

Key of Valor Study Guide

Key of Valor by Nora Roberts

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Plot Summary

"Key of Valor" by Nora Roberts is the third book in Roberts' Key Trilogy. The basis of the trilogy is that three women have been asked by ancient gods to help free three demigoddesses trapped in glass boxes by an evil sorcerer.

The main character in this part of the trilogy is Zoe McCourt. Zoe and her two close friends, introduced in "Key of Light" and "Key of Knowledge," have decided to open a business named Indulgence. Each woman has her specialty.

The story begins with Zoe's history. Zoe was raised by a hardened mother and alcoholic father. When Zoe was twelve, her father took off with another man's wife. Zoe's mother, Crystal, became harder than ever and Zoe became caretaker to the family. In order to make ends meet Crystal opened a beauty salon in her home. Zoe worked there with her on a daily basis while minding the children. Zoe eventually meets a falls in love with a local rich boy and becomes pregnant. The boy's family accuses Zoe of terrible things and leave Zoe to fend for herself. Her only compensation is a check for \$5,000. Zoe moved out of her town and eventually out of West Virginia altogether. Zoe lands in a town in Pennsylvania named Pleasant Valley.

This book picks up ten years later, when Zoe is 26 years old. This story begins where the previous book of the trilogy - "Key of Knowledge" left off.

Various characters from the previous book are introduced - Malory Price, Dana Steele, Jordan Hawke, Bradley Vane, and Flynn Hennessy. Also included are Rowena and Pitte, otherworldly chaperones to the Daughters of Glass and Kane, an evil sorcerer, who wants to stop the three women from finding the third and final key.

The women work hard at readying Indulgence for its opening day. Meanwhile, it is Zoe's turn to accept the challenge at finding the third and final key to release the Daughters of Glass. Although Zoe will have people to help her, the main quest will be on her shoulders.

Bradley Vane is in love with Zoe and will do anything to help her. However, Zoe has to learn to accept help and realize that there are people who do care for her and want what is best for her and her son, Simon.

The people in charge of the quest are Rowena and Pitte, ancestors who are responsible for the daughters' predicament. They have offered money to the triad to save the demigoddesses.

Zoe's quest involves examining her past thoroughly and revisiting each major choice that she has made. Zoe eventually learns that she has made the right choices for herself, from keeping Simon to moving to Pennsylvania to opening Indulgence to falling in love. It is Zoe's acceptance that allows her to find the key. Zoe must face off with Kane, the evil sorcerer. Kane, whose soul is made up of pain and sorrow, has no

chance against Zoe's determination to live a happy life. Zoe slays Kane with the help of a demigoddess and prepares for a bright future. The demigoddesses are released from their prison and Rowena and Pitte are permitted to return home after 3,000 years.



Chapters 1-5

Chapters 1-5 Summary

Chapter 1 begins, "Zoe McCourt was sixteen when she met the boy who would change her life" (p. 1).

Zoe was raised by a hardened mother and alcoholic father. When Zoe was twelve, her father took off with another man's wife. Zoe's mother, Crystal, became harder than ever and Zoe became caretaker to the family. In order to make ends meet Crystal opened a beauty salon in her home. Zoe worked there with her on a daily basis while minding the children.

Zoe's family was extremely poor. However, Crystal had skills with hair. Mrs. Marshall, a very wealthy woman in town, often hired Crystal to cut and style her hair. At times, Zoe would go along to perform other services. One night Zoe was hired to serve at a party.

The Marshalls had a son named James. James and Zoe fall in love and Zoe becomes pregnant. The Marshalls gave Zoe a check for \$5,000 after accusing her of trying to trap James. James had agreed to do what was right by Zoe but he eventually went back to school and Zoe never saw James again.

Zoe moved out of West Virginia and to Pennsylvania to a town named Pleasant Valley.

This book picks up ten years later, when Zoe is 26 years old. This story begins where the previous book of the trilogy - "Key of Knowledge" left off.

Various characters from the previous book are introduced - Malory Price, Dana Steele, Jordan Hawke, Bradley Vane, and Flynn Hennessy. Also included are Rowena and Pitte, otherworldly chaperones to the Daughters of Glass, and Kane, an evil sorcerer, who wants to stop the three women from finding the third and final key.

Zoe prepares to go to Warrior's Peak, the castle where Rowena and Pitte live. Zoe has been there before, including the initial meeting when she and the others accepted \$25,000 to undertake the quest to find the keys. This time, however, Zoe's nine year old son, Simon, is along for the ride. Along the way, Zoe explains the mission to Simon.

Simon is fascinated by real magic. Zoe gives Simon the basic outline of the story, which involves the tale of the Daughters of Glass. A young king separated from his father's kingdom. He came to earth and fell in love with a mortal woman. Simon has an "it figures" attitude which makes Zoe laugh. Simon is still in the girls are icky phase.

Zoe explains, "The young king had three daughters. They call them demigoddesses because they're part human. Each of the daughters had a special gift. One was music, or art, another was writing, or knowledge, and the third was courage, I guess. Valor" (Chapter 1, p. 9).



The three women, Malory, Dana and Zoe represent the three Daughters of Glass. There is a portrait that shows the women and the resemblance is obvious. The Daughters have waited for 3,000 years for these mortal women to come along and rescue them from their glass boxes, much like Sleeping Beauty.

The demigoddesses were guarded by a warrior and a teacher. The pair fell in love and neglected their duties to the demigoddesses. Rowena and Pitte oversee the modern day missions as they were the teacher and warrior, thereby being responsible for allowing Kane to get near the girls. An evil sorcerer, Kane, cast a spell on the demigoddesses, locking their souls in three glass boxes. The only way for the demigoddesses to be released is if three mortals, the demigoddesses' counterparts, could solve a riddle, find the right key and open the box. Zoe's counterpart is Kyna; Malory's counterpart is Venora; and Dana's counterpart is Niniane. Key of Valor is the final book in the trilogy and focuses on Zoe/Kyna's mission.

The group arrives at Warrior's Peak and Zoe steels herself to learn about her mission.

In Chapter 2, Zoe is scared. The other women give her a "pep" talk which only scares her more. However, it is necessary as Kane is a formidable foe. Although the others can help, it will be Zoe that must face off against Kane.

