

Open UP, Vice Squad



Carlton Gardner

CARLTON GARDNER

Open UP, Vice Squad!

A Very Short Story

Copyright © 2025 by Carlton Gardner

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.

First edition

This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy.

Find out more at reedsy.com

“A joke is an awkward thing. It is not like a game, where you have winners and losers. You only have to hear a joke once for it to stop being funny.”

— Neil Simon

Morning Wake-Up Knock!

During my college years, I had the bright idea of recording books on cassette tapes. It was actually a good idea, and the timing was right since eight-track tapes were being replaced with cassettes. I pursued my dream by recording a number of books. I was helped in this venture by my best friend, Callahan. In my humble opinion, he is the best reader ever. When he reads, he not only changes his voice but his facial expression for each character in the story. I have listened to numerous books on tape in the last few years, and I still think Cal is the best. Anyway, we were a team. He read, and I recorded and edited.

The only complication was that Cal also worked as a bartender and kept really late hours. One of my jobs was to wake Cal up so we could work on the recordings during the day. I would typically show up at his apartment around ten o'clock each morning to get him up. Since we didn't get paid for doing these recordings, we would typically grab some breakfast before getting started. Cal's apartment, which he shared with a guy named Benny, was in the attic of an old house in the Midtown area of Atlanta, Georgia.

OPEN UP, VICE SQUAD!

His room was all the way at the front of the attic, facing the street. Unfortunately, the door to the apartment was right in the middle of one of the sides. Keep in mind that we did not have cell phones back then, so there was no way for me to give him a call. To wake him up, I would literally have to pound on the door, and it usually took a while to arouse him. This was sort of a regular routine, and I just got used to it. Benny, his apartment mate, had a day job at one of the local banks and was always gone by the time I got there. Benny was also a marijuana user, or more commonly, a Pothead.

One notable day, I showed up as usual and wasted no time in pounding on the door. I was not really paying attention to anything at the time. For some odd, impulsive reason, thinking I was funny, I added a loud shout to my next set of pounds, “VICE SQUAD, OPEN UP!” I actually repeated this a number of times. As I said before, it could take a while to arouse Cal, so I was not expecting an instant response. I finally heard some timid steps coming down the steps. I figured Cal was hanging on to the handrail and trying to wipe sleep out of his eyes. To help wake him, I pounded again with the same shout, “VICE SQUAD, OPEN UP!”

The door slowly opened, and a guy I had never seen before peeked out from the other side. He had very long and not very clean hair, along with a full beard. I knew Benny, slightly, and this was not him. I had moved to enter the door as soon as it started to open, believing it to be Cal, so I just kept going. What happened was totally unintentional and certainly not planned. It really was not my fault at all. As I entered and walked up the stairs with this guy following me, I asked him, “How’s it going?” No response. When I got to the top, I found Benny. Playing on my vice squad joke, I looked at Benny and stated

that I had heard somebody up here had been reported reading a Playboy. It wasn't that clever, but all I could come up with at the time. The funny thing was that both Benny and this other guy looked like a deer in headlights. Their eyes were wide open. I asked if Cal was there, and Benny shook his head, NO. I don't think either of them said a word the entire time I was there. I told Benny to tell Cal I had dropped by, and I exited without a care in the world.

Okay, obviously something was terribly wrong. Only I didn't see it. Cal called me later, laughing hysterically, and said I couldn't come over for a while. He explained that Benny and his buddy had flushed all their pot down the toilet because of my little prank. It really wasn't my fault. How was I to know? I do remember the water draining through the pipes as I walked up the stairs, but I just figured nature had called one or both of them. Needless to say, Benny and I were never going to be good friends after that. I heard from Cal that Benny was going to make me pay for what they had flushed, but Cal let him know it would not be a good idea.

Note:

Just a short follow-up on this misunderstanding. I have told this story many times and it always brings a chuckle to me and usually my listeners. But not everyone finds it funny. My wife, in particular, gives me a sour look and suggests that I refrain from telling it. Evidently, pot, back in the day, was really expensive, and paychecks were sort of small. It hit home for her. In fact, I probably shouldn't be posting this story at all.



About the Author

A Long Overdue Apology

Looking back on this story, especially from the perspective of someone who grew up in the '60s and '70s, I honestly should have been more clued into the world of 'mind-altering substances.' Maybe I was and just don't remember! At the time of this particular incident, I was married, working, and balancing life as a student on a track scholarship at Georgia Tech. My head was pretty buried in my own lane, so to speak.

I can see now, with absolute clarity, that what happened was far from 'nice,' and a heartfelt apology was definitely in order. While it truly was unintentional – a genuine case of cluelessness meeting unfortunate timing – the impact on Benny and his friend was significant, and that's something I deeply regret.

So, to Benny, if by some wild chance you're reading this, please know: **I am so incredibly sorry.** That prank was thoughtless, and it absolutely won't happen again. **Peace, Brother!**

Carlton Gardner

You can connect with me on:
⌚ <https://carltongardner.com>

