

The Chaos We Create

For Josephine, you should have seen.

BABYGAY

The Chaos

We Create

For the over-thinkers, late in lifers. It's time to take up some space.

I didn't mean to ruin everything.
But I didn't mean to save it either.

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NEW FUCKING YORK

The plane hit the ground hard, and for a second, I thought about how easy it would be to die in a crash. No slow unraveling, no complicated stories to explain. Just one final impact and silence. I blinked the thought away and stared out the window.

Out the window, I could see a skyline that looked smaller than it was supposed to. Fuzzier.

I tried to picture her next to me—my mom—leaning over to get a better look. She would've said something corny like, "There it is, Scoutie, your big new life," and I would've rolled my eyes but secretly loved it.

"Big new life," I muttered under my breath, imagining her hand squeezing mine. But when I tried to picture her face, the image slipped through my fingers. Eight years was a long time to hold onto someone who only existed in my memory.

She never got to see me grow up, to see me change.

Sometimes, I wondered if she would've been proud of the woman I'd become—or if she'd see right through me, to the cracks I'd tried so hard to fill. Sometimes I felt like I was living for both of us, carrying the weight of her dreams and mine. And honestly? It was exhausting.

She always believed in me in this quiet, unshakable way I never understood. Even when I was sixteen and skipping school to hang out with boys I didn't even like, she'd look at me like I was destined for something bigger.

"You're going to change the world, Scoutie," she'd say, her voice soft but firm, like it was written in some cosmic contract. Back then, I hated it. It felt like pressure, like she was betting on me to win a race I didn't even know how to start.

And now, standing here—well, sitting here in a too-small plane seat—I hated it for a different reason. She was the one who should've had this.

She should've had the chance to stand on the edge of something new, to feel the weight of possibility without it crushing her. She should've been the one packing her life into suitcases, carving out space for herself instead of smoothing over everyone else's lives.

But she didn't.

So here I was, doing the thing she never could: choosing myself. It felt like betrayal, but it also felt like a gift. Like this was her way of showing me what she wanted for me all along, even if she couldn't say it. But it hurt—Fuck, it hurt—to realize that every step I took forward was a step she would never get to take.

When I stepped out of the airport, the cold slapped me in the face like it had been waiting. It wasn't just cold—it was hostile, like it had been building its case against me for hours and decided now was the time to present it.

My phone buzzed in my pocket as I hauled my suitcases into the taxi line. I fished it out with one hand, juggling my bags like a one-person circus act.

Bobbi: Welcome to New York, queen. The lesbian masses are waiting for you. See you soon.

I smirked. Bobbi always had a way of making everything sound both ridiculous and deeply important, like my arrival in the city was a historic event for all queer kind.

"Brooklyn Bridge," I told the cab driver, settling into the seat. He glanced at my suitcases in the rearview mirror like he wanted to ask why I wasn't going straight to wherever I lived now, but he didn't. That's the magic of New York: nobody cares what you're doing, as long as you don't block the sidewalk.

Dragging two giant suitcases across the Brooklyn Bridge felt less like moving and more like performing—like I was auditioning for some obscure workout trend.

Or maybe I looked more like an influencer who'd just discovered a new place to stand in line for overpriced coffee, suitcases in tow for the perfect 'I'm so busy but unemployed' aesthetic. Either way, nobody cared.

This was New York. You could be walking a llama in a wedding dress and still barely get a second glance.

Halfway across, I stopped.

The wind was relentless, cutting through my coat and stinging my face. I closed my eyes, letting it whip past me, its sharpness a strange comfort. It reminded me that I was here, that I'd left everything else behind.

Home. The word itself felt strange, heavy in my mind like an artifact I didn't know how to use. Home was supposed to be safe, solid, unshakable. But for me, it felt like a slow-motion trap, like every room was trying to press me into a version of myself that I didn't recognize.

It wasn't just the house, the rooms, or the walls—it was the air. It felt static there, like it never moved. Everything back home was too still, too controlled. Every glance, every conversation, every meal felt like a subtle performance. My stepfather's disapproving looks, my brother's effortless ability to fit into their world, my mother's silence—none of it said much out loud, but it didn't have to.

And me? I was always the one who didn't fit. The one dreaming too big, talking too much, feeling too much. Every room I entered felt like it was waiting for me to apologize for taking up space. And I did. God, I did.

