

## Dear Begonia

Dear Begonia,

I have really small hands. They're frail and veiny, and not great for a lot of things. Mom would never let me gather eggs from the chicken coop, for fear they would slip through my fingers and splatter on the grass. She would tease me, saying these hands were only good for sewing, braiding, and flower-picking.

So I was confused the day she gave me a gun. She had thrust the bulky thing into my arms and told me to learn its body, its mind. I had been thoroughly spooked, but scoured the internet for tips nonetheless. I knew better than to doubt my mother. My mother, who honked at the sun when it glared off the car's windshield. My mother, who told pesky critters in our begonia fields to go to hell. That woman told me to learn the secrets of the pistol, so for weeks I explored the internet on our shared, beat-up laptop and tried to keep the gun handle from slipping off my small, sweaty palm.

I'm not saying Mom's to blame for what happened.

What *really* happened, I mean. Not the teenage serial killer fantasy the authorities are entertaining.

Although, maybe it *was* her fault. She *was* the one who bore the small-handed-gun-shooting daughter.

Anyway, I had tucked the clunky thing under my mattress after double and triple checking that the safety was on. My usual route to school had me cutting through our wildflower fields and dashing across a blocked-off street, so you can see how I felt no need for the firearm.

Everyone at school was cheerful and kind and very, very witty. The wittiest of them all, Chandler Wilkinson, had my heart skipping every day with nothing more than a smile cast in my direction.

Experiencing firsthand just how witty and charming Chandler could be made me wonder about my future in the field of romance. I began talking to Mom about what my child would be like, if I ever had one. She kept quipping about how I would become a city girl and forget about my roots, so the child should be named something home-y. I had just giggled at her.

When she found out I hadn't been taking the gun to school, she had been very upset. Her cheeks had flared, her voice tapering off into something flat and snake-like. She ordered me to stuff it in the bottom of my bag. To always be ready.

Ha.

I'm surprised no one's taken this diary from me yet. My lawyer keeps reminding me that everything is evidence. He already has my pistol, my charm bracelet, and my pretty blue sundress. It's been months, and all he's been able to say is that he's 'figuring it out'.

And he's not the only one. I'd been interrogated just a few months ago, before my detainment, and the officers were trying so hard to figure me out. True, I had been a sobbing, shaking mess, but they were officers--they should know a justifiable homicide when they see one. Sitting in that cold, grey room with all the blue-clad officials staring at me, I had just wanted to beg, *"Please. My hands. They're so...please. I didn't mean it."*

Looking back, I regret not being more forward with them. Maybe I could've been released sooner. Now, they doubt my integrity and are doing all they can to leech as much time and money away from me as possible.

Mom visits me every night, bringing me home-baked pastries and cookies and demanding updates on my case from anyone who listens. She also brings me all my chalky prenatal vitamins. Everyone watches me and my slowly swelling abdomen as I take them with lemon water.

Teenage pregnancies were super uncommon at my school, but romance wasn't. There was at least one school dance every month, and the guys would caress their girlfriends' backs on the sticky dance floor all through the evening. I would sit on the bleachers, perpetually alone, save for my friend Dolly. She had braces nailed to her teeth and wiry metal headgear wrapped around her head like a bird of paradise. Our friendship mainly comprised of her reading old fiction and me peering over her shoulder.

The last dance before high school graduation, I vowed to be close to someone other than Dolly. Lucky for my seventeen-year-old self, Chandler Wilkinson found me very pretty. He agreed to clutch my waist and sway on the sticky dance floor with me. It was a romantic few songs, with him shaking blond bangs out of his face and me, attempting to stifle my unnaturally broad smile.

Now, Mom agrees with me. Chandler was an ugly, ugly boy, and he masked it with sarcastic comments and a glorious laugh. My seventeen-year-old self just wanted to be wanted. When Mom and I talk about that, my lawyer has pity on his face. I'd slap it right off of him, if not for the fact that he's arguing *for* me. For my justifiable homicide.

Justifiable, only because after that graduation dance, Chandler had cornered me behind the school and pinned me against the dirty brick wall. His breath smelled like whiskey, and I remember thinking "*Where did he get alcohol?*" My mind could barely comprehend anything else. My arms had been shaking. My bag had been right at my feet, the gun waiting as he pulled away from me.

I wonder if Dolly's seen the news about me. She's obviously in some college now, studying old literature, sitting next to some other lonely girl at parties. I wonder what she would think. She *had* been one for morbid stories, stories deemed 'unfit' for teenagers by some contemptuous societal entity. Stories deemed too ugly, ugly, ugly.

Yeah, my life story wasn't ugly. Until it was.

My lawyer asks me questions like "Do you feel remorse?" and "Do you blame your school?". I can barely answer them. I'm too busy trying to ask my own questions. "*Why was the sound of Chandler's belt buckle louder than the crack of my gun?*"

But those are barely important. They're just the musings of a careless, ungrateful teen.

So, instead of wasting my time arguing with my lawyer, being scared of my future, or crying myself to sleep, I focus my time wondering about my daughter's name. The label I stick on her after everything that happened. The label on a girl with a murderer for a mother, a corpse for a father.

She'll have small hands, like me. Not good for holding eggs, or guns. Good for sewing, braiding, picking flowers. She'll live with Mom and I, until she can be a city girl. Her name will be for the wildflowers blanketing our property, not for the blooming chest wound that's perpetually seared behind my eyelids. She'll just be Begonia.

That's *all* she has to be.

One day she'll read this diary, maybe, and know that flowers fight to bloom in the wild.