

THE SANCTUARY

BY ANN E. ESKRIDGE

The Sanctuary tells the story of a bright ten-year-old boy named Frederick, who goes by the nick-name of "Little Man." Little Man has no father, but a loving mom who is often overwhelmed by the responsibilities she carries alone. Together, the two live in an inner-city neighborhood, struggling to survive.

Little Man desperately wants to believe in something *good*. The other kids in his neighborhood often make fun of him and tease him about his absent father. When he finds out in a letter from his Aunt Sophie that his father had tried to save another man's life in a barroom fight, he is both proud and relieved to know that his daddy died a hero.

Little Man has recently become curious about an elderly woman, the mysterious Mrs. Lucy Johnson. Mrs. Johnson is a destitute, (presumably) homeless woman who has built a strangely beautiful, magical sanctuary out of junk. Her sanctuary is a giant collage of boxes, shopping carts, old tires and crates painted in vivid colors and unusual symbols. Upon these always hang the photos of all sorts of people that Mrs. Johnson has collected over time: famous freedom fighters, strangers, and people from Mrs. Johnson's life.

The children in the neighborhood think of Mrs. Johnson as a scary old witch who may be capable of anything! The adults just think she's *crazy*. But as Little Man gets to know Mrs. Johnson personally, he finds that the ex-school teacher is the one adult who is able to offer him the love and guidance that he needs.

Scene 1

3 Boys

Little Man, Amon and Tico (all age 10)

In the following scene, Little Man is hanging out with two other boys, Amon and Tico, on a hot, muggy summer day. When the scene begins, Little

Man has just come from the sanctuary, where he saw Mrs. Johnson perform a strange, spiritual ritual. He tries to tell Amon and Tico all about it, but Amon and Tico have other things on their minds—like ice cream and basketball—and giving Little Man a hard time.

Tico and Amon are lounging on the abandoned car. Amon is licking an ice cream while Tico is looking at a sports magazine.

Little Man is trying to explain his encounter with Lucy Johnson.

Little Man *(Demonstrating)* ...and I'm tellin' ya, she raised her hands like this, and made the sun come out.

Tico *(Tico shoves the magazine in Amon's face.)* You see this? You see them shoes? Betcha I can out jump and run anybody on the court.

Little Man ...And she was just talkin' to herself. Well, talkin' to somebody. But I didn't see *nobody*. And then she hums like this, hummmmmmm. Some weird kinda music. More like noise. Hummin' noise and talkin' to nobody.

Amon *(Amon brushes the magazine aside.)* Them's nothin' man. My daddy bought me a pair of shoes on him a hundred and fifty dollars. They do every thing but fly.

Little Man ...and I *heard* she had a broom and people *seen* her on Halloween.

(Tico takes a sip of his pop.)

Little Man Mrs. Falls says she's a witch. And she chased her with a broom. And she probably wears one of them pointy hats witches wear when they go out at night.

(Amon takes a last lick of his ice cream and tosses the stick at Little Man.)



Little Man Watch it.

Amon Why don't you get outta here with that silly stuff. Don't you know there's some serious business goin' on here?

Tico Yeah, serious business. *(To Amon)* Your daddy really bought you them shoes?

Amon *(Bragging)* Sure thing. He say I gotta have the best if I'm gonna be another Michael Jordan.

Little Man *(Impressed)* Wow, a hundred and fifty dollars.

Amon *(Frowning)* Butt out, little squirt.

Little Man Who you callin' a squirt? I'm as old as you and Tico. Besides, you said I could join your gang.

Amon *(Laughs)* We only said you could join 'cause you had money on you that day. How long ago was that, Tico?

Tico *(Looking up from magazine)* A hundred trillion, zillion years ago.

(They both laugh.)

Little Man *(Hurt)* That was my birthday money. Momma said to share.

Amon *(Mimics)* And momma said to share.

Little Man *(Puffs up, angry. He jumps up from the car and fronts Amon.)* You leave my momma outta this.

Amon *(Grabs Little Man and pulls him closer. They're face to face.)* We ain't gonna talk about your momma. But we sure gonna talk about your daddy 'cause you ain't got one. And we do. And our daddies



take us places and do things for us. And that's why the two of us are in our gang and that's why you ain't, got it?

Little Man *(Tries to jerk away. Struggling)* I do so have a daddy. My daddy's a hero 'cause my Aunt Sophie said so in a letter. My daddy saved his friend's life. That's how come he died a hero and your daddy just paints houses ugly colors and drinks beer all day.

(Amon is a big kid, but he's also fast. Before Little Man can get off the ground, Amon grabs him by the neck and forces him down on the ground. He's sitting on top of Little Man. Tico drinks his pop and watches the action.)

Tico Fight...fight...fight...

Amon Take it back.

Little Man No.

Amon *(Amon is pounding Little Man in the back with his fist.)* Take...it...back...now...or...you're...gonna be deader than the engine of that car.

Little Man *(Holding back the tears.)* Noooooo....

