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*Dramatic Publishing*

A GOOD  
OLD-FASHIONED  
BIG FAMILY  
CHRISTMAS

COMEDY BY PAT COOK



# A GOOD OLD-FASHIONED BIG FAMILY CHRISTMAS

**Comedy. By Pat Cook.** *Cast: 5 to 10m., 2 to 6w.* Hayden Stewart's wife, Judith, and her sisters, Carla and Beth, are worried about their parents. "They argue all the time," Judith says. When she mentions this to Hayden, he casually suggests maybe the women could spend some time with Jack and Arlene, their parents, and squelch any such arguments. The next thing Hayden knows, Judith is planning a huge Christmas party with the whole family. "And it was all Hayden's idea!" she boasts. This doesn't set well with his brothers-in-law, who have a hard time getting along with Jack. However, as time gets short and the party draws near, suddenly everyone is on their best behavior. The husbands, the wives, even the kids. Everybody is being good ... too good. Is it possible to be TOO good? That's what Jack and Arlene suspect when they arrive. "Judith and Hayden must be having problems," Arlene suspects. Then she and Jack start "putting on the act." Only the Stewarts' daughter, Phoebe, seems to be trying to start a fight. This party has more intrigue behind it than a whole host of spy novels by the time Hayden's parents, Tom and Marjorie, join them. Only Marjorie can see what's really going on. All the traditional Christmas standbys are utilized as the family tries to throw *A Good Old-Fashioned Big Family Christmas*. *Unit set. Approximate running time: 90 minutes. Code: GD3.*

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# **A Good Old-Fashioned Big Family Christmas**

By  
PAT COOK



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# **A Good Old-Fashioned Big Family Christmas**

## **CHARACTERS**

**HAYDEN STEWART:** A rather laid-back but inept husband, mid-40s.

**JUDITH STEWART:** HAYDEN's thoughtful wife, also mid-40s.

**CARLA:** JUDITH's suspicious sister, in her late 30s.

**BETH:** JUDITH's other easygoing sister, around 30.

**MAX:** CARLA's argumentative husband, late 30s.

**CLIFF:** BETH's eager-to-please husband, also around 30.

**PHOEBE:** HAYDEN and JUDITH's secretive daughter, 19.

**MILDRED:** Well-meaning sentimental neighbor.

**BLAIR:** CARLA and MAX's 13-year-old daughter.

**LANIE:** Their other daughter, 11 years old.

**JACK:** JUDITH's dad, a feisty 65-year-old.

**ARLENE:** JACK's wife and mother to the girls, also 65.

**TOM:** HAYDEN's health-conscious dad, mid-60s.

**MARJORIE:** HAYDEN's wise mother, also in her mid-60s.

**TIME:** Christmastime, the present.

**PLACE:** The living room of HAYDEN and JUDITH's house.





# A Good Old-Fashioned Big Family Christmas

## ACT I

### Scene 1

*(The main setting for our little yuletide tale is the comfortably furnished living room of the house belonging to HAYDEN STEWART and JUDITH STEWART. There are four doors utilized in this floorplan. The first door is the front door and is located UR. The second door is a closet, located on the upstage wall near the front door while the third door, further down the upstage wall, leads to the kitchen. The fourth door, located on the L wall, leads to the dining room. There is a staircase just R of the kitchen door, which leads to the bedrooms upstairs. Two large curtained windows are located on the DL wall.*

*The furniture is tastefully matched. The sofa, located downstage, is flanked by two end tables while a coffee table rests in front of it. There are also two matching chairs on both sides of the sofa. There is a desk and matching chair, situated in front of the windows, on which rests a telephone, a computer and various other desk-related items, such as a calendar, note pad, jar of pens, etc. On the L wall, there is an entertainment center, complete with television, stereo, CD player and other media. There is an occasional chair next to it. The rest of the room is decorated with the usual art, photographs, plants, etc.*

