

## Okay

by Timothy Quinlan

Aya felt around the foot of her bed for her ringing cell phone.

“Moshi moshi.”

“Hi Mom,” Aya groaned and rolled to her back. Her mother began talking very quickly in Japanese, but Aya cut her off. “English please, Mom.”

“...Aya, how are you? You never called last night like you said you would.”

“I’m fine, Mom. I fell asleep, that’s all. Sorry.”

“I was worried.”

“Everything’s fine.” Aya said.

“Where are you?” her mother asked.

“At my apartment. Why...never mind, it doesn’t matter.”

“And how was your week?”

“It was fine,” Aya said.

“Fine—that is all you know how to say.”

“I quit my job.”

“Oh, not again. When?”

Aya got up and took the bottle of wine that was sitting on her kitchen table out of its paper bag. “On Monday. It was too much. I just can’t do it. I tried, and I just can’t do it.” She put the wine in the refrigerator.

“Can’t, what do you mean? All you have to do is take their money and give them change. It’s not hard. You are a smart girl, you can do anything. You go to school, you can work too.”

“Well, I can’t work that job. Or any of the others. I’m just not cut out for it. I swear, I tried.”

“Aya, you can. I know.”

“I tried, and I can’t.” Aya looked in the cabinets for clean glasses, but there weren’t any. She took two dirty ones from the sink and began washing them off, her phone cradled between her neck and ear. “Can’t we talk about something else? I hate talking about it almost as much as I hated working there.”

“Okay, okay. But I just...”

“Something else, Mom.”

“Okay.... How is John?”

“Who?” Aya asked.

“John. The boy you date?”

“John?”

“With all the computers.”

Aya thought about it. Finally she said, “You mean Jacob?”

“Yes, Jacob. John. You know what I mean.”

“Well, I don’t know who John is, and I only dated Jacob for one weekend, that’s it. I haven’t talked to him since then.”

“What happened?”

“I don’t know. It didn’t work out. As usual.”

“Usual for you.”

“Well, not with me.” There was a knock at Aya’s door. “Listen Mom, I have to go. I’m having someone over.”

“Who?”

“Mom, I got to go. I’ll call you on Sunday.”

“Why not tomorrow?”

“Okay, I’ll call you tomorrow.” She went to the door. “Bye, Mom.”

Aya let Nick in as soon as she got off the phone with her mother. He was wearing a Steelers Jersey. Last weekend it was Penn State.

“Hey,” he said, waiting in the doorway for something.

“Hi Nick,” she said. “Uh, come in.”

“Thanks,” he muttered.

He stooped over, hesitated, then gave her an kiss. Aya shrank back.

“Oh, you got some too,” she said. He had a bottle in his hand. “I just put one in the refrigerator.”

“That’s cool. The more the better, right?”

Her apartment was only two rooms, a big room with the kitchen and a smaller living room. Her bed was in the kitchen. The walkway from the kitchen to the smaller room was badly damaged; the floor boards were cracked and rising. The smaller room she used as a studio and it was much too messy for them to sit in, so Aya sat on her bed. Nick dragged out a chair from the small kitchen table.

“How was work?” she asked him before the silence went on too long.

“Fine. My guest showed up drunk. It was boring.”

“Does that happen a lot? The guest showing up drunk, I mean,” she asked him, finally thinking of something to say.

“Not on my program. On the late-night shows it does. But the guy kept drinking through the whole show, getting drunker and drunker. By the end you couldn’t even understand a word he was saying anymore. We kept getting calls at the station from listeners asking if his mic was fucked up.”

Aya liked the story, but she didn’t know what to say about it, and the apartment was quiet for a time. The silence was as obvious as if it was on fire. She couldn’t stand just sitting there like that, so she stood up and went to the kitchen side of the room. She looked around for something to do, and finally decided to wash the two glasses out again. Out of the corner of her eye she could see Nick fidgeting in the chair, his long legs sticking out into the center of the small room.

“How was work for you?” he asked her.

“Fine.” She didn’t want to get into it with him.

“That’s good.” After a pause he asked, “Hey, where do you work again?”

“Nowhere,” she said.

“Huh?”

“At that little art store on the corner of Walnut.”

“Next to the coffee shop?”

“Yeah.”

“That’s an art store? Huh, I always thought it was a book store.”

“We sell books there, too.”

“Oh.”

The cups were washed, so Aya had to sit back down. While she was up Nick had moved his seat a little closer to the bed. She wondered if he thought she wouldn’t notice.

