

Hedges

By Dave Carley

Author's Introduction (1992)

Back in 1985 Marion Gilsenan asked me if I would write a play to commemorate the United Nation's International Year of the Youth. Ms Gilsenan, a well-known and gifted actress, was at that time running a small theatre in the eastern Ontario village of Merrickville. She needed something that was performable by students-on-grants. I accepted her commission, despite the fact I found the prospect of writing a play for teenagers intimidating. I thought I'd have to start loitering about schoolyards, learning a whole new vocabulary, and I didn't have the foggiest notion what were the current pressing teenager concerns.

It didn't take me long to realize that the worst thing I could do was to write the play in a "different" language. Nor should I write about something that wasn't of vital concern to my own post-teen self. The only topics I could speak about with any authority and credibility were the ones that troubled my own heart and, if those concerns were truly important, my student performers and audiences would find a way to relate to them.

I've always been involved in the human rights and peace movements, so they seemed like logical starting points. The arms race was in full swing in 1985 and there was no clear Canadian foreign policy. (Could we expect anything different from our congressman-wannabe Prime Minister Brian Mulroney?) Officially we were toeing an aggressive American line: Star Wars, Cruise Missiles, arming Western Europe - it was all hardware, hardware, hardware. Privately, however, most Canadians were expressing unease at what seemed like a mad, genocidal arms race. And that dissent was good, except that too often it smacked of smugness, with an implicit assumption that all evil generated from south of the border and, if Canada ever managed to elect a Prime Minister capable of independent thinking, well heck, we'd be a big force for peace.

Smug is one thing that Canadians have no right to be. When I wrote **Hedges**, Canada was an active participant in the arms trade. In 1985 Canada sold more than \$1.75 Billion in armaments to various governments around the world. (The figures only pertained to finished products, and did not include raw materials that might be converted at some later date by the destination country. Those figures also assumed that all sales were being recorded and revealed.) We were selling everything from boots to sophisticated missile guidance systems, both to the Americans and to such human rights pariahs as Iraq, Indonesia, Uganda and China. Hardly the actions of a noble, peace-loving people! So when Canadians blithely went about denouncing their Yankee cousins, I thought they should know what was going on in their own backyard. The hypocrisy of Canadians made me angry - and that made **Hedges** easy to write.

I have tried to make **Hedges** a physical piece, so that the energy of student performers (my intended actors) could be unleashed. I added humour, not to sugar-coat my message about our complicity in the arms race, but to hopefully give the rather dark ending even

more bite and surprise. The play doesn't need an elaborate set and actually works better with less clutter. A few cut-outs of houses can suggest a bucolic Canadian suburb.

Hedges premiered in 1985 and, since then, it has had dozens of productions across North America. Although I had written it to expose the arms-racing going on in my backyard, it can also help provoke discussions about the arms industry in other nations as well. (This can be helped by changing the flag in the last image of the play to suit the country in which the play is being performed.) In fact, in 1990, **Hedges** was featured at the Kanagawa International Arts Festival in Japan, where it received great acclaim.

Addendum (2002): A decade later and Canada is still supplying the world's armies while talking peace. And, in late 2001, George W. Bush has yanked the United States out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. It is no time for complacency. Students and teachers who wish to receive up to date information on Canadian arms dealing should contact their local peace group or Project Ploughshares: www.ploughshares.ca

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Synopsis:

The Smiths and Joneses are ultra-compatible neighbours, and their lovely suburban homes are separated by a small - but acerbic - Hedge. The Smiths and Joneses socialize with each other and all is harmonious on their street - until the issue of the Jones' errant dog drives an un-aromatic wedge between the two families.

The Smiths are not dog-friendly and, egged on by their local hardware retailer, Widget, they begin a series of "defensive" maneuvers designed to keep the Jones canine on the Jones side of Hedge. But the Joneses are offended and they soon turn up at Widget's store too - requesting pro-dog armaments. Throughout, Hedge tries to remain neutral, but inevitably he too is drawn into the little war.

Hedges is a modern day parable about the arms race, and illustrates how the incredible profits involved in the armaments industry actually encourage conflict. The play is designed for the junior high level, and for performance by students.

Production History:

Hedges was commissioned in 1985 by the late Marion Gilsenan, for production with a group of young actors in Merrickville and Smiths Falls, Ontario. At Ms Gilsenan's behest, the play was specifically written to encourage enthusiastic performance by school-age actors.