*DR is another smaller area. This is HAYDEN's "getaway" spot. It consists of a workbench, the standard garage tool table and wall, supporting all sorts of tools. There is also an old wooden stool in front of it.*

*Lights come up DR on HAYDEN, standing in front of the workbench and working on a motor. He looks up and speaks in a relaxed casual confidentiality as if confessing some dark secret to an old friend.)*

HAYDEN. I have always been amazed at just how easy it is to make a woman mad. I can do it without thinking. *(He puts the motor down.)* In fact, Judith's biggest complaint is I often do it without thinking. So, after all these years of marriage, I've learned to start thinking whenever I see a woman approaching. *(He leans forward.)* Now by that I don't mean everyday thinking, normal thinking, "Where did I leave my car keys?" thinking, I mean defensive thinking. Get your guard up from the get-go. *(He leans back.)* Now, I know you'll want to say, "Why not just think two steps ahead of her?" Trust me, that's practically impossible to do, since I have no idea which way she's going. And her opening barrage is no indication. For instance—

*(Lights come up C on JUDITH.)*

JUDITH *(tapping her foot)*. Just what did you tell my sister?  
*(Lights dim out on her.)*

HAYDEN. Well, the plain fact is I don't remember WHAT I said to her sister, nor which sister she was talking about. See, sometimes I just sort of tune them out. Did I say I can make women mad by not thinking? I meant by not listening. Guess I wasn't thinking when I said that. *(Perturbed.)* You SEE how confusing it can get?! Look, it's one of those

guy things; we all like to figure out things on our own, you know? That's why we don't like to read directions on anything we have to assemble or ask directions whenever we're driving someplace. *(He holds up an odd tool with several metal attachments.)* See this? I've had this for I don't know how long. And I'm going to hang on to it until I figure out what is it. Also, this is why I like to hang out here in the garage. I spend a lot of time here. It's got everything I need, just where I want it. I have my tool bench here with all my tools. *(He indicates out.)* Over there is my storage cabinets and files. And of course, my fishing boat and trailer, everything you'd expect to find in a garage ... except a car. Wait, where was I? Oh yeah. It's not just a matter of my not listening, it's that I speak when I shouldn't, now that I think of it. Like when we decided on what to do for Christmas. I say "we," what happened was this.

*(Lights comes up on JUDITH.)*

JUDITH. Hayden! Can you come in here a minute?

HAYDEN. Yes, dear. *(As HAYDEN enters the living room, the DR lights dim out.)* What'd I do now?

JUDITH *(sits on the couch)*. Nothing. *(She pats the area next to her.)* Really! *(A curious look.)* Don't you trust me, your own wife?

HAYDEN. Certainly, certainly. *(He sits cautiously.)* Now, what is it?

JUDITH. Well, I've been worried lately about Mom and Dad.

HAYDEN. Jack and Arlene? What'd THEY do now?

JUDITH. It's what they ALWAYS do. All they do lately is argue with each other constantly.

HAYDEN. Well hon', they've been married for over forty years; they've run out of all the things they agree on, so—

JUDITH. So?! So I've known a LOT of couples their age and older who never fight.

HAYDEN. Hon', those couples you know, their age or older, never fight in front of company. Your folks simply go ahead no matter who's around. They're what I call "equal opportunity arguers."

JUDITH (*a beat*). Can you at least TRY to help?

HAYDEN (*softening*). Judith. Look. (*He puts his arm around her.*) I just think you're making too much out of this. I don't think they fight any more than anyone else.

JUDITH (*turns to him*). Well, you're the only one. Both Carla and Beth have noticed it as well. We're all worried about them.

HAYDEN. Well, have you tried talking to them about it?

JUDITH. Oh, you know Mom; she'd automatically think we were poking our noses into something that's none of our business.

HAYDEN. Really? She doesn't mind poking her nose into OUR business. (*JUDITH looks at him.*) Wait—that's a whole 'nother argument. I guess you've already thought of having them go to some professional or other, you know, a marriage counselor.

