**Too Short a Summer** (A Story of Walnut Grove)

by Kelly Adams (kelly\_h\_adams@hotmail.com)

Stretched out on the bed in her room, fifteen-year-old Kate paged lazily through an issue of Seventeen. The fact that she thought of it as 'her room' spoke volumes about how comfortable she now felt in America. Her real room was in her mother's house back in Australia. This was really just the guest room at her Uncle Taylor and Aunt Justine's house. But after almost a year in Walnut Grove, Ohio, she really felt at home--just in time to have to go back.

It was a Monday in mid-June, the first official day of summer vacation. Which Kate still felt was strange, as June back home was always winter. As usual for a Monday, the restaurant that her aunt and uncle owned and operated was closed. For Kate, a night off was a night off, but Uncle Taylor and Aunt Justine always used Monday evenings to go over the books and receipts for the restaurant. They were good people but workaholics. Still, she supposed that's what it took to run a successful small business.

Kate was just starting to read an article about summer party clothes when her aunt called up from the downstairs: "Kate, Zoe's here!"

"Send her on up!" Kate replied back.

Zoe was Kate's best friend here in Walnut Grove. Kate hadn't known quite what to make of the pretty brunette who, last fall, had enthusiastically welcomed the shy foreigner on her first day of American high school. But once she saw that Zoe was genuine the two became fast friends.

"Hey girl," Kate said to her friend as Zoe entered through the open door.

"Hey yourself," Zoe responded. She sat down on the floor next to Kate's bed. "What'cha doing?"

"Just wasting away a few brain cells reading a dumb magazine," Kate told her.

"Yeah, well, it being the first week of vacation and all you don't want to seem too anxious to get to your serious summer reading." Zoe was constantly teasing Kate about her friend's propensity to frequently have her face buried in a book.

"I suppose I'll have plenty of time to read on the plane," Kate said.

"So you're really leaving, huh?"

"Yeah, two weeks from today. I've already got my plane tickets and everything."

"Two weeks? That's pretty soon. I was hoping that we would be able to hang out some more this summer before you had to go."

"It's not really up to me," Kate explained. "Mum made the arrangements."

Zoe didn't say anything. She just sat on the floor, looking a bit sad.

Kate slid down off the bed and sat down on the floor next to Zoe. "What's wrong?" she asked.

"I... I don't want you to leave," Zoe said.

Kate didn't quite know how to respond. It wasn't like it had been any big secret that she would be going back to Australia. Sure, she thought that Zoe would be a bit sad, just as she herself would be, but Zoe seemed to be taking the whole situation a lot harder than she would have thought.

"I'll miss you," Zoe added. "A lot."

"I'll miss you too," Kate told her. "You've been such a great friend to me."

"It's not just that, there's..." Zoe seemed nervous to Kate, in a way she had never seemed before. "There's something I've been wanting to tell you, for quite a while now."

"What?"

"I... I don't know if I should..." Zoe looked away from Kate, as if embarrassed.

Kate put a comforting hand on Zoe's should. "Zoe, we're best friends. You can tell me anything."

Zoe hesitated, the turned her head to look right at Kate. "I love you."

It wasn't the first time either of them had said those words to the other, as it was a term of affection that both of them used freely with friends and family. But this time when Zoe said it, it sounded different somehow.

"I don't know what you're getting so weird about," Kate said to Zoe. "Like I said, we're best friends, and I love you too."

"No, Kate, you don't get it," Zoe said.

"Don't get what?"

"I mean I'm \*in\* love with you."

"Huh? What do you mean \*in\* love with me?"

Zoe smiled and shook her head affectionately. "God Kate, for such a smart girl, you can be awfully thick-headed sometimes. I mean I'm in love with you, like this..." Zoe leaned over to Kate and kissed her right on the lips. Not a peck, but a full-blown, tender, I'm-in-love-with-you kiss.

Kate was stunned. She had long thought about what her first real kiss would be like, but had never dreamed that it would have come from a girl, especially her best friend. She was speechless.