I gripped the railing, the cold metal biting into my fingers as I leaned forward. The river below was wild and messy, light and shadow twisting together in a way that felt alive. It was everything home wasn't. Here, I didn't have to hold my breath.

The city stretched out in front of me, jagged and chaotic, unapologetic in its imperfection. It screamed, You're nothing. You're everything. Get over it. I thought about how much easier life would be if it could look like that—messy, uncontained, and free.

But home was none of those things. Home was suffocating, pressing down on me like it wanted to mold me into someone I didn't know. Someone quiet, someone smaller, someone easier to love.

I wasn't sure who I was yet, but I knew I wasn't that.

The wind tugged at my hair, snapping me out of my thoughts. I let out a breath I hadn't realized I was holding, my shoulders finally loosening for the first time in years. I leaned into the railing, letting the cold seep into my skin like it was rinsing something away.

My phone buzzed in my pocket.

Bobbi: Have you cried on the bridge yet?

I laughed under my breath, wiping at the tears I hadn't realized were there. Already ahead of you, I texted back.

I let myself cry, but not the loud, dramatic kind. Just a few tears, enough to clear the pressure in my head. I thought about her again, my mom. How much she would've loved this moment—me, finally here. I could almost hear her voice, soft and steady. "See? I told you you'd make it."

"Yeah, but you're not here," I whispered.

The wind carried my words away, like it was doing me a favor. The crying had left me hollow, but hollow wasn't bad. Hollow was something I could fill up. I wiped my face on my sleeve and looked at the skyline one last time, grabbed my suitcases, and turned toward Manhattan.

The apartment smelled like old wood and something sweet, maybe leftover perfume. The kind of smell that made you feel like you were borrowing someone else's life. I stood in the doorway for a minute, letting it all sink in—the light pouring through the big windows, the cracked white tile in the kitchen, the worn-out couch that looked like it had held a hundred conversations.

I dragged my suitcases inside and let them collapse in the middle of the room. The furniture was mismatched but

charming in a way that felt accidental, like someone had thrown it all together without trying too hard.

And then there was the bookcase.

It stretched across an entire wall, packed with books that looked like they'd been collected one at a time, each with a story beyond the one inside. I walked over, running my fingers along the spines, reading the titles out loud like I was introducing myself to them.

That's when I saw it.

Then I saw *The Protector*.

The weight of it hit me before I even opened it. His book. The one he used to read to me before bed. I pulled it off the shelf and sat down on the couch, tucking my legs under me as the book fell open in my lap.

It felt heavier than it should, like it was stuffed with all the expectations he'd ever piled on me. I traced the gold lettering on the cover, smirking to myself. For a moment, I could almost hear his voice—calm, deliberate, calculated. Everything about him was calculated.

"You know," I muttered to the room, "I bet he'd choke on his craft beer if he knew."

I could almost hear his voice now: "Scout, I always knew you were one-of-a-kind." Which, knowing him, was probably some roundabout way of taking credit for my queerness, like he was some kind of inspirational muse.

He'd probably suggest we meet up at some microbrewery to "talk it out" over IPAs that tasted like tree bark. He'd do that thing where he'd lean in too far, like proximity equaled sincerity, and say, "This explains so much about us. I mean, I sensed you had... unique energy."

Unique energy. As if my sexual orientation were a mildly interesting vibe and not a whole-ass identity.

And then he'd throw in a sad look for good measure, mourning the potential of our nonexistent future together. "If only I'd known, I could have saved you the trouble of figuring it out."

I laughed under my breath, shaking my head. “Yeah, because nothing screams self-discovery like you reading me bedtime stories and guilting me into your domestic fantasy.”

He’d probably end the conversation by calling himself an “ally” for not freaking out, like not being a homophobic jerk was some revolutionary act.

The humor fizzled out as quickly as it came, replaced by that familiar heaviness. Because the truth was, it was never really about him. It was about me.

He was just a mirror. One I looked into because I didn’t have one of my own yet. His attention made me feel visible, like I wasn’t just floating in some undefined space, waiting for someone to notice I existed.

That’s the part that still made my stomach turn—the fact that I let him do it. I let him promise me things he was never going to deliver, just because I didn’t know how to ask for what I really wanted. Or maybe I didn’t know what that was yet.

