

THE PLAYGROUND

A woman is backstage left on the phone, her face in profile. Stage front, three children, Weslie, Lily and Alistair¹ take up centre, and stage right. Alistair is noticeably scrawnier and wears a red bobble hat. The boys are playing British bulldog. Lily dreamily plays by herself, notices a pile of Weslie's sweets and picks a handful up. Spotlight on children.

Lily: (sang in a vaguely nursery rhyme sounding tune, sweet and happy) Its Saturday and they're having a play, what a lovely sunny day, to be out today.

Weslie: Get off my sweets Lily, they're mine and you're not having any.

Lily drops the sweets down where she's playing. Weslie pushes her away roughly, goes to collect the sweets, sits down and carefully places them in between his crossed legs.

Alistair: Weslie, please can I have a sweet? I'm really hungry and you have loads of sweets.

Weslie: I won them at school so they're mine. Get your own sweets.

Alistair: Mummy says you have to share because it's kind. That's why I always share out my sweets. She says it's SHELLFISH (looks pleased with himself for using a 'big word') to keep stuff to yourself.

Spotlight on woman on phone, fades on children. Every time the woman speaks the same happens.

Woman: Yes, ye-... I agree. We can't afford it, and none of us want them here. I don't-...in our schools, sharing our local areas, parks-...No, exactly, I don't want to be giving my hard earned money to them either...(laughs) There is such a /fine²

Spotlight back on children, fades on woman.

Weslie: Fine then. You can have just two and that's it. (picks the two smallest sweets from his pile and drops them near Alistair, but

¹ Side note: The name Alistair has the meaning of 'helper, friend, defender of the people'.

² A forward slash (/) marks the point of overlapping dialogue

purposefully just too far away so he has to get up and collect the sweets)

Alistair: (pause) Thank you.

Weslie: Whatever, they're not very nice sweets anyway.

They eat a sweet together. Weslie opens his mouth to show the half eaten sweet to Alistair, he giggles and the sweet falls out his mouth. Weslie puts another sweet in his mouth not bothered as he has many sweets. Alistair copies Weslie and opens his mouth, they giggle, Alistair's sweet falls out his mouth but he quickly picks it up from the ground, dusts it off and carefully places it back in his mouth. (Let that be a character note)

A boy wearing oversized, worn out clothes enters stage right.

Lily: *(More like an adult with hint of ominousness)* In comes the child from far away, he's foreign to this group, and oh look and is that a cloud that's grey?

Weslie: I'm bored, let's play dragons and Vikings. *(grabs Lily roughly)*

Alistair: Look, it's the new boy from school yesterday. He said moved here last week.

Weslie: *(not listening)* Come on Alistair, hurry up, I have my sword and I'm going to kill you.

Alistair: Raaaaaaawr *(Imitating a dragon)*

The children run around playing 'dragons and vikings' the boy approaches Alistair.

Boy: *(mild unrecognisable accent)* Hello, can I join in your game please?

Alistair: Sorry it's not my game, I have to ask Weslie if you can play because it's his game.

Alistair runs over to Weslie and whispers in his ear, Weslie responds, Alistair runs back to the boy.

Alistair: Weslie says the game only works with three people. If you join they'll be /too many people

Woman: ...too many people here already...and /it

Boy: It might be more fun if I join in? I'm really good at being a scary dragon and a quick running Viking. Please.

Alistair nods and runs back over to Weslie and loudly whispers again. Weslie looks over to the boy.

Weslie: *(loud whisper)* Why do we have to have the new boy joining in MY game, I don't want him to. He looks weird and he's wearing weird clothes and his massive glasses makes him look funny. He looks a like a silly beetle.

Alistair: Don't call people names, that's not very nice, Mummy said-

Weslie: Your Mummy is stupid, s-she's as stupid as...aaaa...dog.

Alistair: Thank you, that's a compliment as dogs /are clever

Alistair smiles contently, Weslie pulls a face at Alistair.