Several moments of silence passed, each one more awkward. Zoe's smile vanished, replaced by a look of uncertainty. "Oh... oh my god," Zoe said, jumping to her feet. "I knew I shouldn't have done that. I'm sorry, Kate. Oh god. I'm so stupid. I..."

Zoe turned and ran out of Kate's room, down the stairs. Inside herself, Kate wanted to say, "Wait, Zoe, stop. Let's talk about this." But she couldn't get the words out. Instead, she just sat there, and watched her best friend run out of her house, and possibly out of her life forever.

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Kate didn't sleep well at all that night. She tossed and turned in bed, running the evening's events over and over in her head. She finally fell asleep about three and slept in until a little after nine. Things weren't any clearer in the morning when she finally got up, but Kate decided that she had to go and talk to Zoe. She still wasn't sure what to make of Zoe's confession and kiss, but there was no way she was going to let a great friendship end like this.

Kate walked the half mile to Zoe's house, but then stopped at the edge of the driveway. She'd had the entire walk over to rehearse what she was going to say, but hadn't managed to come up with anything that even remotely made sense.

She thought for a moment about turning around and walking back home, but then Zoe's little sister, Ashley, came out of the front door and saw her standing there. "Hey Zoe!" Ashley yelled back into the house through the screen door. "Kate's here!"

"I guess that settles it," Kate muttered to herself and started up the driveway.

"Hiya Kate!" Ashley said as she rode her bike quickly past and off into the neighborhood. Kate gave Ashley a wave and continued up to the front porch.

Zoe came out the front door to meet her, wearing dark blue denim shorts, a white tank top, and her hair tied back in a pink scrunchie. She smiled nervously when she saw Kate. "Hi."

"Hi," Kate replied.

"So..."

"So."

Zoe motioned to the porch swing, and she and Kate sat down on it, both half turning to face each other. Kate had one leg tucked up under her while the other touched lightly on the ground, rocking the swing back and forth just a few inches. "I should have said something last night," Kate told Zoe.

"I was afraid you would never want to speak to me again," Zoe told her.

"God no!" Kate said. "We're best friends. It's just that, well, just kind of surprised me."

"Sorry."

"Don't apologize. How long have you, you know, felt like this?"

"I don't know, a while."

"Oh. Why didn't you say anything earlier?

"I was afraid at how you might react."

Kate let out a soft chuckle. "Rather poorly, obviously."

"I'd say so, yeah."

"Sorry about that."

"Don't apologize. It wasn't really fair of me to spring that on you."

"I didn't realize you liked girls," Kate said, remembering all the times that they'd talked about boys together.

"I never said anything about liking 'girls,'" Zoe said. "I love you, Kate. The thought of you leaving, of not getting to see you any more, it's just too much."

"Why me?" Kate asked.

"Gee, Kate, I dunno--maybe because you're nice and smart and pretty and funny and when you talk with that Aussie accent of yours I just want to melt inside."

"You think I'm pretty?" Kate asked.

"Yes, Kate," Zoe told her.

"But you're the one the boys are always staring at."

"Who cares what the boys do?" Zoe said. "\*I\* think you're pretty."

"Thanks." Kate suddenly felt bashful, and looked at the ground where her foot was still lightly pushing the concrete porch.

They didn't say anything for a couple of minutes. Kate heard a bird chirping in a nearby tree and lifted her head to look at it, and then turned to see that Zoe was looking at her.

"Kiss me again," Kate said suddenly. She hadn't really thought about it, she just blurted it out.

"Really?"

"I wanna, you know, um, last night you kind of surprised me, so I didn't really know..." Kate stopped talking when she found that Zoe's lips were pressed up against hers. Last night Kate hadn't felt anything but shock when Zoe kissed her, but this time it was different. Zoe's lips were soft. She smelled Zoe's sweat mixed with perfume. She felt a tingling down in her toes. The kiss didn't last long, but to Kate it seemed like eternity. A nice eternity.

