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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ SHORT STORIES

Tales of Chinkapin Creek, Volume II: Bob Ayer, Ann Van Saun, Kevin Meredith

Jean Ayer
CreateSpace (Jun 27, 2012)
Softcover $10.00 (168pp)
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Described as historical fiction, but easily mistaken for memoir, the second volume of Jean Ayer's *Tales of Chinkapin Creek* is an absolute delight. Names and locations have been changed, and the first-person narrator represents the author's mother rather than the author herself, but it reads precisely as if it came straight from the experiences of Ayer's own mother and grandmother. Carefully and lovingly written, the tales resound with an authenticity often lost in "handed down" family stories. There are no glorious accounts here, no wondrous tales, but simply straightforward, truly believable snippets about a farming family living in West Virginia before household electricity, indoor bathrooms, hot and cold running water, and so many of the conveniences people now take for granted. Ayer's characters simply *live*; there is no suggestion that the family is hindered by what they do not have. Trials and tribulations are taken in stride and reported as such. It is Ayer's own ability to back off and simply tell her story that makes *Tales of Chinkapin Creek* feel so real.

Ayer has a fine command of detail and description. Her narrator, Nellie, born in the middle of the 1890s, is the child of the "mixed marriage" of a Methodist and a Presbyterian. Her life is one of hard work and deserved rewards, of respect and manners within a loving household.

The introduction of the automobile, indoor plumbing, and even the washing machine brings change to the farm, and not everyone understands or appreciates the "modernization." From Nellie herself, who can travel days by horse-drawn coach but suffers motion sickness every time she gets in an automobile, to the farmhand who mistakes the new bathroom sink for a toilet, to the laundry woman who refuses to give up her washboard and warily avoids the new hot water heater, Ayer addresses the transitions realistically.

Tales of Chinkapin Creek, Volume II is a comfortable, down-home book filled with endearing characters. At one point, one of the Chinkapin characters comments of Nellie's mother, "She treated me like folks," and that is precisely how readers will feel about Jean Ayer.

CHERYL M. HIBBARD (August 2, 2012)

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