Brad thinks about the portrait and how he was smitten with Kyna the first time he saw her face. There was an instant connection. The portrait is a main piece of the puzzle as it gives clues to the situation of the daughters and clues to the whereabouts of the keys.

The portrait, *After the Spell*, is the first item that connected the triad. Brad saw the portrait shortly before moving back to Pleasant Valley from New York. He was captivated by Kyna, whose counterpart is Zoe. A copy of that same portrait hangs in the castle at Warrior's Peak. The painting was created by Rowena. There are other portraits that are similar, including one that hangs at Warrior's Peak. Another has yet to be finished.

The portraits show the three Daughters of Glass. Kyna, Zoe's counterpart, has inky black long hair and topaz colored eyes. In the portrait she holds a puppy in the crook of her arm, a sword at her side. Venora, Malory's counterpart, has vivid blue eyes. She holds a lap harp and smiles for the painter. Niniane, Dana's counterpart, has strong features and thick brown hair. She sits on a marble bench, holding a scroll and quill.

In the corner, the sky shows a storm brewing. In the forest there is a shadow of a man. A snake slithers onto the tiles near the daughters. In the background are the two lovers, so embroiled in each other that they do not see the danger.

Also in the painting are the three keys. One is disguised in the shape of a bird. Another was camouflaged in the leaves of the forest. The third is seen reflected in a pool of water.



The orientation gets underway. Rowena reads from a lengthy scroll about Zoe's mission. It contains clues to finding the key. Zoe will have to find the answers to riddles and to face her fears and choices in order to defeat Kane.

Rowena reads the scroll, which begins, "'Beauty and truth,' she read, 'are lost without the courage to hold them. But one pair of hands can grip too hard, so that the precious slips through the fingers. Loss and pain, sorrow and will, blaze the rough path through the forest. Along the journey there is blood, and there is the death of innocence and the ghosts of what might have been'" (Chapter 2, p. 29).

Zoe learns from the rest of the scroll that she will have to have the courage to trust others and to know when to lay down the sword in order to experience peace. Rowena tells Zoe that if she can have the courage to find that goddess, she will know power, faith, and her valiant heart.

Zoe struggles to get through dinner. She is pleased that Simon is so comfortable with the group. Simon adores Brad which frightens Zoe since she has feelings for him. During dinner, Brad tries to comfort Zoe while Simon engages in an intense conversation with Rowena.

That night, after Simon is put to bed, Zoe has her first projected vision. It involves a forest and blood.

In Chapter 3, Zoe oversleeps. She and Simon go to Indulgence, the business she is opening with Dana and Malory. The business is located in downtown Pleasant Valley, Pennsylvania, home to the triad. The business is located in an old house that is being renovated by the women with help from their boyfriends - Brad, Flynn and Jordan. Zoe is the one that found the house, which seems to be a perfect location and suited to the needs of the business.

Each woman has her specialty. Malory is artistic. Her side of the business, located on the first floor, will encompass fine arts and creative treasures in a gift shop/gallery atmosphere. Dana, a librarian, is in love with books of all kinds. Her side of the business, a bookstore, is also located on the first floor. Zoe's talent lies in cosmetology. Her business, an all encompassing spa, is located on the top floor of the house. It includes all salon treatments plus massage and associated amenities.

The women have worked hard to renovate the place through the sweat of their own brows. They have used the money given to them by Rowena and Pitte to fund the renovations. Each day that the women go to Indulgence, progress is being made and excitement grows.

Zoe balks at receiving help from Brad. Brad is upstairs fashioning one of the salon stations when Zoe arrives. Zoe wants to do everything herself. She also refuses to take help from Brad or HomeMakers, his family business. There are times, however, when Brad insists, such as offering free installation of windows.



Zoe worries about Simon. Rowena and Pitte have cast a spell to protect Simon but no one can be sure how well it will work since the laws that used to govern the gods seem to have changed.

Malory, Dana and Zoe discuss theories on what the clue means and how it can help Zoe find the key. Zoe makes a key list of words that include beauty, truth, courage, sorrow, loss, forest, journey, path, ghosts, blood and death, fear, faith, goddess, and valiant.

At this point all Zoe knows is that she is the warrior that will wield a sword.

Zoe has another vision. In this one, she is lying in a hammock, just enjoying the afternoon. The scene switches to her mother's trailer on a blisteringly hot day. Then Zoe finds herself in the woods, pregnant and bleeding.

In Chapter 4, Simon fusses when he has to stay with a school friend. Simon likes hanging out with Brad, Flynn and Jordan. Simon also loves Jordan's dog, Moe.

While working at Indulgence, the group talks about the mission. They also discuss Zoe's experience in the woods. Although it scared Zoe, she admits that Kane did not actually hurt her.

Zoe is also torn because she does not know what to do about Brad. Zoe has feelings for him but does not want to jeopardize the mission or Simon's feelings. Zoe is afraid of hurting and being hurt.

The women continue to work on readying Indulgence for business.

Zoe says James is getting married.

In Chapter 5, Zoe invites Brad to dinner. The invitation makes her nervous but she reminds herself that it is only dinner. It doesn't signify any type of commitment. Disaster strikes just before dinner when Moe charges through the house with a roll of soggy toilet paper in his mouth.

Brad arrives shortly after the disaster and helps to clean up.

Brad and Simon play video games after dinner. Zoe is glad that Brad doesn't let Simon win.

After Simon goes to bed, Zoe and Brad kiss. Zoe reminds herself that she needs to take it slow.

Chapters 1-5 Analysis

Simon's sense of humor proves to be a much needed release for Zoe in times of high stress. For example, when Zoe explains the Daughters of Glass saga wherein Rowena



and Pitte fall in love, Simon rolls his eyes. Simon has an "it figures" attitude, which makes Zoe laugh. Simon is still in the girls are icky phase.

Zoe is a strong independent woman. She has been forced into being that way since she was twelve when, for intents and purposes, both parents deserted her. Zoe is determined to never rely on anyone ever again. She does accept some help from Malory and Dana, albeit reluctantly. Brad works hard to convince Zoe that he only wants to help because he cares about her and wants nothing in return. Zoe expresses her worries about Simon. Brad admits that he is nearly as captivated with Simon as he is with Zoe.