At the time, I didn’t know how to say, I think I’m gay. Or, I think I’m here because I don’t know how else to feel loved. All I knew was that his attention made me feel like I mattered, even if it came tied up with guilt and manipulation.

I snapped the book shut, tossing it onto the coffee table like it might bite me if I held onto it any longer. The sound echoed through the room, sharp and final.

He wasn’t in my life anymore. He hadn’t been for years. But the weight of his promises, his gaze, his expectations—they still lingered, tucked into quiet corners of my mind like dust I couldn’t quite sweep away.

Maybe that’s why seeing The Protector again hit so hard. It wasn’t about him. It was about the version of me that let him in. The version of me that hadn’t yet realized I could want more.

My phone buzzed in my pocket.

Bobby: Don’t get too existential before I show up. Save some angst for me.

I laughed under my breath, shaking my head as I stretched out on the couch. Bobbi was like the Co-Star app or one of those weird tarot algorithms on TikTok—always knowing exactly how I felt, swooping in with just enough insight to interrupt my spirals, whether I liked it or not.

“Fine,” I muttered, tossing the phone onto the cushion beside me. “Angst on hold.”

The day was pressing down on me now, exhaustion settling in like an unwelcome guest. I set an alarm, thinking I’d wait for Bobbi, but the pull of sleep was too strong. Before I could fight it, I was out.

THE LESBIAN MASSES

I woke up to Bobbi serenading the shower with Sade.

The water was running full blast, and their voice echoed through the apartment walls, somehow both soothing and completely off-key. They were halfway through "Smooth Operator," stretching the vowels like they thought they were onstage at Wembley, when I rolled over and checked my phone. 7:43 a.m. Too early for this.

"Bobbi," I groaned into my pillow. No response, just their voice climbing dramatically as they leaned into the "coast to coaaaaast" part.

Living with Bobbi was... a choice. Not one I consciously made, but a choice nonetheless. This was our third city together in just over a year. We'd shared a one-bedroom in London last spring, back when I was broke and heartbroken, and Bobbi was splitting their time between gigs and "figuring shit out."

We made it work in the most ridiculous way possible. I slept on an air mattress in the living room, the kind that deflated halfway through the night so I'd wake up practically hugging the floor. Bobbi took the actual bedroom but complained constantly about how they could hear me snore through the door. "I don't snore," I'd told them.

"You do," they said. "It's like an angry walrus. Honestly, it's impressive."

They would say stuff like that and then leave a cup of tea on the counter for me every morning before they went out. That's Bobbi. Loud, impossible, and somehow the only person I can stand to be around for more than a day.

The singing finally stopped, and the shower cut off. A second later, Bobbi appeared in the hallway, towel-wrapped and smug. "You're welcome for the free concert," they said, running a hand through their wet hair.

"We're late for the apartment showing," I said, glaring at them.

"Relax, Scout. Landlords love me," they replied, as if this were a universal truth.

"They love you until you start talking," I muttered, stepping over the puddle they were leaving behind.

They smirked and walked into the kitchen, pulling an iced coffee from the fridge like they had all the time in the world.

By the time we made it to the first apartment, I was already sweating through my shirt. Navigating the subway with Bobbi was like being in a video game where the NPC doesn't know how to wait for you. They were always three steps ahead, moving confidently in the wrong direction, leaving me to scramble after them.

The landlord was already sweating through his Yankees cap, clipboard in hand, as if he could sense that showing this place to us was going to be a colossal waste of time. The smell of mildew hit us in the stairwell, but Bobbi, ever the optimist, declared it "rustic ambiance."

"Ambiance?" I repeated, side-eyeing them. "It smells like the inside of a forgotten gym bag."

They grinned. "Scout, you've got to learn to see the potential. This place screams untapped charm."

"More like black mold," I muttered as we followed the landlord into the apartment.

The unit was... a disaster. Peeling paint, a single flickering lightbulb, and a kitchen shoved into one corner that looked like it came straight out of a dollhouse. The sink could barely fit a single plate, and the stove was missing at least two knobs. Bobbi, undeterred, immediately began pacing the room like an interior designer who had just been handed a blank canvas.

"Okay, first of all," they said, gesturing to the tiny closet near the front door, "this is perfect for storage. Very cozy."