After they had finished one of the bottles of wine Aya finally wanted to get closer to him.

“Come here, I want to show you something,” she said.

She flipped open her computer and began thinking of what she wanted to show him. Nick came and sat by her on the bed.

“This is my roommate from last semester. Remember you were asking about her or something?” She knew he hadn’t asked about her. “That’s her in the Eagles jersey,” she said.

“She’s the lesbian, right?”

“Yeah,” Aya said, scrolling down the pictures and concentrating on how close Nick was sitting to her. “That’s her girlfriend in the blue tank top.”

“Damn, she gets hotter girls than I do.”

“I know,” she said, and when she looked at him she found herself looking into his eyes.

“Alright. Enough of this,” she said, and slid her arms around his neck and pulled him closer. Their clothes came off in seconds. Every time Aya had sex with someone in her apartment she worried that the neighbors could hear every thrust, every groan.

When they lay next to each other after sex his feet stuck at least four inches off the end of the bed.

“I like fucking you,” he told her.

Aya didn't know how to feel about that.

Nick continued, “I mean, sometimes you like someone and then you have sex with them and you hate it. But I like you and I like having sex with you. Not like all these other girls. I always like them and then realize that I don't after I have sex with them.”

“I'm the opposite,” Aya said. “I usually hate a guy but like having sex with him. Usually the more I hate a guy the more I like having sex with him.” And then she added, “Not you though. I mean, I like having sex with you and I don't hate you, either. Okay, I'm going to shut up now.”

Nick said, “How many?”

“How many what?”

“How many guys that you've hated did you sleep with?”

“You first. But just how many girls have you slept with. I don't care how many you hated.”

“Well, I hated them all. Except for you, of course,” he added quickly. Aya watched him silently count. “Eight.”

Aya swallowed hard. She didn't even count, she just rounded down.

“Fifteen.”

“Goddamn. Is that everyone, or just the guys you've hated?”

“Just the ones I hated,” she muttered.

“How many in all?”

“Twenty-one,” she said. She didn't have to count; she always knew. “You're twenty-one.”

“Goddamn. How old are you?”

“Nineteen.”

“Shit, I'm ten years older than you and you've slept with twice as many people as I have.”

“Eleven.”

“What?”

“You’re eleven years older than me. And it’s more than twice; it’s almost three times,” she said quietly.

“Twenty-one guys, that’s a hell of a lot. Not many girls your age can say that, I bet.”

“I know. I used to be jailbait, and now I’m just a whore.”

“No, you’re not. That’s just a lot of guys. But whatever, it’s not a big deal,” Nick said.

“Well, if it makes it any better, only three of them were any good.”

“How do you mean.”

“Only three of them got me off.”

“Shit, are you serious? Three out of twenty one. God, that sucks.”

“No kidding.”

“Uh... I’m one of the three, right? I mean... the way you-”

“Of course,” she said, smiling.

“So I guess that means you actually liked six guys.”

“Yeah. Well, something like that.”

Nick turned over to face her. “Tell me about the one you liked the most.”

“Well, there was only one I was actually in a relationship with.”

“What happened?”

She turned away from him. “He died of an overdose.”

“God, I’m sorry.”

“It wasn’t your fault. Anyway, that was a long time ago, in my first year of college.” She hadn’t thought about Jack in a long time. She wanted to stop thinking about him. “How about you? You hated all the girls you’ve ever slept with? Except for me, of course.”

“Except for you, yeah, pretty much. Really they were all just whores. I don’t know what my problem is. I’m only ever attracted to the horrible drunk slutty girls. Except for you.”

The next weekend her apartment was trashed. Empty beer cans, cigarette butts, and three hundred roofing nails lay like a carpet on the floor of her kitchen. The place smelled like stale booze and cigarette smoke. No light came through the windows from the grey day outside, and all the lights inside were unplugged. Aya was asleep in the darkness, but she stirred when Nick came in through the unlocked door.

“I tried to knock,” he said.

“Whu... Is that you?”

“Yeah. What happened here?”

“Oh, it’s you...God, what time is it?”

“Seven-thirty. Have you been asleep all day?”

“I guess so,” she sat up, hands on her throbbing head. “Shit, I missed my fucking interview.... Goddamnit.”

“What the hell happened here?”

“I had a party.”

“You’re kidding.” Every inch that Nick moved was accompanied with the sound of scraping metal. “Are these nails?” He picked one up.