Woman: ...are clever, they have no money where they come from so they come over to Britain and steal our jobs. They're vermin! We need to get rid of them and stop them coming in...AHAHA-... They don't pay any tax. They've probably come over here for a free ride. To take our stuff and live a luxurious life doing nothing, pretending to be the victims, when in fact WE, the community are having to live with this infestation. They just keep on coming, like the bloody ants in my conservatory haha. If only they were as easy to get rid of-...a spray? Haha-...They don't stop. Travelling over...yeah...spilling over the sides of their boats like that, scrabbling over to get here...disgraceful...animals, exactly, just like /animals.

Lily: Animals are nice, humans not so quite, dogs never bite me, but a human might.

Alistair: Let's make friends with the new boy, he looks lonely.

Weslie: Fine, as long as he doesn't mess up the game. I don't want him /ruining

Woman:...ruining what we've created. We can't be having them in our country, what an atrocious thought, they will mess everything up, a country we've worked so hard-...exactly! Corrupting our children with their beliefs and breaking our laws-...It would be mayhem. /They won't

Alistair: He won't. Let's give him a sweet to be nice and make him be friends with us.

Weslie: Do I have to? I don't want him /taking all...

Woman: ...taking all our money, they're a drain on our economy!

(pause)

Alistair passes over his remaining sweet from Weslie to the boy. He smiles and joins the game. Weslie does 'eeny meeny miny moe'³ to decide who runs first. They start chasing each other round the playground, the new boy is noticeably good at catching and running faster than the others. Weslie signals to the boy to be his 'second in command' but the new boy is too fast and each time over takes Weslie. It is obvious that Weslie is getting more and more agitated. The new boy catches Lily and starts dancing with her. This is the last straw for Weslie and he purposefully trips him over. The new boy brings Weslie down with him as he falls and they both end up crashing onto the ground. The boy rises with a bloody nose, cries and mutters threateningly and runs off stage.

Lily: Tears have fallen and blood is spilt, can their friendship be rebuilt? Weslie is angry, and the new boy is sad, are all children this bad? /See

Woman: See, didn't I tell you, all they do is cause trouble, they have their own ways, their own rules and will bring a hugely negative influence on the kids. Imagine our children having to play with them, talk to them and copying their ways?! Disgusting!

Weslie gets up and checks his grazed knee. He looks at it and starts crying. The woman doesn't flinch and just talks louder, until the crying gets so loud she cannot hear the phone conversation.

Spotlight on both the woman and the children.

Woman: Sorry, one of the children is crying, hurt himself or something, must go, catch you over coffee tomorrow? Let's hope we'll be celebrating getting rid of those bloody refugees here. (laughs)...exactly, yah, yah...One family is supposed to be settling in our street soon. Hopefully the plan for that shelter gets denied...mmm...talk to you later dear.

Woman hangs up the phone and walks up to the children

Woman: Right, what's happened here?

Weslie: I fell over.

Alistair: Weslie made that boy fall over too. (points off stage)

Weslie: Well he ruined our game.

³ Game included as it had racist connotations, (catch a 'nigger'/tiger by its toe)

Woman: Weslie! What would your Mummy say! That's not nice to be mean to others. Remember, always be kind to everyone. Did you say sorry to him?

Weslie: Please don't tell my Mummy what I did. I didn't say sorry to him, he ran away.

Woman: Well next time you see him, maybe you can say sorry, and ask him to play with you and join your games.

Weslie: Yes, Mrs Johnstone.

Woman: Why didn't you stop him Alistair? Deary me. Don't you ever listen to what I tell you, violence is not the answer and we should be helping everyone, our friends, our neighbours-

Alistair: But Mummy I tried..

Woman: No back chatting Alistair..

Woman: Anyway (sighs). Right you two, time to go home. Gosh you lot are a handful aren't you. (*Muttering, but just loud enough to hear.*) Thank goodness they'll grow out of it.

Woman and boys exit

Lily: Listen to what she says, but not as she does. Be kinder, be greater, give shelter. Hold out a hand and **understand**, that no one puts a child in a boat, unless the water is safer than the land.

Blackout.