The cast and crew of the original production by Merrickville Century Theatre included Helen Bretzke, Kate Egan, William Hurman, Felica Kelso, Karen D'Alessio and Christopher McLeod. Arnold Connerty directed and Charis Kelso was the assistant to the director.

Hedges was a winner of the 1985 Creative Peacemaking Award.

The professional debut of **Hedges** was an Ontario tour by Carousel Players in 1995 in a slightly altered four-character version. The cast and crew included

Hedge - Adrian Churchill
 Drumlin - Jennifer Moore
 Widget - Denis Nadon
 Esker - Sanjay Talwar

Director - Josephine LeGrice

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The Characters:

The cast of **Hedges** can number four or six, though the latter is preferable. The smaller cast version is also available in copyscript format from the Playwrights Union of Canada.

The cast consists of:

PETER Smith - Suburban male
JUDY Smith - Suburban female
DEBBIE Jones - Suburban male
DON Jones - Suburban female
WIDGET - Hardware store owner; either gender
HEDGE - Ratty cedar hedge; either gender

The Set

The set should be simple!

The Time:

The time is now.

Hedges

The play begins with HEDGE alone on the stage, standing on the well-marked line between the SMITH and JONES properties. HEDGE will travel up and down this line - but never off it.

HEDGE: I know what you're thinking: I'm just an ordinary, run-of-the-mill hedge. I can live with that. I was born cedar and sure, I know how you feel about that, too. You think cedars are ugly. We're a dime a dozen. You prefer lilacs. Your loss. I smell good and I stay green all year. Small people use me for shade. I'm thick enough for hiding stuff - oh yeah, I've got my secrets - all hedges do. But I mind my own business. I don't ask questions. OK OK, so I've got a few mosquitoes - but that's it. Maybe some caterpillars and the odd mouse. Nothing dangerous. I sure never deserved what I got from you guys.

(There might be some offstage music here, or a jingle advertising Widgetworld.)

Humans. You make me sick.

(WIDGET enters, glad-handing the audience, with false friendliness. He's a master salesman.)

WIDGET: Hiya pal. Looking' good. *(He adlibs his way up to the stage, showering compliments on everyone. When he gets to the stage, he begins to speak with sudden, overwhelming "sincerity".)* If there was any way I could turn back the hands of time and undo the awful events of the past few months. Oh gosh. Oh gee.

HEDGE: The whole thing was your fault!

WIDGET: Hedge, my friend - please! I had nothing to do with it - zilcho! Nil!

HEDGE: You had everything to do with it! You were the catalyst, the accelerator - and you should've been the brakes.

WIDGET: A nice turn of phrase but you don't have a firm grip on logic. My only interest was for the well-being of the parties involved.

HEDGE: Why don't we let the general public be the judge of that. *(Indicates audience.)* That's a quality jury. Let's fly it by them and see what they think.

WIDGET: Why don't we. No sweat off my back. I've got nothing to hide. My hands are clean. *(He holds them up - they aren't.)* My friends. Hedge here, this motley, blight-ridden haven for freeloading caterpillars and dirty birds, this collector of blowing newspapers, this catcher of flying plastic debris, this low-rent hotel for refuse...

(HEDGE has been self-consciously discarding bits of debris during this.)

Hedge seems to think his current physical failure is my fault.

HEDGE: I can prove it!

WIDGET: He's feeling a little on the hard done-by side of life because things haven't worked out for him. He is, after all, just another cedar hedge. I mean, he gets a bit messed up and what does he do? He starts casting blame all over the place.

HEDGE: Not all over the place - just at you!

WIDGET: Today I'm the villain - *(To Audience.)* just watch - in a few minutes he'll try blaming you, too.

HEDGE: I won't.

WIDGET: Why not? They live in this country, same as me. My "sins" are their "sins".

HEDGE: Quit grandstanding. You're trying to get them on your side. Get on with the story.

WIDGET: My name is Widget and I'm the fourth generation Widget to be in the hardware business in this town. That's quite a record eh? In this entire county I doubt there's one house or barn that doesn't contain at least one Widget whatchamacallit -

HEDGE: Weally -

WIDGET: Because we sell everything. Cheap. Sure, we make a little money here and there - there's no law against that. Widgets are community pillars. We employ lots of people. We give money to charities.