"Well?" Zoe asked. "Did you like it?"

"I'm not sure. I didn't hate it."

"That's a start, at least." Zoe was smiling. Zoe had a terrific smile.

"I need some time to think about this," Kate told her friend.

"I guess that's fair," Zoe said. "How long?"

"Well, you've had several months to think about this," Kate said. "Can you give me a day?"

"It'll be the longest day of my life, but yeah," Zoe agreed.

"Kate?"

"Yeah?"

"We're still friends, right? No matter what?" Zoe asked.

"Still friends," Kate told her. "Always."

Kate got up from the swing and started to walk away, but Zoe grabbed her hand and stopped her. She gave Kate another kiss, lingering slightly, then walked back into her house.

No, Kate didn't hate the kiss. Not at all.

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Kate was alone that evening. Her aunt and uncle were at the restaurant, but Kate only worked there as a hostess Friday & Saturday evenings and Sunday afternoons. She almost wished that she were at the restaurant, as the work would have been a welcome distraction from the myriad thoughts that were racing through her mind.

She went into her bathroom and looked in the mirror, focusing on her hair. It was reddish-brown, medium cut and straight. There wasn't much she could do with it other than just wear it hanging straight down. It had never really bothered her much before, but now she found herself wishing it were different. If it were longer, like Zoe's, she could wear it up, let it hang down, put it back in a ponytail, braid it... She could be beautiful, like Zoe.

Zoe.

Zoe had told her that she, Kate, was beautiful. Plain ol' Kate, with her mousy hair and freckled nose and small boobs. Zoe thought that she was beautiful.

Kate had never known a friend like Zoe. Back in Australia she'd had friends, sure, but none that she'd ever felt this close to. Zoe could bring a smile to a gloomy day, and make a good day even brighter.

Zoe had kissed her. It was like nothing she'd felt before. Warm and tingly. Soft and moist and oh so sweet. Her best friend had kissed her, and she liked it. She wanted Zoe to kiss her again.

Oh.

There it was. She was in love with her best friend. In love with Zoe. She wanted to kiss her, hold her hand, run her fingers through Zoe's long hair, smell Zoe's sweet perfume and hold her close. She wanted that special feeling that she felt when she was with Zoe, a feeling that she now realized was deeper than friendship.

Kate couldn't wait until tomorrow. She had to tell Zoe now. She ran out of the bathroom, down the stairs and picked up the phone, hitting the speed-dial for Zoe's number. It was late, but she was pretty sure that Zoe would still be awake.

Zoe's mom answered.

"Um, hi Mrs. Whitaker," Kate said, her voice quivering slightly as her heart raced within her chest. "It's Kate. Is Zoe there?"

"It's getting pretty late, Kate," Zoe's mom admonished.

"Yeah I know, I'm sorry. I just have something very important to tell her that can't wait until morning. It won't take long, I promise."

"Okay, I'll go get her. But make it quick, okay?"

"Okay, sure. Quick." Kate waited for what seemed an eternity until Zoe came on the phone.

"Hi Kate?"

Kate nearly melted when she heard Zoe's voice. "Hi Zoe."

"What is it?"

"I love you," Kate told her. "I'm totally in love with you. I was so stupid not to see it before but I know now that you're my best friend and I'm so in love with you."

Zoe didn't say anything immediately in response, but Kate thought that she heard a sniffle. "Zoe? Are you okay?"

"Yes, yes, I'm sorry. I'm just tearing up because I'm so happy. Oh Kate, sweet Kate, I love you too."

"I wish I could be there with you now, to hold you, to kiss you," Kate said.

"Tomorrow," Zoe told her. "Until then, good night my sweet."

"Good night," Kate replied, and waited until she heard the click of Zoe hanging up before she put down the phone.

They were in love. It had taken such a long time to realize it, but now she knew. And, Kate realized with a touch of sadness, they only had two weeks left to share that love...

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The next morning Kate once again approached Zoe's house and stopped at the edge of the driveway, but this time she was filled with anticipation rather than worry.