I opened the closet door, which creaked ominously. It was barely big enough to fit a broom, let alone anything else. "Cozy? This thing couldn't fit my suitcase."

"Not your suitcase," Bobbi said, winking. "But it could totally fit my harness and strap."

The landlord froze mid-scribble on his clipboard, his eyes widening as he processed the comment. I turned bright red, slamming the closet door shut.

"Oh, don't mind Scout," Bobbi added with a smirk. "She's shy about our minimalist lifestyle."

"Bobbi," I hissed under my breath. "You can't just say that."

"Why not? Honesty is the foundation of any good rental agreement." They turned to the landlord, who was now clearly regretting his entire life. "Don't worry, we're very clean tenants."

The landlord cleared his throat and shuffled a step back. "Uh, yeah. So, as you can see, the kitchen is... functional."

I raised an eyebrow at the lone cabinet hanging at a 45-degree angle. "Functional for what? A raccoon?"

Bobbi ignored me, moving into a bedroom. Or what passed for one. It barely fit the twin mattress already shoved into it, and the window was covered in what looked like decades-old grime. They flopped onto the mattress with a dramatic sigh, bouncing once before settling in like they were testing out a five-star hotel suite.

"I love it," they announced, arms spread wide. "The vibes are immaculate."

I stood in the doorway, arms crossed. "If I stretch my legs, I'll end up in the kitchen. How is that immaculate?"

"Think of it as efficiency," Bobbi said. "You could literally make toast without getting out of bed. That's luxury living."

I shot them a withering look. "Bobbi, I don't want to live in a shoebox."

"It's not a shoebox," they replied, sitting up and gesturing around. "It's a story. A gritty, bohemian start to our new lives. We're like starving artists in a coming-of-age movie."

"The only thing starving here is the fridge," I said, glancing at the ancient appliance. "I don't think that thing could keep a glass of water cold."

Bobbi tilted their head, squinting at the fridge like they were analyzing a priceless artifact. "True, but it has character."

"Character doesn't keep groceries from spoiling, Bobbi."

The landlord cleared his throat again, clearly ready to wrap this up. “Uh, so, do you want to submit an application?”

I looked at Bobbi, who was now lying back on the mattress, pretending to stare wistfully at the cracked ceiling.

“No,” I said firmly. “We do not.”

We didn’t take that one. Or the next. Or the one after that. But every apartment came with a moment like this—me, spiraling, and Bobbi, grinning like we were on an adventure.

When we finally sat down on the curb outside some bodega, Bobbi handed me a bottle of water they’d grabbed inside, their shoulder bump was as casual as always. But something about it hit differently this time, like the touch lingered longer than it should have—not physically, but in my chest.

“We’ll figure it out,” Bobbi said, cracking open their own drink and taking a long sip. “We always do.”

And they were right. We always did. Somehow, in three cities, across two continents, with barely enough money between us to buy groceries, we’d figured it out. Bobbi could walk into a room and turn it into a story worth telling later, and I was... well, I was good at keeping up. We were a team. A messy, ridiculous, kind of wonderful team.

But sitting there, watching them grin like the world couldn’t touch them, a thought slithered in—a thought I didn’t want to look at too closely: What happens if we don’t figure it out?

I shook it off, chugging the water like hydration could drown it. But the knot in my stomach stayed. Like the world was shifting under me, just enough that I noticed but not enough to steady myself.

Bobbi smirked, tossing the empty bottle into a nearby trash can. “What are you overthinking now?”

“Nothing,” I said quickly. Too quickly.

They rolled their eyes, stretching their legs out in front of them. “God, you’re exhausting sometimes.”

“You love it,” I shot back, but the words felt heavier than usual. And maybe they were.

But Bobbi and I didn’t just happen.

It started in Amsterdam, at a gallery opening I didn't want to be at, in a city I didn't belong to yet.

Amsterdam was supposed to be my fresh start. I love art but the "art people" not so much. Everyone there seemed to know everyone else, and I'd already lost count of how many people asked me what I did before quickly moving on to someone more interesting. "Who are your parents?" or "Where did you study?" were the most common asked questions by rich white people who were given it all on a golden plate.

I was pretending to be deeply invested in a painting of a banana duct-taped to the wall when I heard it.

"Do you think they were trying to make a point, or do you think they just hate bananas?"