HEDGE: This is starting to sound like an advertisement.

WIDGET: It's a public service announcement. Did I mention that we employ lots of people? And we tie up our garbage in almost-biodegradable plastic bags? I buy chocolate bars every time there's a fundraiser at the high school. We're a key part of this awfully nice town.

HEDGE: It was awfully nice.

WIDGET: It still is! And it's full of awfully nice people, too. Which made it all the more surprising and - yes - hurtful when the Smiths and the Joneses began fighting. Personally, and this is speaking as a respectable merchant, I was horrified. Dismayed. Depressed.

HEDGE: Personally, and this is speaking as a hedge, I was wrecked!

WIDGET: We were all shaken up.

HEDGE: Shaken up! Look at me. And it's all because of you -

WIDGET: But for this craven collection of curling leaves to insinuate that I, Widget, Mr. Honest, Mr. Awfully Nice - for him to hint that I could have had anything to do with it... It's outrageous. It is so outrageous it makes me laugh! *(Silly laugh.)* See. I'm laughing. *(Another silly laugh.)*

HEDGE: But it was your fault.

WIDGET: IT WAS NOT! *(Remembers to do silly laugh.)* The very idea is laughable.

HEDGE: Are you going to tell this story or will I?

WIDGET: Who'd believe a hedge? OK. This is primarily the tale of two families, The Smiths and the Joneses.

HEDGE: They already know that -

WIDGET: The Smiths and the Joneses - two ordinary families separated by one exceedingly ordinary hedge. Don and Debbie Jones, and Fifi.

HEDGE: *(Disgusted.)* Fifi -

WIDGET: They lived at Number 3, Silverfish Crescent. Peter and Judy Smith lived next door, at Number 5.

HEDGE: And Rex.

WIDGET: Rex isn't in the story yet. But oh gosh - here's Peter Smith now!

(PETER enters, smiling and waving like a game show contestant.)

Yes, Peter is a law-abiding nice man, a teacher at the local high school - a guidance counselor?

PETER: That's right, Widget. I tell students where to go.

HEDGE: I'll just bet you do.

WIDGET: Welcome to our little parable.

(PETER walks to his area, by HEDGE. He might make a fond gesture in HEDGE's direction, which will be rebuffed.)

As you can see, Peter Smith isn't the handsomest man in the world -

HEDGE: Or the smartest -

WIDGET: But there was something about him that Judy Smith found attractive, so she married him.

(JUDY Smith enters, smiling and waving.)

It's Judy! The office manager at a local insurance agency, Judy Smith enjoys golf, glockenspiels, gargling and gardening.

JUDY: Especially gardening, Widget. My gladioli are the pride of the entire suburb. Hiya Hedge.

(HEDGE acknowledges her, grouchily.)

WIDGET: Last year Peter and Judy Smith spent over a thousand dollars in my store. Items for the new rec room Peter's building. Gardening supplies for Judy... You'll never hear me say a bad word about the Smiths, ever.

HEDGE: Hmmph.

(DEBBIE Jones enters. DON follows, shyly.)

WIDGET: Don and Debbie Jones are equally nice folks. Debbie works at the bank, in a position of trust and responsibility.

DEBBIE: Although I wasn't born here, I've come to love this town.

WIDGET: That's swell. *(To HEDGE.)* Isn't that nice. She loves it here. *(Back to DEBBIE.)* I hear you're a fan of opera.

DEBBIE: *(Trilling and laughing.)* That's right.

(Groans from HEDGE, PETER and JUDY.)

WIDGET: Where's your husband! Oh Don - there you are. Don, step forward a sec, willya? Don't be shy. You're among friends. Don here owns the variety store on Water Street. How's business going, anyway?

DON: Good.

WIDGET: Uh, would you care to elaborate?

DON: Up?

WIDGET: Ah - up.

DON: Up lots.

WIDGET: Great.

DON: Lots and lots.

WIDGET: Great, pal. *(Continuing with story.)* Last year -

DON: Really really up. Really up lots. Lots and lots of really up.

WIDGET: *(Trying to override DON.)* Last year -

DON: A whole pile really lots up and up and up and waaaay up and

WIDGET: Shut up!

DON: Thank you!