Kate took a deep breath, exhaled, and then strode up to the door. She knocked and waited for someone to come.

"Who is it?!" she heard Zoe call from somewhere inside the house.

"It's me--Kate!"

Kate heard a \*thump\*, then the sound of Zoe quickly bounding down the stairs. Zoe appeared in the doorway, wearing a red spaghetti-strap top and white shorts--a simple outfit, but on Zoe anything looked great. "Hi!" Zoe said as she opened the storm door to let Kate inside.

"Hi," Kate replied, suddenly realizing that she had no idea how she was supposed to act around her best friend.

"I'm so glad that you called last night," Zoe said, taking Kate's hand in hers. "I didn't know how I was going to be able to sleep, not knowing what you were going to decide."

"Well, once I knew what I wanted, I couldn't wait to tell you," Kate explained.

"You made me the happiest girl in the world," Zoe said.

"I think we're both happy," Kate replied.

A few moments of awkward silence passed before someone spoke again. "So, what do you want to do?" Zoe asked.

"Well, I was hoping that maybe we could do some more of that kissing," Kate suggested with a smile.

"I was hoping you might say that!" Zoe said, leaning in to give Kate a soft peck on the lips. This time, Zoe returned the kiss. As soon as Zoe pulled back, Kate leaned into her and gave Zoe a lingering smooch.

"C'mon, let's go down to the basement," Zoe said, taking Kate by the hand and leading her to the stairs.

Zoe's house had a large furnished basement, with one end dominated by a pool table and the other by an entertainment area with two couches, a couple of beanbag chairs, a stereo system and a large-screen tv. Kate had spent many an afternoon hanging out in Zoe's basement, but this was the first time she had come down here to make out!

The two girls sat down next to each other on one of the couches. "Mom and Ashley are out shopping, so we should have plenty of privacy," Zoe said.

"Good." Kate's heart was racing, pounding furiously in her chest. She wondered if Zoe was as nervous as she was. She probably was, Kate realized, as the two of them just sat looking at each other, each afraid to make a move.

"This is silly," Zoe finally said, breaking the awkward silence. "We're best friends; we shouldn't be all nervous like this.

"So what are we waiting for?" Kate asked.

"Nothing I can think of," Zoe said, then leaned in and kissed Kate full on the lips.

"That's nice," Kate told her.

"You liked it?"

"Yeah."

"Here's another." Zoe kissed her again, longer this time. She draped her arms over Kate's shoulders and pulled her close.

"You smell nice," Kate told Zoe.

"I dabbed on a little perfume before you got here," Zoe explained. "Do you like it?"

"Yeah, I do." Kate felt special that Zoe would do something like that just for her.

As they continued to kiss, Kate felt Zoe's tongue press against her lips, as if asking to come in. Kate opened her mouth slightly and felt Zoe's tongue slither inside. It felt great as their tongues began to move together, poking and prodding in each other's mouths. Kate could feel the beating of her heart intensify, more with passion now than with nerves.

"Is that your heart beating so hard?" Zoe asked.

"Yeah. Here, feel it." Kate took Zoe's hand and placed it on her breastbone so that Zoe could feel the thump-thump-thumping in her chest.

"Damn girl!" Zoe remarked. "I'm doing that to you?"

Kate nodded affirmatively. "Cool!" Zoe said, obviously pleased with the effect she was having on her friend. After feeling Kate's heart beat for a few seconds, Zoe slid her hand over to the left a few inches, gently cupping Kate's right breast. She brushed her fingers over Kate's excited nipple, which was pressing hard through her thin bra and shirt. Kate felt her body involuntarily tense up.

"Relax," Zoe told her. "I'm not going to hurt you!"

Kate giggled. "Sorry," she said.

Zoe began to squeeze Kate's breast with a soft slow motion while they resumed their kissing. It felt really nice, Kate thought, to have Zoe touching her like that. When Zoe eventually moved her hand away, Kate placed her own hand on one of Zoe's breasts, treating it with a similar light touch. She could also feel Zoe's hard nipple, just as excited as her own.