The voice was sharp, dry, like it was daring me to laugh.

I turned and saw them: Bobbi. They were leaning against the wall, their arms crossed, wearing a shirt with a hole under the armpit and sneakers that had clearly been through a war. They weren't looking at me, though. They were staring at the banana like it had personally offended them.

"I think they hate people," I said, surprising myself. I wasn't usually quick with strangers.

Bobbi turned to me then, and their smile was instant, lopsided, and somehow conspiratorial. "Finally. Someone who gets it."

They stuck out her hand. "Bobbi. They/them. Professional banana critic." I shook their hand, and their grip was warm and firm, like they already knew me. "Scout. Amateur banana sympathizer." We spent the next hour in the corner, hiding from the rest of the party. There was a guy there—let's call him Adam—who thought he was God's gift to small talk. He kept circling the room like a shark, zeroing in on anyone too polite to escape. Bobbi clocked him immediately.

"Adam has three things to say," they whispered, leaning in like we were sharing a secret. "Number one: He's really into vinyl. Number two: He just got back from Thailand and found himself. Number three: He thinks women shouldn't wear makeup."

I laughed, probably too loud, and they grinned like they'd won something.

Sure enough, ten minutes later, Adam cornered us and started with, "So, are you guys into vinyl?"

Bobbi didn't miss a beat. "Oh, totally. But only the really obscure stuff, like, you wouldn't have heard of it." I made a fake artist up, which were "very niche and upcoming".

He looked impressed, and I bit my lip to keep from laughing. When he asked them to name a band, they said, "It's called Silence. You just stare at the record while contemplating the futility of existence."

Adam left shortly after that.

By the time we left the party, it felt like we'd known each other forever. Bobbi offered to walk me home, even though I lived on the other side of the city. That was the thing about Bobbi—they didn't ask permission to be part of your life. They just waltzed in, like they'd always been there, and made themselves comfortable.

Most people didn't stick with me that long. I had a knack for pushing them away, either by accident or by design. But Bobbi didn't seem fazed by my awkward edges or my tendency to overanalyze everything into the ground. Instead, they leaned in closer, like they were more interested in the cracks than the smooth parts. We stopped at a bodega on the way, and they bought me a bag of chips, declaring, "These are my contribution to your new life. Amsterdam sucks a little less when you have snacks."

When we got to my door, they shoved the chips into my hands and said, "If you need someone to make fun of vinyl guys or bad bananas, you know where to find me."

I didn't think I'd take them up on it. I didn't think I'd see them again. But a week later, they showed up at my door with two coffees and no explanation. And that's how it started.

Bobbi and I were alike in all the ways that mattered. We'd both mastered the art of living on the edges of other people's expectations. Handling life alone wasn't a choice; it was the default setting. Bobbi called it "radical self-sufficiency," like it was some manifesto. I just called it survival.

Neither of us had any patience for the kind of people who thought art was a status symbol or gossip was a personality trait. The ones who showed up to galleries to talk about which cousin got into what scandal or who they saw sneaking out of someone else's loft last week. Bobbi and I made a game out of it—spotting the worst offender in the room. The woman with the vintage Chanel and the cutting laugh who said, "Oh, darling, did you hear?" before delivering the nastiest thing she could muster. Or the guy who looked like he rolled out of a GQ photoshoot just to say something like, "Art's about connections. You wouldn't get it." We'd watch them like anthropologists, then compare notes on the way home, tearing apart their personas like we were dissecting frogs in biology class.

The truth was, neither of us cared what anyone else thought, or at least that's the story we told ourselves. Bobbi embodied it effortlessly, a living, breathing middle finger to societal norms. They could wear a shirt with a hole under the arm to a gallery opening and somehow make it look intentional. They'd walk into a room, size it up, and decide if it was worth their time—all without ever breaking stride.

I envied that ease. Because while I didn't care about fitting in, not really, I cared way too much about the narratives I built in my head. I was an over-thinker to my core. If Bobbi was a storm that rolled in and didn't apologize for raining on your party, I was the one standing outside with a map, trying to predict where the lightning would strike. They made decisions in seconds; I needed to analyze every possible outcome, even if it was just deciding what kind of coffee to order.

Bobbi called me out on it constantly. "Scout," they'd say, "you don't have to live your life like a Choose Your Own Adventure book."