Zoe carries a lot of baggage from her youth. She was basically abandoned by her parents and forced to raise a family at a very young age. Zoe was truly in love with James but questions her subconscious choice to be with him. Zoe never questions her decision to have Simon and sees him as a blessing.

The triad of women had become very close, very quickly. They depend upon each other. Through this friendship, however, each woman has also had to rely on herself. In the bargain each woman has also gained a love interest.

The birth of Indulgence is a necessary item in the story. It shows the capabilities of each woman and how she has developed her talents and is moving toward a positive future.

Rowena and Pitte carry a lot of guilt about the Daughters of Glass. They feel that it is their fault Kane was able to get to the demigoddesses. This is actually true. As a result, Rowena and Pitte have offered the women an initial \$25,000 to undertake the task and \$1 million each if they should succeed. At this point the extent of Rowena and Pitte's powers is unknown.



Chapters 6-10

Chapters 6-10 Summary

In Chapter 6, Brad spends extra time at work at HomeMakers, overseeing an upcoming expansion project. Brad's background is discussed. Like Jordan, Brad had left Pleasant Valley for greener pastures. Brad's reasoning was to learn about the family business so he went to New York for six years. It was the right move for Brad.

Brad and his father, B.C. Vane III do not always see eye however both are excellent businessmen. Brad has great visions for HomeMakers.

Brad stops by the Valley Dispatch to see Flynn. Flynn had toyed with the idea of writing about the Daughters of Glass but knew that in order to protect the innocent, it should be fiction. That is Jordan's territory. Both men agree that the story should be told.

Zoe takes care of Mrs. Hanson, a woman that lives next door. Although Zoe does not cut and style hair in her kitchen like Crystal, Mrs. Hanson is the exception. Mrs. Hanson has become a motherly figure to Zoe, a grandmother to Simon. Zoe is grateful for the woman's friendship.

Brad has to go to Pittsburgh on business that day. Meanwhile, Zoe goes to West Virginia where she has an encounter with Kane. Zoe sees what her life would have been like if she hadn't had Simon. She would have been a rich and powerful businesswoman. Kane wants her to choose between the two lives. Zoe chooses Simon. Zoe begins to realize that her quest is about making choices and accepting those choices.

In Chapter 7, Brad sends a limo to pick up Zoe and Simon for dinner. They dine at Brad's house. Brad teases Simon about grilling giant African frogs' legs steaks. After dinner the boys have their video game time. Simon falls asleep on the floor. Zoe and Brad spend some quality time together. Zoe talks about her past. Brad tells Zoe that he has feelings for her. Zoe is in doubt.

Zoe tells Brad about her past and growing up in West Virginia. Zoe is surprised when Brad is understanding and supportive. Zoe begins to allow herself to fall for Brad.

In Chapter 8, Zoe gives details to Dana and Malory regarding her relationship with Brad while working on setting up Indulgence. The women ask Zoe why she is avoiding Brad. After all, he is a good man. Zoe expresses her fears about being dependent and hurting Simon. She knows the excuses are simply that - excuses.

Zoe worries that she is not on the right track with the key. Dana tells Zoe that she is doing just fine.



Zoe becomes frustrated because she feels like there is a clue right under her nose but she cannot find it.

Rowena visits Indulgence and is very impressed with the work in progress. Zoe asks Rowena if there is a way to protect Brad. Rowena says that it cannot be done.

Brad, Flynn and Jordan meet for lunch. The men discuss Zoe and Simon as well as the mission.

The men continue to discuss how their paths crossed and what it might mean.

Zoe sits in her kitchen and makes notes on various ideas and possible meanings contained in the clue. As Zoe stands in front of her stove, she sees a reflection in the range hood. It is Kyna's reflection. The woman is standing in the forest with a sword at her side.

Brad picks up Zoe for dinner with the group. Zoe is in a foul mood.

In Chapter 9, the group sits down and discusses theories. Zoe says they don't really know what Kane knows. It could be important to see how Kane sees Zoe. Kane most likely sees Zoe as uneducated and unworthy of the quest.

Zoe interprets Kyna as being both protector and defender, with the puppy and sword as clues. Zoe says she has had nine years as a protector of Simon.

Zoe also believes that one of the basics of the quest is to show that people should live how they want. Everyone chooses a path.

Zoe begins to retrace all of the steps of her life.

Brad points out that their paths have crossed before. Brad had conducted business with James and did not like him.

Brad tells Zoe that it is time to knock down the brick wall and to use the bricks to make a nice walkway.

Zoe and the others wonder how Kyna can appear to Zoe and put thoughts in her head. The demigoddesses are supposed to be powerless. However, Kane has broken the rules and the rules seem to be changing. It is possible that Zoe could receive help from Kyna.

Zoe says, "If Kane changed the nature of the spell by breaking the rules of it, and if that opened - well - like a chink in the curtain, wouldn't loving parents try to send some light through that chink?" Chap. 9, p. 140

Brad insists on staying at Zoe's for the night. Brad offers to sleep on the couch but ends up in Zoe's bedroom.



In Chapter 10, Zoe and Brad have a peaceful morning together. Zoe likes the "homey" feeling of it. Zoe and Brad discuss HomeMakers and Brad's expansion plans.

Zoe goes to West Virginia. On the way, she sees the white buck in the woods.

Zoe visits her mother at the trailer park. Her mother, Crystal, is suspicious. She expects Zoe to bring bad news. As usual, she accuses Zoe of putting on airs and trying to live above her station in life. Zoe thanks Crystal for being the best mother she could be. Crystal tells Zoe that she has always been a strange one.

Zoe walks into the forest. It is a place where she spent a great deal of time as a kid, playing and walking. It is also where she lost her virginity and conceived Simon. Zoe thinks about the past. Suddenly it becomes extremely cold. It is snowing. Zoe is pregnant and bleeding. She tries to convince herself it is not really happening. A bear charges Zoe. Zoe knows it is probably Kane as its eyes glow. Zoe does not run. She hits the bear with a tree limb. The white buck comes out of nowhere and gores the bear with his antlers. The bear strikes back. The bear gets the worst of the fight. The buck tells Zoe to run.

Back at Warrior's Peak, Rowena tends to Pitte's injuries. Pitte is the white buck.