Zoe's lips left Kate's mouth and she began to slowly kiss down the side of Kate's neck. "Ooohhh," Kate moaned in response.

"You like that?" Zoe asked.

"Yes, it's wonderful," Kate told her. Zoe continued kissing across Kate's collarbone, then back up the other side of her neck and back around so that she was kissing Kate's mouth again.

"So how long are we supposed to do this for?" Kate asked.

"Why, are you bored already?" Zoe asked in return.

"No, no, this is really a lot of fun," Kate assured her. "It's just that I could use a breather."

Zoe laughed. "Yeah, I guess that I could too," she agreed.

Kate slid down on the couch until she was lying with her head in Zoe's lap. She breathed deeply while Zoe slowly stroked her hair.

"Zoe?"

"Yes?"

"I love you."

"I love you too, my sweet."

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Kate and Zoe quickly found that, while they certainly enjoyed making out, it wasn't something that they could do all day. They quickly found themselves reverting to the old ways that they used to hang out together, with the added benefits of kissing interludes.

On Thursday they took the bus out to the mall where they hung out, shopped for clothes, and shared a frozen Cherry Coke. They also went to a movie, sitting in the back so that they could put up the armrest between them and cuddle.

In the evening they stopped by the restaurant where Kate's Aunt Justine fixed them dinner, then it was back to Kate's house where they hung out and danced around to the new Kylie Minogue album before ending up making out on top of Kate's bed.

On Friday they rode their bikes down to the park and spent the day beside the small lakefront beach. Zoe was wearing a maroon bikini that Kate found to be a bit risque but also very enticing.

It was the skimpiness of Zoe's bikini that prompted Kate to ask a particular question:

"Hey Zoe?" Kate began as she and Zoe sat on their blanket in the shade beneath a willow tree. Zoe was leaning back against the tree with her arms around Kate, who was sitting with her back against Zoe.

"Yes love?"

"You know how we always showered in the locker room after soccer practice?"

"Uh-huh."

"Did you ever, you know, um, look at me?"

"Well, I sure didn't shower with my eyes closed!"

"No, I mean, were you, like, checking me out?"

"Umm... Yeah," Zoe admitted.

"Oh," Kate replied, not sure of what to make of the revelation.

"Hey, don't tell me that you weren't looking at me or any of the other girls."

"Well yeah, but just, you know, to see if their boobs were bigger than mine and stuff like that. Not, like, checking them out or anything."

"Is that a problem?"

"It's just that you've seen me naked," Kate said.

"You've seen me naked too," Zoe pointed out.

"Yeah, but not in that way."

"We were both naked in the gym shower, I don't see much difference," Zoe told her.

"You know what I mean. I was just thinking, 'Hey, that's my friend Zoe taking a shower,' while you were thinking, 'Oh boy, Kate's naked!' and stuff like that."

"Yeah, but I was also thinking that I'd never get to touch you, hold you or kiss you."

"Well, you're touching and holding me now," Kate observed.

"Yeah, I am," Zoe said with satisfaction.

"And you \*could\* be kissing me." Kate tilted her head back to look up into Zoe's eyes. Zoe smiled, and then gave Kate a soft kiss on the lips.

"Hey, what time is it?" Kate asked after a couple more kisses.

Zoe fished her watch out of her belt pack that was laying on the edge of the blanket. "It's almost three," she told Kate.

"Shoot. I have to be getting back home so I can change and get to the restaurant to work tonight," Kate said with disappointment.

"Just as things were starting to heat up," Zoe sighed.

"I guess we'll just have to pick things up again tomorrow," Kate said.

"Oh, I uh, can't tomorrow," Zoe said.

"Why not?"

"Dad's coming back from his latest trip tonight and we're all going off to the timeshare for the weekend," Zoe explained.

"So I won't get to see you at all this weekend?"

"Hey, you could probably come with us if you want," Zoe suggested.