"I like adventures," I'd reply, defensive.

"Yeah, but you never pick a page," they'd shoot back, smirking.

It was infuriating how right they were.

But the thing that tied us together wasn't just our differences or even our shared disdain for the world's nonsense. It was the way we both wanted to protect our peace, fiercely and unapologetically. Neither of us had much to spare, and we weren't about to let anyone mess with it. That's why we used to joke about getting a farm in Italy one day, far away from people and their opinions. Just us, a hundred cats, and a couple of donkeys. "No drama," Bobbi would say, holding up an imaginary glass of wine. "Just sunsets, good books, and feeding our weird animals."

"The Bobbi Effect"

Living with Bobbi is like starring in a chaotic queer sitcom where I'm the frazzled sidekick, and they're the tornado of charm that somehow always lands on their feet. Today they dragged me to see a shoebox apartment and called it "character," as if we're auditioning for Brooklyn: The Indie Film.

And the shower concerts at 7:43 a.m.? Objectively criminal. Except—I secretly love them. There, I said it. Nothing like waking up to Bobbi belting Ade like it's their farewell performance on Broadway. Who needs coffee when your roommate is the human equivalent of chaos and karaoke?

THE APPS

Bobbi was sitting cross-legged on the couch, eating cereal out of a mug and scrolling through their phone. They looked up as I walked in, their eyebrows lifting like they were about to drop some life-altering wisdom.

"So," they started, stretching the word out as they set the "I love sex" mug on the coffee table. "Have you downloaded the apps yet?" I blinked, still halfway through taking off my shoes. "What apps?"

Bobbi rolled their eyes, like I'd just asked if water was wet. "The apps, Scout. Tinder, Hinge, HER, Bumble—your digital ticket to lesbian chaos. How else are you supposed to find anyone in this city?"

I tossed my bag onto a chair and shrugged. "I don't know, Bobbi. I thought my lesbian powers would just summon someone to my doorstep."

"You've been here for, what, a week?" Bobbi said, leaning forward like they were about to stage an intervention. "That's, like, six lesbian years. You're practically overdue."

I laughed, sitting down beside them. "I know, could've been married by now."

Bobbi shook their head, picking up their mug again. "You can't just sit around waiting for your queer awakening to walk through the door. This is New York. You have to grab it by the—"

"Okay, okay," I interrupted, holding up my hands. "Help me set it up then" Bobbi squinted at me like they didn't believe a word. Then their face lit up, like they'd just remembered something. "Actually, forget the apps. I've got something better."

"Oh no," I said immediately. "What are you planning?"

They ignored me, pulling their phone out and typing something. "There's an art show at the gallery on Friday. You should come."

"Your gallery?" I asked.

"Yes, my gallery," they said, throwing a dramatic hand over their heart. "Where I slave away under the iron rule of Val. Come on, it'll be fun."

I raised an eyebrow. "Since when are gallery openings fun? Should I bring a monocle?"

Bobbi grinned, leaning closer. "No, just bring your crippling inability to make eye contact with hot women."

I groaned, tossing a pillow at them. "Oh, that's rich coming from the person who once tripped over their own foot trying to impress someone."

"They were really hot," Bobbi shot back, catching the pillow mid-air. "Speaking of which, there's going to be someone there you're going to drool over."

I rolled my eyes, but my stomach did a little flip anyway. "Oh, really?"

"Yup," they said, popping the 'p.' "Very hot. Very gay. And, if you play your cards right, maybe a future contender for your U-Haul fantasy."

"Please never say 'U-Haul fantasy' again," I said, covering my face with my hands.

Bobbi just laughed, nudging my leg with their foot. "I'm serious, Scout. You need to get out there. What's the worst that could happen?"

"You've just jinxed me," I said flatly.

They smirked. "Great. So, I'll put you down as a yes?"

I sighed, but I couldn't stop myself from smiling. "Fine. But if this mystery woman is some straight girl trying to 'experiment,' I'm blaming you."

"Trust me," Bobbi said, standing up and pointing at me with her spoon. "She's the real deal."

That afternoon I was ready to start my "U hauling" journey, "Okay, I'm going to say it: your profile needs to scream gay and ready to slay," Bobbi declared, flopping onto the couch with their laptop while I scrolled on my phone.