WIDGET: Last year Don and Debbie Jones spent nearly two thousand dollars in my store. They are fine, upstanding citizens and you'll never hear me say a word against them.

HEDGE: Fifi.

WIDGET: How could I forget? The Joneses have a small schnauzer - they're the dogs that look like dustballs on legs. Fifi. Come out Fifi and take a bow.

(All six look in the direction of the JONES's house.)

Come on, Fifi!

(They still look. DON whistles.)

DEBBIE: Come out wittle wamb chop.

(HEDGE groans. An invisible Fifi enters, and all six mime watching her progress. The following endearments and disparagements overlap.)

Here she comes

DON: Sweetie pie hi fi

DEBBIE Lambie chop chop

DON: Daddy's furry baby

HEDGE: Honestly

DON: Twittie twittie wing ding

DEBBIE: Doggy honey bunny wunny

WIDGET: It is pretty sickening.

HEDGE: You have to wonder at the sanity of dog owners -

DON: Papa's wittle tiger

DEBBIE: Tweetie sweetie

DON: Hot doggy diggity

(FIFI has run by DEBBIE and DON and around the others. They all follow with their eyes until FIFI comes to the SMITH side of HEDGE. At this point the JONESES suddenly find other things to do.)

DEBBIE: Oh ha, Don - look at that uh bird up there.

DON: Oh yeah, would ya just look at it.

HEDGE: *(Trying to kick FIFI away, meanwhile.)* Get lost. Get lost you dumb mutt. Scram fleabag. Get lost. *(And then, as FIFI unloads.)* Aw come on. Fifi.

PETER: Well!

JUDY: That darn dog!

PETER: Where's my shovel?

WIDGET: No wait - we haven't reached that part of the story yet -

PETER: But Fifi just -

WIDGET: We'll get to Fifi in a second. I want to go back a bit, and tell them about the pride you took in Hedge.

PETER: Oh. OK.

WIDGET: Because you really were - proud - of him.

PETER: We groomed Hedge like a golf green.

JUDY: *(Clipping.)* You like that, don't you.

HEDGE: Oo - oo yes, uh huh -

JUDY: Would you like your sides done?

HEDGE: Yeah baby, do it to me Judy baby -

(JUDY continues grooming HEDGE, who moans with delight, under following:)

WIDGET: They took wonderful care of Hedge. I sold them only the finest organic fertilizer and sprays, and they used the gentlest of clippers. I sharpened them every month.

JUDY: *(Proudly.)* There were birds in our hedge.

DON: And the wonderful scent of cedar.

DEBBIE: Healthful bugs.

HEDGE: The kind of bugs you'd take home to mother, if you were a hedge.

PETER: Good urban insects, susceptible to sprays -

DEBBIE: And nice birds, eating the nice sprayed bugs -

WIDGET: The funny thing about Hedge was that no one was quite sure how he got there in the first place.

PETER: We moved here six years ago and he was already (*Indicates.*) that tall.

DEBBIE: And we've been here eight - he was here then.

HEDGE: I came from the forest. From the wilds of the Canadian Shield. From the land of the wolf and bear, where hedges are hedges and cedars stand tall and tough and proud. My mother was probably a hundred feet tall. I betcha she had bugs on her like you wouldn't believe. And my Dad, maybe he was a mighty Douglas Fir.

WIDGET: They say that good hedges make good neighbours and, in the early days, the Smiths and the Joneses got along famously.

JUDY: (*Sees DEBBIE dialing phone.*) Oh - she's calling us. (*Picks up phone.*) Hello Debbie?

DEBBIE: Judy, it's Debbie.

JUDY: Debbie!

DEBBIE: Judy! Judy, Don and I were wondering if you and Peter would like to come over tonight.

JUDY: How lovely. (*To PETER.*) They're asking us over!

PETER: Who.

JUDY: Debbie and Don!

PETER: Debbie and Don!

DEBBIE: Don and I think it's time we progressed to the Next Stage.

JUDY: Oh gosh, how exciting is that! We'll be right over.

HEDGE: The couples were taking a correspondence course in dancing. You know, one of those things where you send away and for just a few dollars every week you get a tape in the mail with instructions...

JUDY: Which one are we at now?

DON: We've done the Charleston and the Jitterbug

PETER: The twist and the gavotte

DEBBIE: I wouldn't mind square dancing again.