Chapters 6-10 Analysis

Brad's capabilities as a businessman are detailed. He had returned to the Valley to take over that region's HomeMakers. While Brad and his father are both savvy, Brad has ideas that do not necessarily match up to those of his father, who is somewhat old school. Unlike many father/son relationships, however, Brad greatly admires his father and respects what he has done with the family business. Working at HomeMakers proves to be fortuitous as Brad can help with the work at Indulgence whether it is in the form of free installation or labor.

HomeMakers also turns out to have other connections. There is clearly a connection between Zoe and Brad. Additionally, Zoe had worked at HomeMakers in Morgantown while she was pregnant; James had dealt with Brad on a land deal, and Zoe had shopped for items for her new house there.

Zoe begins to approach the quest as logically as possible. There are facts missing from the equation that make it difficult. The rules of the game have changed which means that there are unknown abilities from Kane's side of the curtain. Plus Zoe may be able to get help from Kyna or another unseen force. Zoe knows that the answer is not far off and that deep inside, she already knows where to find the key. It just does not seem possible to access that information yet, as if she is not ready.

The interaction between Zoe and Crystal is painful. Crystal is clearly a selfish woman who blames Zoe for things that were beyond her control. Crystal is the type of woman that needs to attack others in order to make herself feel better about her situation, which is often bleak.



Zoe's interactions with Kyna, Kane and Pitte make the entire quest seem more real. Zoe feels that Kyna has found a way to communicate with her which had never happened before. Kane does not attempt to scare Zoe at first but rather to coerce her into making a choice about Simon. The second time, Kane does try to hurt Zoe but Zoe prevails. It does not take long for Zoe to realize that the white buck is Pitte. Zoe is grateful to Pitte because he most likely saved her life.



Chapters 11-14

Chapters 11-14 Summary

In Chapter 11, Brad is angry with Zoe for going to the forest alone. He goes to Zoe's house to confront her. He finds Simon playing downstairs. Zoe is upstairs, making slipcovers for her new sofa. Brad goes upstairs to speak to Zoe. Brad finds it hard to confront Zoe. She is busy and exhausted. Brad is relieved that she is not seriously hurt. Zoe says she does not have time to fight. She has to finish working plus bathe Simon, read to him and put him to bed. Brad tells Zoe that he can do the bedtime ritual and she can finish her sewing. Zoe is skeptical but agrees.

Brad and Simon have a great time together. Brad ends up being soaking wet but enjoys every minute. He reads to Simon, tucks him in and returns to Zoe. Zoe had managed to sneak a peak while Brad was reading to Simon. The moment touched her so much that she could not be angry with Brad. Brad and Zoe still speak of the events in West Virginia. Zoe explains that she had to go alone but promises Brad to be careful.

Zoe goes to work the next day and tells Malory and Dana about her experience in the woods. Each woman had seen the white buck. He was a protector as well as a sign.

Zoe is stunned to see that her salon chairs have arrived. The dream is finally beginning to take shape.

Zoe talks about the quest and how she feels that if she could just turn her head slightly, she would see the answer. Zoe wonders if she should go back to where she started.

Zoe tells the women that Brad had insisted on picking up Simon after school. Zoe is grateful for the time to work.

In Chapter 12, Zoe works late. While she works, she thinks about finding the house for Indulgence. Zoe was the one to find the house. It was a good solid commercial property at a good price although it needed a lot of cosmetic work. Zoe has the gift to see beyond that. It turned out to be perfect for the business' needs.

Zoe goes into the attic to search for more things that might be used in the salon. She finds a Raggedy Ann doll and other items. Zoe also finds an old mirror. Zoe approaches the mirror and steps into it. There she finds herself as Kyna with her sisters. They play with a new puppy. The sisters talk about Kane and how their father worries too much.

Touching the sword on Kyna's hip, Niniane tells Kyna that there is no need for a sword that day. Venora says there is always a need for Kyna to carry her sword.

Kane arrives. Zoe returns to the attic. Zoe wonders if the daughters can get through the mirror as well.



Zoe and Brad go to see Rowena and Pitte. Zoe sees that Pitte is hurt and learns that he is the white buck. Pitte explains that he cannot fight Kane in evil form. Pitte admires Zoe for standing up for herself in the face of grave danger. If Zoe had run, Pitte might be dead.

Zoe tells the story about the mirror. The group begins to think that maybe the daughters are trying offer help and therefore, hope.

Brad asks Pitte how he can draw Kane's attention away from Zoe. Pitte says the Brad needs to make Zoe fall for him.

In Chapter 13, Zoe works all day. She thinks about surviving until the store opens and wonders how it will fare in the local market. Zoe also thinks about finding her little brown house. She realizes that she had made many purchases for it at HomeMakers, which is another connection to Brad.

Brad has a vision. He is sixteen years old. He sits by a fire drinking warm beer. Jordan and Flynn have wandered off somewhere. He hears one of the friends scream and call out his name. Brad runs to find them. When Brad finds them, both Jordan and Flynn have been sliced open, blood and gore is everywhere. Brad knows it is Kane's work and he calls out that Kane is not fooling him.

Brad and Zoe make love again and discuss their feelings for each other.

In Chapter 14, Zoe installs lighting in the bookstore. The women have decided to focus on one area until it is finished. A game of rock, paper, scissors determined that Dana's area would be first on the list.

Zoe speaks to Malory and Dana. She is worried about her feelings for Brad and how it will affect Simon. The women try to convince her that Brad is a good man.

Simon approaches Zoe about "the sex." He says his friend's parents have the sex and it is really loud. Simon wants to know if it hurts. Zoe is stunned by the conversation but talks to Simon honestly. Zoe says that sex is fun, which is why the mother makes so much noise. It is something to be shared by people that care about each other and it is very private.

Zoe and Simon go to Brad's house where she admires his art collection. Brad talks about his father's art collection and how he plans to open a new hotel filled with art. Brad says it allows him to buy more. Zoe is in awe of the scenes she has only dreamed of but that Brad has experienced.

Brad talks about his family, especially his father. Zoe tells Brad about her past. She had not intended to tell him some things but it all poured out. Zoe is surprised that Brad does not judge her. They profess love for each other.



