



Review of *The Little Known* by Janice Daugharty

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*The Little Known* by Janice Daugharty is one of her best works to date. Daugharty has been a prolific writer, having churned out two short story collections and seven novels, since she began her writing career at age thirty-nine. She was even nominated for a Pulitzer for her novel *Earl in the Yellow Shirt*. Currently, Janice is writer-in-residence at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in Tifton, Georgia.

Writers have obviously covered the poverty stricken rural South, highlighting racism, classism, and sexism, but few have done so and expanded the vision in such a succinct way as to cover additional human experience as Daugharty has done in *The Little Known*. Her ability to write from a young black male perspective in the main character of Knot reveals further complexities that seem to be a microcosm of the greater “quarters” society, the community of Statenville, Georgia, the rural South, and yet in some ways, a reflection of the human condition in general. Knot, as his name signifies, is a complex character, ‘knotted up,’ and difficult to unravel. The First National Bank in Valdosta has been robbed, and the robber’s dropping the bag containing twenty-five thousand dollars

during his get-away on foot, opens the plot flood gate. Knot is the 'lucky' recipient of the robber's misfortune, or so the reader might think.

What we learn from the knot of a boy is that in contrast to the financial rewards we often think money will bring, new found financial wealth is more of a burden, an all-consuming responsibility, and we come to learn that the old anecdote, "money isn't everything," proves true. Knot struggles with turning the money back in, but in the meantime, he attempts to help others in his community, a modern day Robin Hood who assists his sometimes friend Cee Ray's family, his own alcoholic mother Marge, the church, his Aunt Willie, a local charity, the abusive neighbor Winston, the abusive pulpwooder Bruce's wife and daughter. Cee Ray's family spends their hundred dollars on a new bike for Cee Ray, instead of a wheel chair or motorized cart for their paralyzed daughter. Marge drinks her money away. While the church does purchase a new piano, pays their heating bill, while Aunt Willie saves her money, and the money helps those abused get out of their situations, the lesson is that people use it for what they need and if there is no need, then it's squandered.

While Knot eventually drops the money back in the bank's night depository, it's unclear how a reader might feel about his decision. Despite the fact that the bank probably had insurance to cover the robbery and turning it back in was probably the ethical thing to do, it seems that ethics is only partially why Knot turns it back in. His guilt is no doubt evident throughout the novel, his wrestling with idea of giving it back. For Knot, though, it's also a decision based on the fact that managing the money is a lot more trouble than it's worth, at least from his childhood point of view. Readers may speculate he will regret his decision later, but what readers can't speculate about in this novel set in the 1960s is that positive societal change was coming, even for Knot, as he attends a service where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. speaks. Knot's road will continue to be a rough one, but there is enough positive influence in his life that we are comforted in speculating this knot of a boy will grow and flourish and continue to do good.