Tico *(Tico reluctantly breaks up the fight.)* I don't want to get into trouble 'cause of you guys. Last time you two was fightin' I got on punishment. Now you two and make up.

(Tico makes kissing sounds. Little Man eyes Amon. Amon eyes Little Man. Little Man sticks his hand out tentatively. Amon looks at the hand and brushes it aside. But he pulls him up off the ground.)

Amon So, butt face, what's this about your old man?

Little Man I ain't suppose to know but...okay. See, I found this letter and it said my daddy's a hero 'cause he

was in this bar and there was a gunfight and my daddy faced down this gunfighter to save a friend's life. And the gunfighter shot him. And my daddy died...like a mangy dog but his last words was, "it wasn't nothin'." That's why my daddy is a hero.

(Little Man puffs up proudly. He looks at Tico and Amon. Amon and Tico are impressed.)

Tico Man, your daddy is a hero.

Little Man Told you so.

Amon *(Skeptical)* This really happened?

Little Man *(Crosses his heart, spits in his palm and holds it up to God.)* Swear.

Amon Well, I guess you can't help it if your dad died. 'specially the way he died. What you say, Tico? Should we let him join our gang?

Tico You got any money on you?

(Little Man shakes his head)

Tico What we need with a poor gang member? He don't even get an allowance. Least I get an allowance.

Amon You get change from the store, man. Stop lyin'.

Tico I got some don't I?

Amon So, the man don't have money. He'll just go through an initiation.

Tico Yeah, an in...in...yeah. You know.

Amon You got to be *brave...bold...bad...*

Amon & Tico To be a man.

(Tico supplies the beat while the two of them go through their ritual. They give each other five. Then raise their arms and hit fists and move their pelvis back and forth.)

- Little Man** So, what I got to go through?
- Tico** Yeah, I don't remember us goin' through nothin'.
- Amon** *(Ever patient)* Sure you do. 'member the time we took your daddy's car keys, Tico, and drove his car around the block.
- Tico** Yeah, and he took off his genuine leather hand-crafted belt and tore up my behind for it. I 'member.
- Amon** See, we did something tough to prove we was worthy.
- Tico** I did somethin' tough and got the mess beat outta me. What you do?
- Amon** My daddy grounded me. I couldn't play basketball for a whole week.
- Tico** Why is it that when you do somethin' wrong the only thing that happens to you is that you can't play basketball?
- Amon** *(Amon stops suddenly and Tico almost runs into him.)* Dog breath, I got to explain everything! My daddy wants me to be a famous basketball player. That's why he buys me expensive shoes, and my very own hoop. He says that by not letting me play basketball when I'm bad, it's just more time I'll have to wait until I can become a basketball star. He says it hurts him more than it hurts me.
- Little Man** Seems to me it don't hurt you at all.
- Amon** We ain't talkin' 'bout me, Peewee.



- Little Man** Yeah...yeah...so what do I gotta do?
- Amon** How 'bout swipin' food from Mr. Thompson's store?
- Tico** *(Shaking his head)* Naw, Thompson'll shoot him.
- Amon** Okay, what about sneakin' in the girl's locker room at the center?
- Tico** Girls jumped us. They'd kill Little Man.
- (Amon stops suddenly in his tracks. The boys walk on until they realize he's not with them.)*
- Little Man** What is it Amon? You got a idea?
- Amon** *(Amon looks in the direction of Mrs. Johnson's house.)* You say you a good friend of Mrs. Johnson?
- Little Man** *(Squeaks)* No.
- Amon** *(Puts his arm around Little Man.)* Then this is what you gotta do. You gotta go over there and knock down that pile of junk she got and take somethin'...like a prize of war.
- (Little Man tries to walk away from Amon, but Amon has a strong grip.)*
- Tico** Yeah, that'd be it.
- Little Man** But...but...she...a...witch.
- Amon** So? You ain't scared is ya?
- Tico** Yeah, you ain't scared?
- Amon** Besides, we'll be right behind you.
- Tico** *(Startled)* We will?
- Amon** Sure we will. *(He nudges Tico. Tico gets it.)*



Tico Oh, yeah. We will.

(They push Little Man forward.)

Amon *(Whispering)* Here's our chance. She ain't here. When I count to three we start yellin' and then we take it...Got it? *(Pause)* One...

Little Man Wait a minute...wait a minute. What if she bring down a lightning bolt on me and I fall down dead?

Amon Then you'll die a man...TWO! THREE!

(Amon pushes Little Man forward. Little Man runs, screaming a blood curdling yell.)

Scene 2

2 Boys

Little Man and Amon (both age 10)

In this next scene, Amon apologizes to Little Man for his remarks in the previous scene. In doing so, Amon reveals a side of himself that he has never shown to anyone before, and he becomes a better friend to Little Man.

At this point in the play, Mrs. Johnson has befriended Little Man and his sanctuary has become like a second home to him. Tragically, when the neighborhood "clean-up committee" threatens to tear down her beloved sanctuary, Mrs. Johnson disappears from the neighborhood, leaving Little Man devastated and alone. When this next scene opens, Little Man is feeling abandoned.

