You Can't Beat the House

A Comedy by Pat Cook

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STORY OF THE PLAY

"I've had trouble breaking into a house before but this is the first time I've had problems breaking OUT again!" So moans Merle to his partner, Howie. These two minor-league burglars have really met their match this time, it seems. They decided on a house only to find, after managing to get into the place, that it's up for sale and before they can leave, Conrad and Glenda, prospective buyers, show up. Merle figures they have two choices - either pretend to be real estate agents or beat it, making the buyers suspect them and call in the police. Merle begins to show the house while Howie ducks out to get the car. Now the REAL real estate agent shows up and Merle has to juggle the couple and the agent. Finally, as Merle gets rid of the her and is about to show the door to Conrad and Glenda, Howie arrives with the news that their car has been towed away. Suddenly a cop shows up, saying the police are looking for two suspicious characters in the neighborhood. Next in the parade of oddball characters is Conrad's secretary, then Glenda's mother, then her medium, Madame Zenobia. Oh, yeah! The place, it turns out, is haunted! This screwball comedy is one wisecrack after another and proves once again that "You Can't Beat the House."

Premiere Performance

"You Can't Beat the House" by Pat Cook was first produced on July 11, 2003, at the Festival Playhouse in Historic Olde Town, Arvada, Colorado. It was directed by Charles Joseph Ault with the following cast:
Merle - Charles J. Ault
Howie - Jim Hoover
Conrad Spears - John Kubin
Glenda Spears - Shelli Marks
Courtney Parfait - Juli Guyer
Officer Larraby - Arran Lappin
Lillian - Kristine Segura
Madame Zenobia - Donna Sweet Ault
Brittany Marie - Kimberly Horne
Fern Larraby - Jude Anderl

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 m, 6 w)

MERLE: An amiable but not very good burglar.

HOWIE: Merle's partner, who thinks with his heart.

CONRAD SPEARS: Young married man, given to arguing.

GLENDA SPEARS: Conrad's wife, a woman with a secret.

COURTNEY PARFAIT: A well-coifed real estate agent.

OFFICER MILO LARRABY: A not-too-bright police officer.

LILLIAN: Glenda's pushy mother.

MADAME ZENOBIA: A wise-cracking spiritual medium.

BRITTANY MARIE: Conrad's dumb secretary.

FERN LARRABY: Larraby's crabby mother.

Time: The present. Early evening.
Place: The living room of the Patterson's up-for-sale house.

SETTING

The setting for this little farce is the living room of a somewhat upscale home, obviously in a nicer neighborhood. There are paintings on the walls and large vases with flowing ferns around the room. There are three doors utilized in this floor plan. The first, or front door is located SL, which leads outside. The second door, just off USC, leads to the kitchen. SR of it is the closet. The third door, which leads to the bedrooms, is located SR. The furniture consists of a large couch, located DSL, which is book-ended by two small tables. There is a large wooden buffet located against the SR wall and a dinette set in the USR corner. The rest of the room is furnished with other smaller tables, bookshelves and knickknacks.

PROPS

Laundry bag with an article of clothing
Stack of flyers on the buffet
Business cards for Conrad and Courtney
Red bandanna for Howie
Purse with cell phone for Glenda
Purse for Lillian
Cell phone for Conrad
Dark glasses, handful of glitter, and a purse with a business card and remote control for Zenobia
Briefcase and papers for Brittany
Tray of sandwiches
Paper bag
Audio cassette player
Gun, pen and pad for Larraby

ACT I

(AT RISE: No one is in the room. After a slight pause, MERLE looks cautiously in through the SR door. After "casing the joint," he enters on tiptoe, carrying a large canvas bag. He then looks out the SR door.)

MERLE: *(Loud whisper.)* Okay, come on in. *(HE looks around again. Then seeing that no one has entered, he tries again, a little louder this time.)* Howie! Get IN here! I finally got that bedroom window open! Howie! *(HE looks out the door.)* Where ARE you! Howie! *(HOWIE casually enters through the front door. MERLE, not seeing him, continues.)* Where did you go? It took some doing but I did manage to persuade the window who was the boss and availed myself of the interiors. Howie! Howie, you moron, where have you - ? *(He pulls his head back and turns to HOWIE.)* Where'd you come from?

HOWIE: *(Smiling.)* Louisiana, originally.

MERLE: I mean how'd you get in here?

HOWIE: *(Indicating the front door.)* Walked through there. It weren't locked.

MERLE: Why didn't you tell me that before I spent fourteen minutes jimmying that bedroom window?

HOWIE: Aw shoot, Merle, you always take such pride in your work, I just couldn't bring myself to interrupt you.

MERLE: *(Proud.)* Thank you, Howie. *(Hand on his shoulder.)* Nice to see that my artistry isn't wasted on such as you.

HOWIE: *(Looking at the room.)* Is this a nice crib or what?

MERLE: *(Walking around.)* It is for a fact.

HOWIE: Look at those paintings! *(THEY move to a painting.)*

MERLE: Always a sign of a respectable lodging, in my book. Says a lot for the owners.

HOWIE: I used to be a painter, you know?

MERLE: Now that's a minor tidbit about your background I never knew. A painter, huh? You any good?

HOWIE: Shoot, I could do this whole room in three hours, two coats.

MERLE: Uh huh. *(HE shakes his head as if trying to clear it.)* Now, it's best we be about our business and take our leave.
HOWIE: What's first, do you think?
MERLE: *(Hands the bag to HOWIE.)* You check out in here and I'll see what's available in the bedrooms.
HOWIE: Sounds like a plan. Hey, how come you brought my laundry bag?
MERLE: That's your laundry bag?
HOWIE: How come you think there's my shirts and trousers in here? *(HE opens the bag and holds it under MERLE'S nose.)*
MERLE: *(Yanking HIS head away.)* WHOA! *(HOWIE closes the bag.)* You might decide against washing those and opt for burying them instead. Look, just find the silverware and whatever other marketable merchandise as you can. I'll see where they keep the credit cards and currency. *(HE tiptoes out the SR door.)*
HOWIE: *(Drops the bag by the couch.)* I'll give it my best shot. *(HE looks around the room.)* Lessee … If I was a high-priced item now where would I reside? *(HE moves to a large plant. He then calls off.)* What about the potted plants?
MERLE: *(Offstage.)* No.
HOWIE: There's mucho dinero in assorted decorative foliage.
MERLE: I told you a hundred times! No ferns!
HOWIE: Whatever. *(HE moves to the buffet.)* Silverware, come out, come out, where ever you are. *(HE opens a drawer.)* Hm. Empty. *(HE opens two more drawers.)* They's all empty. *(HE opens the bottom doors.)* There ain't nothing in here at all. *(HE closes the doors and finds the flyers on top of the bureau.)* What's this? *(HE reads the flyer to himself.)*
MERLE: This is a nice place, you know it?
HOWIE: *(Nodding.)* No kidding. Almost three thousand square feet, with four bedrooms, a study and a two-car garage.
MERLE: What?
HOWIE: Also, inside washer and dryer hook-ups, a butler's pantry and a deck with landscaping and a hot tub.

End of Freeview

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