JUDITH. No, that's out of the question. Dad would never pay for something like that. (*She looks at him.*) Unless you'd like to—

HAYDEN (*interrupting her*). I see what you mean, out of the question. (*He thinks.*) Look, why not try to come up with some way to ... to ... well, to find a way to ...

JUDITH. To what?

HAYDEN. I was trying to come up with another word for "referee."

JUDITH. You mean some way for us to iron out their problems without them knowing it?

HAYDEN (*proudly*). Sure, that's what I was trying to say.

JUDITH. Say, you might have something there. It would have to be all us girls doing it. BUT we'd need to have them over under some other pretense so Mom and Dad wouldn't catch on.

HAYDEN. Yeah, you could—wait. Have them over here?

JUDITH (*getting excited*). We could have the whole family over!

HAYDEN. No, I didn't mean—

JUDITH. Not just the girls, they might snap to that, but what about EVERYBODY! You know, the whole family!

HAYDEN. Judith—

JUDITH. And Christmas is just around the corner, too. Mom's been saying how much she used to look forward to Christmas like we used to have back when we were kids. (*She snaps her fingers.*) That's it. A Christmas party! For the whole family. You know, one of those old-fashioned family-style Christmas'. (*She leans over and kisses HAYDEN on the cheek.*) What a great idea you had! Thank you! (*She jumps over, goes to the phone and presses a few buttons.*)

HAYDEN (*panicky*). No, I—where are you going?

JUDITH (*into the receiver*). Beth? Me. We came up with a great idea about dealing with Mom and Dad. We're going to throw a Christmas party! Right, here at our house for the whole family! (*She looks over at HAYDEN.*) And it was Hayden's idea!

HAYDEN (*to himself*). Boy, that sure took a bad bounce there at the end ...

*(Lights black out.)*

## Scene 2

*(Lights come up DR. HAYDEN is once again standing in front of his work bench. It is later that afternoon.)*

HAYDEN. You ever get on a bus but find out too late it was going the wrong way? I do that a lot. And this one was what they used to call a “runaway.” It’s like I always never get the whole story from Judith about what’s really going on, you know? Well, sometimes it’s my own fault. This goes back to almost the very beginning. Classic example; a couple of years after we got married, the sisters were sitting around talking about their favorite songs. Turns out they were planning on what songs to play at Beth’s wedding reception. So, I come into the room and they’re saying stuff like how much they like songs like, “Isn’t It Romantic?” and “You Light Up My Life.” I thought they were just talking about their favorite tunes. Well, I chime in and say, “I’ve always liked ‘The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald.’” *(A pause.)* They still talk about that one. So WE decided ... notice I said, “WE” ... decided to have a Christmas party. Well, the next thing that happened was “the summit.” Beth and Carla come over with their husbands in tow to go coordinate their conspiracy.

*(Lights black out on HAYDEN and come up in the living room. BETH and CARLA are sitting on the sofa while JUDITH stands nearby.)*

BETH. I think it’s a wonderful idea!

CARLA. Just the thing!

JUDITH. It’ll be just like old times!

BETH. Getting everybody together—

JUDITH. The whole family!

CARLA. We haven't done that in years!

BETH. And it'll work great!

JUDITH. I know!

CARLA. We'll all have a great time!

JUDITH. Right!

*(A medium pause.)*

CARLA. What're we going to do?

JUDITH *(sits in the chair)*. Here's what I think. I'll get Mom and Dad to come stay with us here a couple of days earlier, you know, get Mom involved right away.

BETH. Good, she LOVES to plan things.

JUDITH. Right. What with the invites and decorating—

CARLA. And what to fix for dinner.

BETH. OH, that's what she'll love the most!

JUDITH *(thinking about this)*. Well, she can help—

CARLA. Help? This is Mom we're talking about; she'll take over and plan the whole menu!

BETH. No kidding.

JUDITH. Well, not the WHOLE dinner—

CARLA. Judy, you won't be able to get into your own kitchen!