Little Man is sitting on the abandoned car when Amon comes up to him, bouncing a basketball.

Little Man What you want?

Amon *(Mumbles)* My dad told me to say that I was sorry for saying those things about your dad.

(He waits.)

Amon So, you comin' to the basketball game with me and Tico?

Little Man Don't want to.

Amon I said I was sorry.

Little Man That ain't got nothin' to do with it.

Amon Then what's with you?

Little Man Nothin'.

Amon I don't wanna go either.

(Amon sits down and bounces the ball.)

Little Man How come?

(Amon kicks the ball away.)

Amon *(Shrugs)* I'm sick of basketball.

Little Man So, how come you sick of basketball?

Amon You promise you won't tell?

(Little Man crosses his heart and spits in his hand.)

Amon It was okay until my dad started makin' me work at it. He wants me to be a big time basketball player like he was...I suck.

Little Man I thought you liked playing basketball. That's what you keep tellin' me and Tico.

Amon Yeah, I know. *(Beat)* Tell you another secret?

Little Man What?

Amon You know all them times I get on punishment?

Little Man Yeah.

Amon Well, I do somethin' bad to get on punishment so I don't have to play.

Little Man So, how come you don't tell him you don't want to play basketball no more?

Amon *(Hangs his head)* 'Cause I'll hurt his feelin's. He got his mind made up. He got it all figured out. But I'm gonna be a high school star and then I go to college on a scholarship and then I go pro. Never asked me if that's what I wanted.

Little Man Life sucks.

Amon You got that right.

Little Man So, what you wanna do? Like, what's your purpose and all?

Amon My what?

Little Man Yeah, like what do you really...really...really more than anything else...want to do?

(Amon puzzles over this.)

Amon You know when our class went to see that play? *(Pause)* I wanna be an actor.

Little Man *(Laughs)* You crazy, man.

Amon *(Hurt)* What's so funny? Plenty people are actors. See it all the time on television and in the movies and in plays.

(Little Man rolls on the ground, laughing.)

Amon You laugh some more, I'm gonna bust your jaw. It ain't funny. You asked me and I told you.

Little Man Okay...okay...I'm sorry.



(He tries to control himself.)

Amon What's so wrong about bein' an actor? You get to dress up in different clothes and be different people. And...and...if you're good people stand up and clap for you. *(Pause)* Bet I'd be a good actor. Watch this.

(Amon jumps up. He paces back and forth, getting into the mood. Then he strikes a majestic pose. Then flails his arms wildly.)

Amon To be...or not to be...that is the question. Whether it is nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous and uh...something. I can't remember the rest.

Little Man That's pretty good. What's it mean?

(Amon shrugs and sits down.)

Amon I don't know. I asked the librarian to give me the best play ever written. She give me that. Says it's by Shakespeare. Says anybody can play Shakespeare can play anything. So, I figure to learn the hard stuff first. Then the easy stuff come easy, you know what I mean?

Little Man Make sense to me. *(Beat)* So, how come you don't tell your dad?

Amon You know what them actors wear in that play? They wear tights and little skirts and such. I tell my dad I gotta wear tights and a skirt he gonna put me on punishment 'til I'm collectin' social security. You be glad you don't have no dad. They make life real rough. Sometimes havin' no dad's better than havin' one.

Little Man Life sucks.

- Amon** You got that right.
- (Silence)*
- Little Man** Grown ups can be a real disappointment. Like finding out there ain't no Santa Claus.
- Amon** Or that your favorite rap star don't even write his own stuff.
- Little Man** Or that those toys you see on television don't do half the stuff they suppose to do when you take them home.
- Amon** Yeah, you think you got grown ups all figured out. Next thing you know they doin' something stupid.
- Little Man** *(Under his breath)* Like go crazy on you.
- Amon** You say something?
- Little Man** I said, if we don't go to the game, maybe we can go to see that library lady and have her give us some plays that make sense.
- Amon** I got to get on punishment first.
- Little Man** Okay, you get on punishment. I'll meet you there in half an hour.

(Light fades out.)

SCARS & STRIPES

BY THOMAS CADWALEDER JONES

A black urban girl and a white rural boy meet by accident in front of the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial in Washington, D.C., where they search for clues to their fathers' pasts. What begins as a hostile encounter fraught with tension and mistrust eventually develops into a strong friendship which is based on mutual respect, understanding and compassion.

In the following excerpt, the boy, *P.T.*, and the girl, *Jewel*, have spent several hours together. It is at this point in the play that their defenses have begun to melt and they are able to understand one another.

1 Boy and 1 Girl P.T. and Jewel (young teens)

Location: The Vietnam Veteran's Memorial.

The boy is reading names on the Memorial. He has been there for a while. The girl watches him.

- Girl There's a directory.
- Boy I know that.
- Girl All you have to do is look up his name. It'll tell you where it's located.
- Boy Didn't you hear me, I know that—
- Girl Then, do it.
- Boy Told you this was special.
- Girl So?
- Boy So what's special about looking up his name in