DON: I kind of thought it was time for

JUDY &
DEBBIE: *(Reading new tape.)* Tango!

(Tango music comes up and the couples have fun but awkward attempts at doing it, with partners switched.)

WIDGET: Oh yes, they were ultra-compatible neighbours all right. Life on Silverfish Crescent couldn't have been happier. It's hard to say what broke it all up.

(Dancing and music stop.)

PETER: Some say it was Fifi.

DEBBIE: Not the wittle weefy!

DON: Never wever!

HEDGE: I'm with Smith on this. Fifi started it.

WIDGET: You see, the Smith side of Hedge seemed to give Fifi all the privacy her schnauzer sensibilities required - and this didn't sit well with the Smiths.

PETER: *(Handing over money.)* Shovel!

WIDGET: Aluminum, plastic, snow, shiny -

PETER: Just a little one. Fifi-sized.

WIDGET: Ah, I understand. *(Hands over shovel.)* The Smiths made a real point of lobbing Fifi's autographs back over Hedge and into the Jones's yard.

HEDGE: *(Ducking.)* Careful!

WIDGET: But Don and Debbie Jones continued to let Fifi roam wherever she wanted, so the Smiths upped the stakes.

JUDY: *(Approaching WIDGET, waving money.)* I need a dog collar and a chain. A big collar and a thick chain. For Rex.

HEDGE: The Smiths' new dog was incredible large.

WIDGET: Huge.

HEDGE: Little Fifi Weefy took one look at Rex and decided to stay on her side of me.

WIDGET: Rex, on the other hand, found himself irresistibly drawn to the Jones's side.

HEDGE: Where he dug holes.

WIDGET: Obeying some vague genetic impulse.

DON: He's at it again!

DEBBIE: My poor manicured lawn!

HEDGE: Rex has it looking like an open pit mine!

WIDGET: Don was in the store a couple of days later, buying defense materials.

(WIDGET hands DON a large shovel, in exchange for money.)

DON: And while you're at it, give me some lime.

HEDGE: Lime!

DON: I heard somewhere dogs won't walk on lime. I'm going to lime a five-foot swath around that hedge.

HEDGE: Lime's not in my contract!

DON: Hold still!

DEBBIE: It's for your own good. Quit twitching!

HEDGE: It stings!

DEBBIE: It'll also keep Rex out.

HEDGE: Really? Just a bit then.

WIDGET: Because of the dogs, and the lime, the atmosphere - and some of the lawn - on Silverfish Crescent - got a bit poisoned.

HEDGE: Unkind words were exchanged.

DON: Insect.

JUDY: Larva.

DEBBIE: Pupae.

PETER: Bug.

HEDGE: That night, Don and Debbie tangoed alone. So did the Smiths.

(Music. The couples are tangoing, but separately, It obviously isn't as much fun.)

DON: Tango!

JUDY: Tango!

DEBBIE: There's something missing.

PETER: This doesn't feel right.

HEDGE: But they wouldn't admit, even to themselves, that it's a lot more fun to tango with your neighbour's spouse, than with your own.

JUDY: *(False happiness, directed at DON and DEBBIE.)* Tangooooo. Wahooooo. Yippee?

DEBBIE: *(For PETER and JUDY's benefit.)* Tangooooo hot hot hot. Hot?

DON: I bet they're not having

DEBBIE: As much fun as we are and

PETER: I bet they wish they could

JUDY: Be over here with us and

PETER: I wish we could be

DEBBIE: Over there with them.

JUDY: But if they want to tango with us

DON: They can darn well apologize

ALL: First!

(There's a pause. The neighbours all look expectantly at each other. WIDGET springs into action.)

WIDGET: Sale on lime! Lime half-price! Shovels! *(To DEBBIE.)* There must be something I can sell you.

(DON and DEBBIE confer.)

DEBBIE: As a matter of fact, I'd like a garbage lid.

WIDGET: Certainly!

DEBBIE: And I'll need a hockey helmet, too. Do you have any horns?

(WIDGET feels his head.)

I mean, for sale. *(Pointing to two gas funnels.)* Those'll do.

(Money changes hands. DEBBIE exits.)

HEDGE: He forgot to tell you: Debbie Jones was a frustrated opera singer. When she was a kid everyone said it'd only be a few years before she was singing all over the world. People in the know said there'd be two names on everyone's lips: *(Names popular female rock star.)* and Debbie.