*(CARLA and BETH both laugh uproariously.)*

JUDITH *(after the laughter subsides)*. I don't think I thought this through. *(Her eyes widen.)*

CARLA. Besides, like you said, it'll keep her mind on something else.



JUDITH. I guess.

BETH. And that's what this is all about, right?

CARLA. Right. And not on fighting with Dad.

*(A medium pause as it sinks on the sisters.)*

JUDITH, CARLA & BETH. DAD!

CARLA. What're we going to do with Dad?

JUDITH. Hey, let's just get the guys to take care of Dad.

Carla, you think Max will help out?

CARLA. Of course. *(Determined.)* He better!

JUDITH *(to BETH)*. What about Cliff?

BETH. Don't worry, you just worry about Mom and we'll get our husbands to do their part.

CARLA. No problem

*(Lights blackout on the living room and come up DR. CLIFF is sitting on the stool, holding the odd tool, while MAX and HAYDEN stand nearby.)*

MAX *(irate, to HAYDEN)*. What were you THINKING?!

CLIFF *(waving the tool at HAYDEN)*. Yeah, Hayden!

HAYDEN. ME?!

MAX. Oh, don't even try that innocent stuff; we heard this was all your idea.

CLIFF. That's ALL they can talk about!

HAYDEN. Guys, listen to me! This was NOT all my idea!

MAX. That's not what THEY think.

HAYDEN. Besides, what're YOU two complaining about?

It's just one party. And it's at OUR house!

MAX. Hayden, Christmas is a week away!

HAYDEN. So?

CLIFF. SO? So for all that time we have to listen to the wives go on and on about what WE need to do.

MAX. Or what we SHOULD'VE done!

CLIFF. Right. Well, at least Carla shouldn't be too bad about it?

MAX. What?

CLIFF. I mean, she's always so easy-going and takes things in stride and all.

MAX. Cliff, what're you talking about? She's MY WIFE! And, believe me, that's all just an act. At home she's—  
(HAYDEN and CLIFF lean in to him.)

HAYDEN (after a beat). She's what?

MAX. Nothing, never mind . . . and you didn't hear that from me.

CLIFF (holds up the tool). Say, just what IS this thing, anyway?

HAYDEN. Put that down! (CLIFF places the tool down.) I still don't see what the big deal is with you two?

MAX. What the big deal is? You KNOW they're going to stick us with Jack.

HAYDEN. Oh. Didn't think of that.

CLIFF. So, mister bright ideas—

CLIFF & MAX. What're we going to do with Jack?!

(Lights come up in the living room again.)

JUDITH. What ARE they going to do with Dad?

CARLA. Let them worry about that. And, listen, I know just what to say to Max to get him to do what I want him to do.

MAX. And I just KNOW what Carla's going to say, too.

CARLA & MAX. When was the last time I asked you to do something for the family!

CLIFF. Why does that sound so familiar?

BETH. I've used that one myself.

MAX. It used to be just us driving down to see Jack and Arlene, spend a couple of hours, exchange gifts, fa la la la and we were out of there! It was GREAT!

CARLA. I mean usually we all just drove down there, spend a couple of hours with Mom and Dad, gave them their gifts and that's all. It was TERRIBLE!

JUDITH. But we still need some plan, some timeline of things to do when Mom and Dad get here.

MAX. Hey. What if we just don't do it? (*The others look at him curiously.*) What if we just stand up to them? All of us.

CLIFF. Yeah. Present a united front! Right?

MAX (*loudly*). We can DO this! Yeah, after all are we just a bunch of cowards, afraid of our own wives?!

*(The noise draws the sister's attention. They all stand and look toward R.)*

CARLA & BETH (*yelling*). What's going on out there?!

MAX (*sheepishly*). Nothing, hon!

CLIFF (*same time as MAX*). Nothing ... my little baby cakes!

BETH. That's what I thought.

MAX (*after a beat, to CLIFF*). Baby cakes?

*(Lights black out on both areas.)*