Chapters 11-14 Analysis

Brad is equally angry at and afraid for Zoe. After their talk Brad does understand that Zoe had to go alone to West Virginia the first time but it scares him because she easily could have died. Zoe reminds Brad that she didn't die and was saved by the buck. However, Zoe is aware that the bear creature could have killed her with one swipe of his enchanted paw. Zoe is still too scared to ask for help even though she clearly needs it. Zoe has spent so much of her life being independent or disappointed in those she trusted that it seems almost impossible to rely on Brad. Brad tries hard to convince Zoe that he will protect and take care of her. Part of it is reassuring to Zoe yet another part is scary because she believes him and it stirs up past fears and memories.

Zoe's resourcefulness continues to impress those around her. Although Zoe regrets growing up poor, it shows that she has learned many skills from necessity.

Zoe continues to doubt herself regarding the mission. It is becoming more confusing now that the rules seem to have changed. How is it possible for Kyna or anyone else from the other side of the curtain to contact her? How could it be possible to draw Kane's blood or for Kane to draw the blood of a human? Zoe wonders what resources she might have that did not exist in the quests for Dana and Malory. Even Pitte and Rowena do not know the answer. Some of the answers Pitte and Rowena have are not allowed to be share with Zoe which is just as frustrating to her.

Simon is in a stage of flux. He is a little boy and yet he is also the man of the house. He astonishes Zoe when he asks questions about having sex and is touched when Simon shows concern about pregnancy and being hurt. Simon makes it clear that he likes Brad but that he is there to protect his mother.

Zoe's first visit to Brad's house shows her just how far apart their worlds are. Zoe grew up poor in a trailer park, scrounging for money for food and diapers while Brad and his family jetted off to Europe and collect art. Zoe has a hard time believing that Brad does not care about Zoe's past; he only cares about Zoe. Zoe desperately wants to believe Brad.



Chapters 15-20

Chapters 15-20 Summary

In Chapter 15, Zoe begins a thorough search at Indulgence. She thinks that the key has to be at a place that means a great deal to her. After coming up empty at Indulgence, Zoe searches her house. She finds nothing.

Zoe and Brad go to West Virginia. Brad meets Crystal. Crystal is rude to Brad and makes fun of his "silver dollar name." She asks if Zoe is pregnant. Crystal tells Zoe to get a ring on her finger because Brad doesn't seem to be as bad as the last one. Zoe is mortified at her mother's behavior.

Brad and Zoe go to Flynn's house. They discuss the next steps to take.

Brad talks about getting a puppy for Simon. Zoe says he is crazy, especially since they are taking care of Moe.

In Chapter 16, Zoe begins to wonder if they are being treated like guinea pigs. It is obvious that rules have changed since Kane has broken some of the old ways and Zoe has been able to draw blood from Kane. It is difficult to know the way to win a game when the rules are no longer clear.

Zoe doubts herself and her ability to meet the deadline. Zoe discusses the mission and Brad with the girls. It is determined that the quest must be based on the choices Zoe has made.

Zoe and Brad get a puppy for Simon. Simon is thrilled. He names the puppy Homer.

Simon loves Brad's house and is excited to stay there. Zoe had explained that it was only temporary.

The characters think about the impending snow.

Simon and Brad have a long talk. Simon tells Brad that he is the man of the house and it is his job to protect his mother. Simon asks Brad if he plans to marry Zoe if she should get pregnant. Simon tells Brad that he must wear a condom if they are going to have the sex. Brad promises to do right by Zoe. Brad asks Simon if he can marry Zoe and Simon so that they can be a family. Simon says yes.

The group has a get together to assess the progress in the quest.

In Chapter 17, Zoe seems to be feeling better and acts more optimistic about finding the key despite the fact that time is running out. Zoe admires Brad's house and suddenly feels that the key must be somewhere in the house. Brad agrees to help and asks for



the others to come over as well. Although every nook and cranny in the house is searched, the key is not found. Zoe was so sure and is now puzzled.

Zoe opens up to Brad and finally gives into loving him.

Zoe becomes discouraged and wonders where she might have gone wrong in her search.

In Chapter 18, the article about Indulgence appears in the Valley Dispatch. All agree that the article is great and will bring in much business. Not only does it play up a new local business but it also plays up the successes and strengths of each woman. The women are thrilled. The phones had begun to ring before anyone was in the store. Although Indulgence is not yet open for business, appointments are being booked for treatments and each woman answers questions about products and takes orders. If it is any sign of the future, Indulgence will be a huge success.

Zoe begins to cry. She is excited and scared all at the same time. She says she feels like a wimp. The others say they feel the same way about the quest and the business.

Zoe tries to figure out how the key relates to courage. It has become clear that the triad had been manipulated even before they met. There are specific circumstances that led each to this stage, including losing their previous jobs. Zoe is somewhat angry about being used. The women discuss the relationships that have formed from the mission involving the Daughters of Glass. Each is grateful for those relationships. Individual journeys are discussed. Zoe tries to find more links to the key.

Zoe returns to Brad's house and conducts another futile search. She goes outside to enjoy the moonlight and cool air. Kane approaches and tells Zoe that she has failed. Zoe says she still has time. Kane says that the time is going by quickly and soon she will have nothing and he will have it all. Zoe tells Kane not to gloat - he has not won. Zoe wants to know why Kane hates them so much. Kane says that the triad means nothing to him - less than a bug one might squash under a boot. Kane begins to insult Zoe.

Kane begins to hypnotize Zoe. He says she can have any wish she wants if she gives up the quest now. Zoe can feel herself sliding under. Then she regains her strength and calls Kane a liar. Kane strikes out at Zoe. Zoe strikes back, drawing blood. Kane vanishes.

Brad has another vision. This time he ends up in dire straits. He runs into a door and finds himself in his New York office with his assistant Michael. Michael does not seem to think it is strange that Brad is bleeding. Michael says he will be safe if he only comes in the rest of the way. Brad knows it is a trick and withdraws. Brad has made his choice.

In Chapter 19, Thanksgiving Day has arrived. Everyone gathers at Brad's house for dinner. The women send the men off into the other room while they prepare the meal. Zoe says it is the only way to get along time with Dana and Malory and besides, she does not mind preparing the food. Zoe likes to cook.