“What? Oh, yeah.”

“Why....?”

“My friend Ryan works at a...never mind. Don’t ask.”

“Okay.”

When she could finally open her eyes all the way she found Nick sitting on her bed with her. She slid her tired, bare arms around his waist.

“Let’s fuck,” she said in a hoarse whisper.

“Uh, are you sure you’re up to it?”

“Yeah, let’s fuck. I want to forget about all this,” Aya said.

“Forget about what?”

“Come on, goddamnit.”

She grabbed his shirt and pulled it over his head, then pushed him back against the wall. He tried to speak but his words were lost in her mouth. Soon Nick stopped fighting. He grabbed at her clothes and pulled back her hair. She groaned with the pain, her eyes shut tight so she wouldn't have to see the strange, disturbing face that he always made when they had sex.

“I was a lesbian for a whole year,” she told him. They were lying together on the bed, like an island among the ruin, staring up at the cheap white ceiling tiles like they were looking at the stars.

“Yeah, and how did that work out for you?”

“It was fine. I fooled around with girls at parties. And I went out on a couple of dates with this butch girl from New York. It was fine, but kind of weird.”

“When I was a kid there was a guy on my Little League team who used to suck my dick in the woods on the walk home from practice,” Nick said. He rolled over and kissed her.

“I used to steal from the mall all the time in high school. Not from the shops, from the people,” she said. “When they put their bags down and stuff.”

“I used to pick fights with this kid who had scoliosis. In high school,”

“I used to do coke and have sex with guys in front of the two year old I baby sat for.”

Aya swallowed when he didn't say anything right away. The room was a still and silent mess.

“In high school I was once look out for a group of guys on my lacrosse team while they fucked this passed out girl. I didn't want to, but I was so worried that I would be ostracized from the rest of the team if I didn't. It's funny, I think that's how everyone felt.”

“I was in love with that guy who overdosed.”

Nick shifted in the bed. “The one you told me about yesterday?”

Aya just nodded. Her back was to Nick, so she knew he couldn't see her face.

“Then that must have been terrible for you,” Nick said. She said nothing. “Were you with him when it happened?” Still she said nothing. “Aya?”

“He was the only one I liked. And I loved him, too. I really did,” she said in a small voice.

“I'm sorry,” Nick stammered.



“I thought he was out. I was waiting outside his apartment for him to come home.”

“What happened is the only thing that could have happened.”

“I’m such an idiot.”

“No, you’re not. It’s not your fault,” Nick said, putting an arm around her. She tensed at his touch.

“I sat there, ten feet away from him while he died.”

“How do you know you could have saved him anyway?”

“I sat there and let him die.”

Nick’s hands began to massage her tense shoulders. She continued to mutter to herself. His hands moved from her shoulders to her back. They swept around to the front. They rubbed her clothes, then dove under to feel her bare skin. Eventually she stopped muttering and began grind her hips in a slow rhythm. She breathed in the distinct masculine smell he always had, a combination of Old Spice and his t-shirt damp with sweat.

Aya kept her eyes open this time. She looked at his face, his wild sneer, the angles of his features bent up in concentration. He was kissing her body all over now, slowly removing her clothing as he went. She wondered why he made that face. Soon she was completely naked before him. It wasn’t cold out, but every cell of her skin could feel its bareness. She closed her eyes and groaned with pleasure as Nick’s mouth slid across her breasts, down her stomach, and further still. She opened her legs. Her muscles tensed. Her fingers grabbed at his hair.

On the edge of her orgasm Nick stopped. Aya’s eyes flew open.

“Whu... why’d you...” She was still panting, and her body literally ached at the interruption. When she looked in his face for an explanation, his eyes burned into her.

“You deserve this,” he breathed.

Aya’s body tensed, but not from pleasure. She covered her face with her hands. Her lip began to quiver. She was ripped from the present, from the bed, the room, the city. A silent voice inside her mind screamed “No”.

Nick asked her, “Are you okay?”

Nothing.

“Aya?”

Aya didn't hear Nick asking if she was alright for a long time. He was holding her in his arms, rocking back and forth.

"You'll be okay. I promise," he told her again and again. "You'll be okay."

When she could, Aya let out a ghost of a chuckle.

"Nick... I'm fine."

"I know," he said. "Everything is fine."

"I know."

"We have so much to live for," he told her.

"I know."

They laid back down, drawing up the covers.

"We'll be okay."

And they stared up at the ceiling.