"I have to work at the restaurant. It's my last weekend."

"I guess I won't get to see you again until Monday."

"This just sucks," Kate pouted. "We barely have much time to spend together as it is before I have to leave, and now we get the weekend taken away from us!"

Both girls were silent for a minute before Zoe spoke up again. "Why don't you stay?"

"What do you mean?" Kate asked her.

"Maybe you don't have to go back to Australia," Zoe said. "You could stay here in Walnut Grove."

Kate thought about it. "I guess I just assumed that I had to go back home."

"Have you asked about staying?"

"No, not really," Kate admitted. "I think that probably my aunt and uncle would let me stay--they've been pretty nice and have appreciated the help at the restaurant--but I'd have to get my mother to agree..."

"So you'll ask?"

"Yeah, I'll ask them this weekend," Kate said.

"Yay!" Zoe gave Kate a big kiss. "I hope you can. Stay, that is. We have so much to share with each other that we can't possibly fit it into just one more week."

Kate understood completely. One week was too short to explore life with her new love. Far too short.

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The conversation with her mother did not go as well as Kate had hoped. She avoiding talking with Zoe until Monday evening, when she broke the bad news.

"I have to go back to Australia," she told Zoe.

They were sitting up in Kate's room, where just one week earlier Zoe had kissed Kate and told her that she loved her. Only a week, but it seemed like both an eternity and only yesterday.

"Next Monday?"

"Yes, as planned."

"That sucks."

"It's not all bad news though," Kate said.

"How can it not be all bad?"

"Mum says that I have to go back, but after the school year is up in December, if I still want to come back here to live with Aunt Justine and Uncle Taylor, I can."

"Really?"

"That's what she said."

"Oh Kate, that's wonderful!" Zoe embraced Kate, squeezing her tight. "I mean, yeah, it still sucks that you have to leave next week, but six months isn't very long, right?"

"It will probably be the longest six months ever," Kate said.

"But at least it's not forever."

Kate leaned over and kissed Zoe. "I'll think about you every day."

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The week passed much too quickly. Kate and Zoe spent every possible minute together, but it didn't seem to be enough. Each goodnight kiss marked one less they'd have until Kate had to leave.

Her Aunt and Uncle gave Kate the last weekend off from working at the restaurant, so Friday evening she and Zoe went out bowling with a bunch of friends from school as a sort of going away party. Most of the girls were teammates from the freshman soccer team, and they were quite happy to hear that Kate would be back in time for the spring season.

"You'll probably make varsity," Emma told her. Emma was a short girl, barely five feet tall, but her short legs packed a powerful kick on the field.

"Really? You think?"

"Oh yeah. You and Holly are the two best players on our team."

Everyone knew that Holly was their star player, so Emma's phrasing her statement by including Kate along with Holly was quite a compliment. "Well, Holly for sure, but I don't know about me."

"Don't sell yourself short, Kate," said Adrienne, joining the conversation. "You're good. And you'll be able to play when you're down in Australia, so you'll have a whole extra season of experience on the rest of us."

Kate realized that was true. While it wouldn't make up for being away from Zoe for six months, she realized that there were some good things about going back home. Extra soccer, seeing her old friends, real Aussie bar-b-ques...

"Hey, babe, you're up!" Zoe yelled to Kate from up at the scoring table.

Kate suddenly felt guilty about looking forward to returning home, but she didn't say anything, just smiled at Zoe as she walked by to grab her ball. But she was so distracted by her thoughts that she sent her first bowl right into the gutter.

"Wooo! Nice one, Kate!" Zoe teased, and several of the other girls joined in with mock cheering.

"Hey, it's my going away party, so you all have to be nice to me," Kate reminded them, then managed to knock down six pins to complete the frame.

Kate managed to bowl a pitiful 82, but had a good time anyway, surrounded by her friends and especially Zoe. No one said anything about how close she and Zoe seemed to be during the evening, even though they often sat close to each other and more than once held hand for a brief period.