WIDGET: But it never happened. Debbie developed a wobble in her warble and the jobs widdled away. She never became a star.

HEDGE: But at night she'd still practise. It was agony.

(DEBBIE re-enters in a Brunhilde get-up, with the funnels as horns and the garbage can lid as her shield etc.)

DON: Yes dear, you may as well share the wealth. A talent like yours should be heard all over the world - or at least over the hedge. *(Laughs maliciously.)*

DEBBIE: *(Looking over HEDGE.)* My public! Oh, how I adore my public!

(DEBBIE lets fly with a tentative trill. A branch of two falls off HEDGE.)

HEDGE: *(Under, as trilling continues.)* Oh no! Anything but this! I can't stand opera. It's not natural for a hedge to listen to opera. *(As more branches*

fall.) This is torture! Lime me, lime me. Bring back the dogs. Anything but this!

WIDGET: (*Amused.*) Which was exactly how the Smiths felt too.

PETER: They've gone too far!

JUDY: She's singing too high!

PETER: She's singing too flat!

JUDY: Too flat and too sharp, all at the same time!

HEDGE: Do something! I beg you, do something!

DON: (*Peering over HEDGE at the Smiths.*) Keep it up dear, they're hurting!

JUDY: (*Starting to swoon.*) Oh oh please - I can't stand it anymore. Peter, let's move -

PETER: Hang in there honey. Bear up. Stiff upper lip. (*To WIDGET.*) I want a blaster. The biggest one you've got. (*Waving money, getting radio.*) And music! Who's the most obnoxious, talentless singer today?

WIDGET: (*Names a singer.*)

PETER: Sounds good to me! (*Hands over more money, takes CD or tape.*) This is war. (*Inserts music.*) Crank up the volume and a one and a two - FIRE!

(The noise can be mimed. HEDGE, DON and DEBBIE are blown back by a wall of sound. Everyone is shouting soundlessly, and clutching their ears. Leaves and branches fly off HEDGE. Fifi is blown clear offstage. They begin miming "Turn it off!" and HEDGE will finally slay the blaster with a branch.)

HEDGE: Stop! Cease-fire! This noise is killing me! We've got to talk, guys, Put that blaster away.

(DEBBIE tries a little opera.)

Kill the trill, sister.

WIDGET: Hey - this is a free country, Hedge. If they want to play music - (*To PETER, sotto.*) More batteries?

HEDGE: You can afford to say it's a free country because you're making money from this. And you live on the other side of town - but they're driving me nuts! When was the last time you saw a bird in these leaves? Or a half-decent bug? They all got wise and flew off, but I'm stuck here and I want some peace and quiet. So can we talk?

(The SMITHS and JONESES sit down on either side of HEDGE. To WIDGET's apparent worry, they seem to be starting a peace parley.)

That's nice. Everyone's settling down peacefully. Do this for me, eh guys. We'll have a little conference and live happily ever after. Debbie, why don't you go first?

(Throughout the following peace talk, WIDGET will insert sotto voce phrases, promoting his lime and batteries and loud tapes etc., in an attempt to derail the proceedings.)

DEBBIE: I'll tie up Fifi if you'll chain Rex.

(WIDGET whispers in PETER's ear.)

PETER: That's all very well, but Fifi is only one-tenth the size of Rex. If you really want to be fair, you'll have to tie up ten Fifis.

(WIDGET has been whispering in JUDY's ear.)

JUDY: And you'll have to include an unbreakable promise to never, ever sing opera anywhere in the known universe, ever again. I've never heard anything so awful.

(DEBBIE makes a noise of outrage. WIDGET has been whispering in DON's ear.)

DON: Opera is a completely different issue. We aren't discussing my wife's singing today; we're talking dogs.

DEBBIE: And anyway, how can we be sure you won't let Rex out at night?

WIDGET: Good point.

HEDGE: I'll monitor them.