Zoe and the others watch Brad and Simon take something into the back yard to hang it. It is a red cowboy boot fashioned into a birdfeeder. Zoe goes outside. Brad says that Simon gave the birdfeeder to him. Zoe remembers helping Simon make it and how proud he was of the creation. It netted him an A in school. Zoe is deeply touched that Brad would want the thing hanging in his back yard. Zoe tears up.

Zoe tells Brad that she has been thinking since that morning. Zoe proposes to Brad. Brad is speechless. After a moment, Brad calls Simon over and whispers to him. Simon whoops and runs into the house. Shortly, he returns with a box. Brad presents Zoe with his grandmother's wedding set. The others cheer from the porch.

Suddenly, Zoe knows where to find the key. It is under the doormat on Brad's porch. It all makes sense to Zoe. She had to lay down the sword and make that choice.

Rowena and Pitte arrive. Shortly after, Kane arrives amidst flying debris. Brad protects Simon and tells everyone to get into the house. Malory is ordered to get Rowena. Kane faces off with Zoe. Zoe knows that Kane will kill for the key. Brad attacks Kane and draws blood, daring to take him on in Zoe's place. Pitte also faces Kane and tells Rowena to get behind him. Kane turns the air into a shock wave. Zoe goes flying and Rowena is hurt.

Pitte tells Zoe to get to the Peak. Zoe begs Rowena to come around to help Pitte fight. Zoe runs to get water. In the reflection she sees Kyna. Zoe plunges her hand into the water and retrieves Kyna's sword. Zoe stabs Kane and watches him die.

In Chapter 20, the Thanksgiving feast is transported to Warrior's Peak. It seemed to be the appropriate place to have the feast. Zoe takes her key and opens the final box. Lights shoot out of the box. The boxes shatter and turn into crystals that shower down upon on the onlookers. Blue lights exited the box. One blue light landed in each of the women's hands.

While having dinner, the group talks about the various weddings. It is decided that there will be a triple wedding on Valentine's Day.

The triad tells Rowena and Pitte that they don't want the million dollar reward. The Daughters of Glass have brought them together and have brought them happiness. It would seem wrong to take the money. Zoe says she does have a request instead. Instead of the money, Zoe's request is that Rowena and Pitte be allowed to return home. Rowena says that is not in their power. Zoe says that the King owes them and it is within his power. The wish is granted.

Indulgence opens and is a success. One morning a gift is found on the counter. It contains a letter from Rowena. She is happy to be home and says that many things have changed and will continue to change for the better. Enclosed are three pendants from the Daughters of Glass. The women say they will be perfect to wear on their wedding day.



Chapters 15-20 Analysis

In this section the final pieces fall into place. The purchase of Simon's puppy represents Zoe's ever-present nurturing side. It also mirrors the fact that in the portrait, Kyna is holding a puppy. Zoe laughingly warns Brad that he has no idea what he is in for with a nine-year-old and a puppy but Brad says he is up for the challenge. Surprisingly enough, Brad is up for the challenge.

Zoe has fewer doubts about her abilities at this point but still feels like she is missing something. At times it seems as if she is waiting for the proverbial light bulb to appear. In fact, that is precisely what happens after the engagement is announced. Zoe had felt something special the first time she arrived at Brad's, which is why she started a search. Now it makes sense - this is where she belongs.

Kane makes one last ditch effort to get the key from Zoe. Kane obviously lied when he said he could kill Zoe with a thought or else he would have done it at that moment. The warriors - Brad and Pitte - put themselves in front of the women to protect them. Naturally, Zoe would not - could not - allow it to play out that way since it was her quest. Additionally, she was fearful that Kane would kill Brad.

Zoe sees Kyna's image in the pool of water and it all makes sense. A final rule is broken when Zoe is allowed to retrieve Kyna's sword. Zoe did not know at the time if a god could die but if it is possible, then she would kill Kane.

Rowena and Pitte are stunned that the women don't want the money, that they view it as blood money. Rowena is especially touched when Zoe asks the king to send her and Pitte home after 3,000 years. Rowena and Pitte are surprised at how much they will miss the earthly life and the group of friends in particular.

As an epilogue of sorts, Rowena sends a letter to the triad telling them about the happenings on the other side of the curtain. Clearly, she and Pitte have been forgiven by the king and the daughters are happy.

The triad also has a very bright future with their impending wedding, thriving business, and lifelong friendship.



Characters

Zoe McCourt

Zoe McCourt is one of the main characters in "Key of Valor" by Nora Roberts. When the story begins, Zoe is sixteen years old. She lives with her mother and three younger siblings in rural West Virginia. Zoe's father had run off with another man's wife when Zoe was twelve. Since that time, Zoe had been expected to help raise the children and to assist her mother in her home beauty salon. Zoe had no real childhood. While she was helping to keep the wolf from the door, her mother chased after the elusive perfect man. Zoe fell in love with the son of a rich man and became pregnant. Zoe became a single mother to Simon while the son of the rich man - James - went on with his life.

The story picks up almost ten years later. Zoe now lives in Pleasant Valley, Pennsylvania - a small town located an hour from Pittsburgh. Zoe is starting a business with two best - and yet relatively new - friends. Since meeting two months before, the three friends had been involved in the mystery of the keys. Each woman had to find a key that was specific to her likeness in a portrait. Zoe's counterpart is Kyna, the woman who is most courageous.

Zoe is independent, forthright, and hardworking. She is also cautious of the attention of Bradley Vane, a rich man and one of the circle fighting against the evil sorcerer, Kane. Zoe learns to confront her past and her fears to put an end to Kane's plot to seal the demigoddesses in the portrait forever.

The Daughters of Glass

The Daughters of Glass are at the root of "Key of Valor" by Nora Roberts. The legend goes that the daughters were three demigoddesses, daughters of a wayward god king and his human wife. When the king separated from his father's kingdom, the world split into two pieces. The second piece was ruled by an evil sorcerer named Kane.