Kate was surprised however to discover that her new girlfriend was an excellent bowler. "You didn't tell me you were so good," she remarked when she saw Zoe's impressive 181 on the scorecard.

"You never asked," Zoe explained. "I've been bowling since I was seven."

"I guess I still have a lot to learn about you."

"We still have a lot to learn about each other, so you'd better come back."

"I will," Kate promised.

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After spending Friday night out with their friends, Kate and Zoe had been looking forward to having Saturday night all to themselves. It turned out though that Kate's aunt and uncle had other plans; they'd asked her to stop by the restaurant to bring by some papers that Uncle Taylor had left behind at the house, but that turned out to just be a ruse to get her there for a surprise party.

Unlike the previous night at the bowling alley, the Saturday gathering was mostly family friends and regular customers. There was a cake from the bakery down the street (chocolate, Kate's favorite) and a lot of food. Thankfully Zoe had tagged along with her so Kate didn't have to explain why they couldn't spend the next-to-last night alone together as planned. As nice as everyone was, Kate kept looking for a chance to slip out with Zoe. But the party kept going on and she was the guest of honor, and by the time it was over it was eleven o'clock and past Zoe's curfew. Aunt Justine didn't want the girls riding their bikes home in the dark so she had Mrs. Swenson drive Zoe home. Kate didn't even get a chance to give Zoe a goodnight kiss.

Kate knew that her Aunt and Uncle had been trying to do something nice for her, but still she felt cheated out of one of her last remaining nights to be with Zoe. Now they only had one day left together. Kate was determined to make their last day together special.

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Kate met Zoe at the restaurant a little after Noon on Sunday when Zoe's mom dropped her off on the way home from church. The two girls reclaimed their bicycles and rode them back to Kate's house where they could finally be alone.

"Are you all packed?" Zoe asked as they went up the stairs to Kate's room.

"Yeah, pretty much." It hadn't taken Kate very long to pack up, as she was leaving most of her things here since she was returning in six months.

"Good. I was worried that I'd spend the whole afternoon watching you put things into suitcases."

"Don't worry, I have other plans!" Kate took Zoe into her arms and gave her a big kiss.

"Mmmm. I think I'm going to like these plans!"

The girls continued to kiss as they fell onto Kate's bed. Immediately their hands began to roam over each other. Kate enjoyed the familiar feeling of Zoe's hands rubbing her tits through her cotton top as her own hands found the curve of Zoe's ass.

"Take off your top," Zoe told Kate.

Kate gave Zoe a questioning look. While they had done a lot of making out over the past two weeks, everything had been done with clothes on.

"I want to see your naked breasts," Zoe explained. "I want to kiss your nipples."

Kate thought about it for a second. She liked it when Zoe kissed her, and also when Zoe touched her breasts, so she was pretty sure that she'd like for Zoe to kiss her there too. "Okay, but you have to take your shirt off too."

Zoe smiled. "Okay. But you first."

Kate began to pull her shirt off over her head, hesitated for a second, then finished, tossing the shirt over the side of the bed. Zoe then reached behind Kate and unfastened Kate's bra, pulling it off.

Zoe placed her hands on Kate's now bare breasts and began to rub and squeeze them. "I've always loved the way your breasts look."

"You don't think they're too small?"

"Oh no, baby, they're just perfect." Zoe leaned her head down and gave one of Kate's nipples a soft kiss. Then she gave a similar kiss to Kate's other nipple. Kate felt a little shock of pleasure with each. It was even better than she had thought. Zoe kissed and licked around Kate's breasts and nipples, then moved her kisses up to Kate's neck.

"That was nice," Kate told her girlfriend.

"You liked it?"

"Yes I did."

"Good."

"Now it's your turn."

Without hesitation, Zoe took off her shirt and tossed it down with Kate's. Her bra followed, and Kate was now looking at Zoe's bare chest. Kate took each of Zoe's breasts into her hands.

