, as a result of her diagnosis. And she needed an organ donor and it worked out that there was one and- So they were gonna go in and like, remove her kidneys and transplant the new one. The doctor’s made it sound easy. That’s what it was supposed to be. Easy. But, it actually... Well. Pretty soon after the surgery, her body started going, they called it, septic. She had developed this infection from the new kidney and the doctors- they said that one option was to go in and remove the new organ, and try again. Once she went septic, she was in, they called it “shock” and she wasn’t conscious anymore. *(He starts tearing up, but doesn’t want to cry on camera.)* But doing the transplant surgery a second time scared her. She had told me once, a while back, about the success rates of having to go in and remove the new organ, and how it can mean that her body wouldn’t accept another transplant down the road if she needed another one, she had heard these horror stories. And so she seemed really afraid of it. She wanted to fight on her own. I knew that. So I made the choice to not- I had the power of, well. *(A beat.)* Lupus has like, an 80% survival rate. She lived with it for so long, and I thought. Well. I thought she would be fine. They had put her on these anti-rejection drugs and I thought her body just needed time to fight back. I thought with her history and the drugs and everything. She wouldn’t have wanted to be put under again. So I told them. Let her fight awhile longer. She’s lucky. She can do this. And. She died because of the infection. *(He stares. He goes somewhere else, haunted.)* She died fighting. *(He stares at the screen. He doesn’t know what else to say.)*

(Lights down. We see “video successfully uploaded” on the screen. Lights back up: the apartment looks almost unlivable. A pile of clothes on the floor. Even more trash, even more empty 2-liter bottles. Beer bottles, half empty and empty fill the table. BEN sits on the couch, fuming. He starts recording a video. We see “video recording in progress” on the screen.)

BEN *(angry, fuming)*

Hello. I know, I know I said I wouldn't record these videos anymore but I just. I had to respond to some of the, frankly, heinous things that people are saying in the comments. Really. Just really hurtful and hateful things. I am shocked at the outrage? I guess I didn't think I'd have to justify the choice I made. But then I'm reading comments like “you're a murderer”. Someone wrote that I deserved to die myself “what you did to Hannah”. Someone else wrote that I exploited the kindness of strangers- that I manipulated Hannah into making money for us. But we made this campaign because the insurance wouldn't cover everything, which isn't my fault! I got a *lecture* on second transplant surgery that they work most of the time and it's the best way to fight sepsis. I guess I'm surprised that some many people on this campaign are medical experts. I knew that! *(losing track)* “You chose manslaughter”. That's the one I keep reading. Manslaughter. *(He can't help himself but to respond, impulsively)* I loved Hannah more than anything. She was my whole- she was, just...She was. *(He can't bring himself to go on)* Just please. Leave me alone. *(He fumes more. He starts to cry.)*

(Lights down. We see “video successfully uploaded” on the screen. Lights up: a little later in the evening. BEN sits on the couch, he starts another video. He's a little drunk. We see “video recording in progress” on the screen.)

BEN *(fuming, beyond anger)*

FUCK YOU ALL. I can't believe I have to keep responding to some of you people, but I just have to. Please, stop reaching out with your hate. Please stop sending me threats. Please, just stop. I've had to delete my personal FaceBook and Instagram. I got called from the fucking news about my campaign. You people have to stop. I can't imagine anyone thinking I am anything other than genuine in my grief. Don't you know how, just, horrible I feel? Don't you have any sympathy? Well. Apparently not, because so many people, many of whom I consider some of my closest friends, have abandoned me. Because of the public backlash. What shocks me more is that some people have actually said they want a refund. They said I should pay back the money that was donated to Hannah's medical needs because I made the decision for her. I hate these videos, I didn't want to do them, but she did! And so we did that! For her! *(A beat.)* Please stop contacting me. Please. *(He's a broken man.)*

(Lights down. We see “video uploaded successfully” on the screen. Lights up: BEN is sitting. He looks like he's sick. He barely sits up. We see “Live video in progress” on the screen. The “Live” stays on throughout.)

BEN

Hi. I just wanted. To say. *(He sighs, he knows he's only talking to himself)* There's no one left on this campaign page, everyone has unfollowed or deleted me from social media. I'm all alone

now. So I just wanted to say, I'm sorry. Hannah. I don't know what I'll do without you. I'll miss the way you made this place light up, how you made me light up. It's dark now. And I don't know how to light it up without you. You remember that thing you used to say, I guess it was in earnest at first and then it sort of became this joke. When you'd be like "Can I ask you a question?" and I'd go, "yeah", and you'd be like "Can I love you?". You never needed my permission. I keep thinking about that. But. But... - I watch old videos of you. I watch them all the time, I can't stop. I never did anything alone once you came into my life, and- and. And I. (*He starts to cry. The lights are fading.*) Can I ask you a question? Just one question? Forgive me? Please. Forgive me?

(Lights down. We see "end of live video" on the screen. End of Play.)