"The young king had three daughters. They call them demigoddesses because they're part human. Each of the daughters had a special gift. One was music, or art, another was writing, or knowledge, and the third was courage, I guess. Valor." Chap. 1, p. 9

The demigoddesses were guarded by a warrior and a teacher. The pair fell in love and neglected their duties to the demigoddesses. Kane cast a spell on the demigoddesses, locking their souls in three glass boxes. The only way for the demigoddesses to be released is if three mortals, the demigoddesses counterparts, could solve a riddle, find the right key and open the box. Zoe's counterpart is Kyna; Malory's counterpart is Venora; and Dana's counterpart is Niniane. Key of Valor is the final book in the trilogy and focuses on Zoe/Kyna's mission.



Rowena and Pitte oversee the missions as they were the teacher and warrior, thereby being responsible for allowing Kane to get near the girls.

Bradley Vane

Bradley Vane is a member of the group that is fighting against Kane. His partner is Zoe. Vane is a wealthy man who operates the region's Homemakers chain.

Flynn

Flynn is the editor of the local newspaper. He is also Brad's best friend and Malory's fiance.

Jordan

Jordan is a lifelong friend to Brad and Flynn. He is romantically involved with Dana.

Malory

Malory is one of the triad. Her counterpart in the Daughters of Glass is Venora. Malory's key was the key of light.

Dana

Dana is one of the triad. Her counterpart in the Daughters of Glass is Niniane. Dana's key was the key of knowledge.

Simon McCourt

Simon McCourt is the nine year old son of Zoe.

Rowena and Pitte

Rowena and Pitte are the teacher and warrior that were supposed to supervise the Daughters of Glass. They arrange for the triad to defeat Kane.

Kane

Kane is an evil sorcerer that stole the souls of the Daughters of Glass.



Objects/Places

Portrait

The portrait, *After the Spell*, is the first item that connected the triad. Brad saw the portrait shortly before moving back to Pleasant Valley from New York. He was captivated by Kyna, whose counterpart is Zoe. A copy of that same portrait hangs in the castle at Warrior's Peak. The painting was created by Rowena.

The portraits show the three Daughters of Glass. Kyna, Zoe's counterpart, has inky black long hair and topaz-colored eyes. In the portrait, she holds a puppy in the crook of her arm, a sword at her side. Venora, Malory's counterpart, has vivid blue eyes. She holds a lap harp and smiles for the painter. Niniane, Dana's counterpart, has strong features and thick brown hair. She sits on a marble bench, holding a scroll and quill.

In the corner, the sky shows a storm brewing. In the forest there is a shadow of a man. A snake slithers onto the tiles near the daughters. In the background are the two lovers, so embroiled in each other that they do not see the danger.

Also in the painting are the three keys. One is disguised in the shape of a bird. Another was camouflaged in the leaves of the forest. The third is seen reflected in a pool of water.

Indulgence

Indulgence is the name of the business being opened by Zoe, Dana, and Malory. The business is located in Pleasant Valley, Pennsylvania, home to the triad. The business is located in an old house that is being renovated by the women with help from their boyfriends. Zoe is the one that found the house, which seems to be a perfect location and suited to the needs of the business.

Each woman has her specialty. Malory is artistic. Her side of the business, located on the first floor, will encompass fine arts and creative treasures in a gift shop/gallery atmosphere. Dana, a librarian, is in love with books of all kinds. Her side of the business, a bookstore, is also located on the first floor. Zoe's talent lies in cosmetology. Her business, an all encompassing spa, is located on the top floor of the house. It includes all salon treatments plus massage and associated amenities.

The women have worked hard to renovate the place through the sweat of their own brows. They have used the money given to them by Rowena and Pitte to fund the renovations. The business opens part way through the book and promises to be a successful venture.



Pleasant Valley

Pleasant Valley is the name of the Pennsylvania town in which the group lives and works.

Valley Dispatch

The Valley Dispatch is the name of the newspaper operated by Flynn.

Homemakers

Homemakers is Brad's family business. It is the home improvement warehouse used by Indulgence.

West Virginia

West Virginia is where Zoe grew up.

Warrior's Peak

Warrior's Peak is the name of the castle/fortress where Rowena and Pitte live.

Forest

Zoe's destiny and path to finding the third key lay in the forest.

Zoe's House

Zoe lives in a small brown house in Pleasant Valley. The house is Zoe's first and is therefore her pride and joy.

Brad's House

Zoe and Simon spend a fair amount of time at Brad's house. It is also located in Pleasant Valley.



Themes

Courage

Courage or Valor is the main theme in the story. Zoe is the third of the triad to fight against Kane to retrieve the third key and set free the Daughters of Glass. As with the other women, Zoe receives clues that lead to the things she will have to do to conquer Kane in addition to facing old and new fears and demons.

Rowena reads the scroll, which begins, "'Beauty and truth,' she read, 'are lost without the courage to hold them. But one pair of hands can grip too hard, so that the precious slips through the fingers. Loss and pain, sorrow and will, blaze the rough path through the forest. Along the journey there is blood, and there is the death of innocence and the ghosts of what might have been'" (Chapter 2, p. 29).

Zoe learns from the rest of the scroll that she will have to have the courage to trust others and to know when to lay down the sword in order to experience peace. Rowena tells Zoe that if she can have the courage to find that goddess, she will know power, faith and her valiant heart.

Zoe has a great deal of courage in her every day life. What she lacks is the ability to trust others and their ability do the things that she is unable to do. Zoe cannot seem to bring herself to let go of control, which seems to be what the goddess requires.

The Daughters of Glass

The Daughters of Glass appear in the portrait, *After the Spell*. The portrait is the first item that connected the triad at Warrior's Peak. Brad saw the portrait shortly before moving back to Pleasant Valley from New York. He was captivated by Kyna, whose counterpart is Zoe. A copy of that same portrait hangs in the castle at Warrior's Peak. The painting was created by Rowena.

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Also in the painting are the three keys. One is disguised in the shape of a bird. Another was camouflaged in the leaves of the forest. The third is seen reflected in a pool of water.

Friendship

Friendship is a relatively new concept for Zoe. Over the past two months, she has developed very strong friendships with Dana and Malory. The friendships stem from the women's work together as a triad to free the Daughters of Glass. It would seem that the women's connection as sisters has translated to the present moment. Working together to retrieve the keys means that the women have had to rely on each other's skills, knowledge, and instincts. As a result of the friendship, the women have decided to open a business together. Each woman has her specialty. Malory is artistic. Her side of the business, located on the first floor, will encompass fine arts and creative treasures in a gift shop/gallery atmosphere. Dana, a librarian, is in love with books of all kinds. Her side of the business, a bookstore, is also located on the first floor. Zoe's talent lies in cosmetology. Her business, an all encompassing spa, is located on the top floor of the house. It includes all salon treatments plus massage and associated amenities.