"Kiss them," Zoe told Kate. Kate did, mirroring what Zoe had done to her own breasts just moments before. She hoped that she was giving just as much pleasure to Zoe as Zoe had to her.

"Kate, dear, I want to make love to you so bad," Zoe said. "I want to kiss you as I hold you naked. I want to feel you touch my naked body with your long fingers. I want to be one with you. I love you."

"Oh, Zoe, I love you too."

"Then let me love you, Kate." Zoe brought her hands to Kate's shorts and unzipped them. She pulled the shorts down to Kate's knees, then slid her hand down the front of Kate's pink cotton knickers.

Kate had touched herself down there before, but that didn't even come close to comparing to what it felt like to have Zoe touch her.

"You're so wet, Katie," Zoe remarked as she gently rubbed Kate's sex.

"Yesss," Kate moaned.

"I want to put my finger inside of you."

"Oh, yes. Yes, please." Kate was now beyond thinking. She wanted Zoe to touch her, to love her, in any way that Zoe wanted.

Kate felt Zoe's finger go up inside of her. It felt good, so good. She felt as if her entire being was centered down where Zoe moved a finger inside of her. She closed her eyes and fell back on the bed.

"Why are you stopping?" Kate asked when Zoe pulled her hand away.

Zoe pulled Kate's shorts and knickers all the way off. "Just making us more comfortable, my sweet." She took off her own shorts and knickers, then laid down naked next to Kate. They held each other and kissed. Zoe settled the curves of her body into Kate's and ran her fingers through Kate's auburn hair. "I love you so much," she whispered.

Kate moved her hand down between Zoe's legs. She felt Zoe's pubic hair, which was sparse and silky. She moved her fingers along Zoe's slit, then pushed the length of her finger inside slightly. Zoe too was wet.

"Touch me, Kate. Touch me," Zoe pleaded. Kate rubbed Zoe's sex like Zoe had done to her a few minutes earlier. She didn't know if she was doing it right or not, but Zoe's soft moans told her that she was on the right track.

The two girls kissed and moaned and touched for what seemed like forever. Time, which had been rushing by all week, was now at a standstill, paused for the two new young lovers.

When finally they finished, Kate felt her eyes start to fill with tears. She didn't want to cry, but started to sob softly despite herself.

Zoe took Kate into her arms. "Kate, dear, what's wrong?"

"I love you so much, Zoe," Kate said through her tears. "I love you and now I have to leave you."

"It's okay, I'm sad too," Zoe told her. "But I'm happy that we got to spend this time together. And when you come back, we'll be able to do it again as much as we want. Okay?"

"Okay." Kate stopped crying, but continued to rest in Zoe's arms.

"I love you, Kate."

"And I, you, Zoe."

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Kate and Zoe said their goodbyes to each other that night. Kate asked Zoe if she wanted to go to the airport with her the next day, but Zoe didn't want to, saying that it would be too emotional for her. Kate understood--she didn't think that she could stand to say goodbye again to Zoe either.

The flight from Toledo to Sydney was over twenty-five hours long, and because of the date line Kate landed in Australia on Wednesday, losing a whole day. She hadn't realized just how much she had missed her mom until she saw her waiting for her as she got off the plane. She gave her mom a big hug, then the two of them got breakfast It was 7:00 in the morning by the time they left the airport, and then another two hours in the car to get home.

After the long trip, Kate was exhausted so she went right to bed. She was disappointed that she didn't dream about Zoe, didn't dream at all. She figured she must have been too tired.

She woke up near suppertime to the smell of her mom's cooking. Even though Aunt Justine was an excellent gourmet chef, she had missed the comfort of her mom's home cooked meals.

Kate had a few minutes before dinner was ready, so she fired up the computer in the den to check her email. She smiled when she saw a message from Zoe. It was simple, just three words long:

"I love you."

Kate hit reply, then typed in a simple response:

"I love you too."

She would send Zoe a longer message later. For now though she was content to know that she loved Zoe, and Zoe loved her, and that they could express that love even though they were separated halfway around the world.

[the end]