WIDGET: Let them solve this themselves. They're adults. *(To DON.)* How about another garbage can lid. You and Debbie could sing duets -

- DON: How much?
- PETER: *(To JUDY.)* We should see about buying some more batteries -
- HEDGE: *(Over.)* And just like that, negotiations broke down. It was so maddening!
- WIDGET: Yes, so very upsetting. *(Musing.)* I wonder how if I have any bags of lime left.
- HEDGE: Some might say you had a vested interest in continuing this conflict.
- WIDGET: I resent that! I signed the Hardware Merchants Good Behaviour Treaty! *(Reciting.)* "I will never knowingly sell something to someone that can be used in an offensive manner." And I haven't! Everything I've sold was for defensive purposes only.
- PETER: *(Has been whispering to JUDY.)* Great idea! *(To WIDGET.)* I need some glue.
- WIDGET: Glue? Coming up! *(Getting a pail of glue.)* Glue glue glue...
- (JUDY is shaping the JONES side of HEDGE, so that HEDGE is making a rude gesture - finger up or thumb down.)*
- JUDY: Make it stick honey!
- (PETER slaps on glue. HEDGE's arm locks into position. DON and DEBBIE see, and react.)*
- DON: Cut that out!
- DEBBIE: The nerve!
- HEDGE: Did I say it was maddening? I could give you a lot of other words: depressing, avoidable, painful. I'd been so green and fragrant for so many years and now I was being destroyed by something so childish, so senseless, by an argument that no one could remember the reason for, by a fire they all knew how to start - but none of them could put out.
- DEBBIE: *(Under last part of preceding, as she hands WIDGET a cheque.)* Give me a chainsaw!
- (DEBBIE cuts off the offending arm/branch of HEDGE.)*
- DON: Timber!

JUDY: (To WIDGET.) Spraypaint!

(JUDY hands WIDGET a stack of bills and is handed a can of spray paint, which she tosses to PETER.)

PETER: (Reading aloud as he sprays.) "Don and Debbie Jones are vermin!"

(DON grabs a spray can from WIDGET and runs to the SMITH side of HEDGE, and sprays.)

DEBBIE: (Reading.) "Kill the Smiths!"

(The couples freeze in horror at this. WIDGET is nearby, at the ready.)

HEDGE: That stopped them for a few minutes. They glared at each other, spray cans clutched in their angry little hands, with only me separating them - or what was left of me - and then they got right back to it. They had to finish what they'd started.

WIDGET: (Handing over a can of kerosene to DON and one to PETER.) If I'd ever guessed what the kerosene was going to be used for -

(DON and PETER are dousing HEDGE.)

(Tossing matches to them.) Or the matches for that matter...

(DON, DEBBIE, PETER and JUDY all light matches.)

HEDGE: It's irrelevant who did it - who lit the match that ended it all. I decided to pack it in. (To WIDGET, sorrowfully.) If only you'd sit back and think about your role in all this - if only you'd do that, I wouldn't feel that this was so meaningless.

(HEDGE turns. The back of his T-shirt is blue. When the others eventually turn to join him the combined image of their shirts will be that of a globe.)

WIDGET: Hedge? Hedge?

(At his last appeal to HEDGE, WIDGET pulls his hands from his pockets or, in some other way, provokes a little cloudfall of money. The bills fall to his feet and he contemplates them, picking them back up and stuffing them in his pockets. He ignores DON, DEBBIE, PETER, JUDY and HEDGE and speaks directly to the audience.)

My friends! I'm as upset as everyone else. I love hedges and sure - that one was pretty obnoxious - but even he didn't deserve what he got. I know that. But it isn't fair to pin it on me. I didn't know they'd behave that way!

(Don and DEBBIE are turning away, to form their part of the globe.)

Not Don and Debbie Jones. They're model citizens - like you and me! Don had his store and Debbie loved the opera -

(PETER and JUDY are now turning, and are joining the globe.)

And Peter and Judy Smith - they were good folk too! Nothing shabby about them! I can't imagine what got into them.

(A bill or two flutters down.)

Seems crazy they got fighting like that. *(Counts a bit of money.)* I know what you're thinking. But you saw it all. I only sold them the things they asked for. I didn't know how they'd be using it. Remember - it's not the gun that does the killing - it's the person who pulls the trigger. What would you have done differently? What are you doing differently. Sure - you're the jury and you can convict me of anything you want, but you better be fair. Put yourself in my shoes.

(WIDGET pulls a Canadian flag from his pocket - an American one if production is in the U.S. He wipes his brow with it. It should not be immediately clear what it is, until after his last line.)

Or - are you already in them?

(Flag is unfurled and visible to audience. ALL look at audience.)

Black.

The End.