In addition to gaining new friends in Dana and Malory, Zoe has made friends with Jordan, Flynn, and Brad. Brad, however, will eventually become Zoe's fiancé.

Style

Point of View

The point of view used in "Key of Valor" by Nora Roberts is third-person and omniscient. This point of view works well throughout the book as there are several components and underlying factors that would not be revealed otherwise. The story itself is rather complex and only third person omniscient would allow the reader to follow and understand the activities of all of the characters as well as the dangerous and deadly events involving the evil sorcerer Kane, and the events that took place regarding Zoe's interactions with Kane and the memories of the journeys taken on by Malory and Dana. Third person also allows for the reader to follow and understand actions and thoughts of other characters in the book as well as those events of which one single character has no knowledge.

While the first person point of view might have been interesting when coming from the characters in their time of confusion or during visions or other experiences involving Kane or the Daughters of Glass, third person conveys the entire story and not just the subjective opinions of the characters. It also permits the reader to take part in the journey and development of each character in the story.

Setting

Indulgence is the name of the business being opened by Zoe, Dana, and Malory. The business is located in Pleasant Valley, Pennsylvania, home to the triad. The business is located in an old house that is being renovated by the women with help from their boyfriends. Zoe is the one that found the house, which seems to be a perfect location and suited to the needs of the business.

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Language and Meaning

The language and meaning used throughout "Key of Valor" by Nora Roberts reflects on the times in a number of ways. Most of the language is in modern tones, often using some popular slang that will give hints to the time period without dating it in a negative way. It is clear that the people in the stories live in the current, as they speak of particular trends of the time, such as video game consoles.

The Daughters of Glass, Kane, Rowena, and Pitte are of an ancient Celtic world. There are times when that language is referenced. The effect is beneficial in giving the characters a sense of place and time but not so daunting that it distracts the reader from the story.

Roberts is a master of simple yet effective language and is not afraid to exercise her vocabulary. There is a marked absence of sex, violence, and vulgarity throughout the stories and it is rare to see any use of profanity. This allows the reader to focus wholly on the story.

It is easy to see the progression of the work, both in structure and language. The language is more formal in the beginning of the collection and becomes looser toward the end.

Structure

The work is chronological in nature. It is comprised of 352 pages, broken into 20 chapters. The shortest chapter is 15 pages in length; the longest chapter is 18 pages in length; the average number of pages per chapter is 17 pages.

The book begins with Zoe thinking about her past growing up in the hills of West Virginia. Zoe had worked at her mother's in-home beauty salon and was forced to raise her siblings. Zoe also got pregnant at age 16. She'd kept the baby and became a single mother.

The story moves to present day. Zoe and her two close friends, introduced in "Key of Light" and "Key of Knowledge," have decided to open a business named Indulgence. Each woman has her specialty. Malory is artistic. Her side of the business, located on the first floor, will encompass fine arts and creative treasures in a gift shop/gallery atmosphere. Dana, a librarian, is in love with books of all kinds. Her side of the business, a bookstore, is also located on the first floor. Zoe's talent lies in cosmetology. Her business, an all encompassing spa, is located on the top floor of the house. It includes all salon treatments plus massage and associated amenities.

Zoe knows that it is her turn to fight the evil sorcerer Kane to retrieve the third and final key so that the Daughters of Glass will finally be set free. Kane takes Zoe through her past - real and what might have been - to her future, playing on her fears and weaknesses. Zoe prevails and the Daughters of Glass are set free.



Quotes

"Zoe McCourt was sixteen when she met the boy who would change her life" (Chapter 1, p. 1).

"Rowena and Pitte, the people who live at the Peak, the people we're going to see tonight, they're magic" (Chapter 1, p. 8).

"The young king had three daughters. They call them demigoddesses because they're part human. Each of the daughters had a special gift. One was music, or art, another was writing, or knowledge, and the third was courage, I guess. Valor" (Chapter 1, p. 9).

"Everything comes down to the courage of one woman" (Chapter 2, p. 30).

"I don't know what to do, or what to think. It's one thing if it's just for fun, the excitement. But I'm not looking for fun and excitement. Not this kind" (Chapter 4, p. 66).

"I don't like to insult anyone - well, not by mistake anyway" (Chapter 4, p. 81).

"If Bradley Vane was indeed one of her forks in the road, it was vital to be certain that neither of them ended up lost, alone, and bleeding at the end of the trail" (Chapter 6, p. 99).

"You would think that, wouldn't you, just because I don't like being told what to do, how to do it and when to do it. I'm just as capable and smart as you are" (Chapter 8, p. 129).

"I don't know that I ever paid attention to the phases of the moon before" (Chap. 8, p. 142).

"And now she smelled her own fear, and her own blood" (Chapter 10, p. 163).

"There was a new sense of urgency now that she, in some very real way, had been inside the skin of the woman in the portrait" (Chapter 12, p. 193).

"Once more, the three lights rose in a perfect circle, then separated and arrowed toward the portrait. And into it" (Chapter 20, p. 324).



Topics for Discussion

Why was Zoe picked to find the Key of Valor? Also discuss the keys linked to Dana and Malory. How might you go about finding the key?

What might have happened if one or more of the women had refused to participate in finding the keys? Would Rowena and Pitte try to convince the women or wait for the next three mortals?

Discuss Rowena and Pitte and their role in the story.

Examine Zoe's history. What parts of it are exploited by Kane? How does Zoe cope? What are Zoe's realizations about her past?

Discuss Kane. How did he become an evil ruler? What types of things does Kane do to trick Zoe and the others? Which methods are most and least effective?

What might have happened if Zoe and Brad had not started a relationship? What if Zoe had refused to accept the proposal? Would the group stay together? Would Brad honor his promise to stay in Simon's life?

Do you think Zoe would have been able to retrieve the key without help from the others? How did the others help Zoe? How did the friendships see Zoe through her journey? Would you be able to depend on someone that way? Explain.