The Velvet Room by Zilpha Keatley Snyder Chapter 1 Review

This chapter starts off by explaining events that happened to a not quite small family. I get the feeling from illustrations and the situation that will be explained later that the story takes place somewhere in California in the 1930s.

The family is moving someplace else, because the father found a new job. However, their car broke down almost a hundred miles from their destination and it was the third time that day their tire went flat. But this time it seemed much worse than the previous ones, because the car hit a huge stone pillar.

After that happened a total chaos grew inside the car. Robin bit her tongue, Shirley started screaming, Cary was trying to look out of the window, even though Robin's head already occupied the window. Then the door opened and all of them decided to go out: Dad, Cary, Theda, Rudy and lastly Mama with Shirley, except for Robin, she wanted to stay inside the car.

Dad was standing in front of the car assessing the situation they found themselves in. He wasn't even worried or angry, just tired. Cary, on the other hand, seemed to be fascinated by the look of the wheel and the fender. Shirley was still crying and when Mama finally managed to get her on the ground, because she was wanted to get out of the car, Shirley immediately buried her face in Mama's skirt and continued crying. Mama tried to make her stop crying because of her asthma but she went on, so she told her to look at Rudy and how he is going to fix the car. This didn't help and Shirley went back to crying. Robin found this situation hopeless. Even though Rudy was excellent with cars, this time he didn't seem to be doing anything but slightly touching the wheel.

At this time Robin was rocking herself back and forth in the car and everything seemed to be distancing. She felt this way before and everything looked pretty unreal, but suddenly she decided to get out of the car. In front of it was a gate with metal forming words that said “Las Palmers”. Robin was curious what is behind the gate as she saw only a curving road, and started climbing over the fence. Mama tried her stop, but she wouldn't listen to her, so at least Robin agreed to be stay withing the shouting distance and wandered of the curving road.

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After Robin climbed over the fence and started following the road, all of a sudden, she felt differently. As if she had escaped the rush of the world. Among the large palm trees, that were on each side of the road, and with the smell of orange blossoms everything seemed so quiet and calm.

She kept going until she saw a group of trees at the base of the hill. At this point, she truly realized, that she had gone far more than within the shouting distance, but she really wanted to see what was hidden behind the trees, so she continued. Once she reached the group of trees she wanted to get to and saw what was behind it, she was astonished. It was a very large house with no windows on the bottom floor and she was standing at what once must have been a lawn. With a pool, with three bronze seahorses, filled with dry leaves, she thought how pretty it must have been when it functioned and if somebody was taking care of it.

Robin was angry. How could one possibly even treat a house like this this way? It was so beautiful and if it belonged to her, she would have never ever let this happen to it. She would just enjoy every moment she would spend there.

But suddenly, her thoughts had disappeared. With Theda shouting at her, she had no other chance than to leave as quickly as possible. Robin didn't want Theda to see the house, even though she didn't know why so. So, she ran and when she reached her, she wasn't cheerful as she always was, that was odd, but after a while Robin realized it was probably because of Theda's new shoes, so she told her to get it off since there was no one to see her, but she didn't and they continued.

After a while their conversation took another turn, as Robin asked what are they going to do with the car. Theda said that Dad and Rudy went looking for a service, but Robin got worried as she knew Dad didn't have much money and told it to Theda. Theda however didn't care at all. She started making fun of the previous trouble that happened to them and that made Robin just run as fast as she could. She climbed over the fence and then she noticed that Dad and Rudy were really nowhere to be seen

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Just as Robin got herself back into the car, a big new truck stopped right in front of them, and everybody was surprised when they saw Dad and Rudy sitting in the back. All of them were so curious to see who were the two men that drove Dad and Rudy here, so they got out of the car. Dad introduced the men as Mr. Criley and his son Fred.

Robin was the only one who stayed inside the car and when she saw Mr. Criley looking at their car, she realized that this car had been the only unchanging part of her life and even though this was the only stability she had, she found out that at the same time with each ride she hates it a little bit more than she did before.

Mr. Criley told Dad to get their stuff out of the car, so it wouldn't get stolen and that now it's not the time to fix the car, because he needs to be at the ranch and that they will do it tomorrow. So, Dad asked everyone to start unloading the car. While doing what she was asked to, Robin was also watching Fred. She was curious whether he would help them or not, but he was just standing by and flipping coin in his hand. Robin was mad angry when she saw him, there was something about his face that made her feel this way.

When the car was almost empty, Fred got up and decided to take a look at the interior. Robin was still in there picking up just a few other things. She saw him looking through the glass and that made her even more angry. She even looked at him, but he didn't seem to notice her. He was smiling, but in a moment that smile disappeared. Cary was taking Dad's shovel out of the car and accidentally hit Fred with it. Cary apologized and started demonstrating how it happened and by doing that he almost hit him one more time. Fred just yelled at him and got back into the truck. Robin and Cary looked at each other and could help to stop smiling.

After everything was in the truck, they started off down the highway and Dad finally got to explain what was happening. When they went looking for service they stopped at the ranch. There was this nice man called Mr. McCurdy offer Dad the job after Dad explained the situation his family was in. For now, he could work for Mr. McCurdy till the end of apricot season and maybe even stay after it if would be possible. Suddenly, Robin shouted a question at him. She wanted to know if the job comes with a house and after Dad said yes, they were all ready to see it.

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The next day Robin was sitting on the front porch and thinking. The only thing every one of them hoped for came true - Dad had a permanent job. But still, Robin wasn’t happy, she felt despair instead. She was hoping that when Dad gets a job, everything will be perfect, but what she realized now was that even this can change and Dad can lose his job. How happy she was yesterday when she found about this, but now it´s all gone.

When they arrived to the facility yesterday, she saw an enormous house belonging to the owners, horse stalls and one peculiar little house she really liked. At that moment, she hoped it would be theirs, but the truck didn’t stop. She thought their house would like this one and was looking forward to seeing it. However, the moment she saw their new house, she found out about despair.

She was still sitting there, pressing her forehead against her knees, when a car stopped in front of their house. A small man came out of the car and asked her if she was on of the Williamses. After she said yes, he approached the front door and knocked. Mama opened the door and man introduced himself as a doctor and said he was sent to check them. After he said that, everyone stopped what they were doing. Theda stopped brushing her hair, Rudy stopped trying to make a hole in the bottom of the wood stove, while Cary was under the table. Mama tried to make a place for the doctor´s bag and some plates fell on the floor. She wanted to pick it up, but the doctor reacted the same way and they almost bumped their heads. Mama apologized to the doctor that he has to see them in such a mess, but hey just got in last night, but he said it´s okay and that he understands.

The next thing he said was for the kids to line up. Mama didn’t understand, because no one was sick, except for Shirley and her asthma, but the doctor said it was just a precaution. After he was done with all the children, he asked Robin, who was last, if it´s everyone or there are five or six more of them. Theda pointed out that Dad wasn´t there, because he was working, but the doctor said he already checked him. He started putting all of his things in his bag and when he was leaving, he told Mama to put some meat on the children´s bones.

After the doctor left, Robin got slowly out of the house, because if she hurried, someone might guess she was “wondering off” and stop her.