

Open House

Passage 1

(align:"<==>")+(box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====") [The floor was cold enough to hurt Jackie's feet. Sitting at the kitchen table, she kept her feet moving by poking at the peeling lino. The heater was on, of course, the dial spun all the way around. There was at least another half hour until the central heating unit was ready to send its trickle of warm air through the vents, and another hour before the temperature would change.

A few times she'd tried getting out of bed earlier, and switching on the heating before returning to the covers until it was warm. The habit never took; it had left her groggy and irritable for the day, quick to snap at everyone. She'd decided to bear with the cold, for the extra sleep and the emotional balance.]

(align:"<==")+(box:"====XXX") [[Next->Passage 2]]

(set:\$tension to 0)

Passage 2

(align:"<==>")+(box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====") [Unfortunately it left her with moments like this, sitting in an icy fog and slowly picking at breakfast. She had no appetite in the morning - another victim of the cold. She stared at the bowl in front of her, her mind plodding through the day's plan.](align:"<==")+

(box:"====XXX") [Applications were sitting on her desktop, not quite ready to send off.

The dream was to get out of the warehouse and find work that used her degree.

There were family and friends to respond to, plans to propose and narrow down.

She had to make appointments at the dentist and the vet, get the mechanic to check out the scraping noise...

And if there was enough time, she should start that book Mum gave her at Christmas.

And yeah, cleaning, always sitting at the end of the list.

Jackie knew there'd only be so much she'd get done before work.]

(align:"<==")+(box:"====XXX") [[Next->Passage 3]]

Passage 3

(align:"<==>")+(box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====") [The place was a bit of a mess - figuratively as well as physically. From the kitchen she could see the untidy shapes of the living room. She could assert that that wasn't entirely her fault. In this share house

of three barely-linked people, there were always things turning up, going missing. That said, with both her housemates away it was hers to deal with. It was likely that one would come back -- Emily had left for Sydney the day before, to visit her parents -- while the other was a mystery. A few weeks ago Scott had, as usual, gone out for Friday night but, unlike usual, didn't stumble back in come Monday morning. After, there had been a week of tentative searching through their loose mutuals -- apparently he was out there somewhere, but no one had actually seen him. Different accounts placed him on benders, gone camping, crashing with a fling-turned-lover, or even in jail. Messages and calls went through, but there was no answer, no response. The situation was in an uneasy state of 'wait-and-see'.]

(align:"<==")+(box:"====XXX")[[Next->Passage 4]]

Passage 4

(align:"<==>")+(box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====") [Theirs had always been a relationship of convenience. Scott had been in one of Jackie's undergrad classes, and Emily was the result of a Facebook group for finding house mates. They worked alright together, all things considered. They rarely argued, and the three of them got along in at least a personable way. Jackie was a little worried about Scott, but he had a way of keeping to himself. Being out every weekend left surprisingly little time to make friends. In any case, the various stacks and piles massing in the living room loomed like storm clouds for an argument on leaving shit lying around.

That was a problem for when - or if - the three were ever in the same room again, Jackie thought.]

(align:"<==")+(box:"====XXX")[[Next->Passage 5]]

Passage 5

(align:"<==>")+(box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====") [Interrupting her thoughts, the doorbell rang. It was a surprise, certainly. No one rang the doorbell here and Jackie approached the front door with curiosity.]

(align:"<==")+(box:"====XXX")[[Next->Passage 6]]

Passage 6

(align:"<==>")+(box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====") [The frosted glass of the door showed several blurred shapes, but Jackie couldn't tell much else. On opening the door, she was met by three faces, all sharing a smile that was slightly stiff, slightly awkward.

'Good morning, it's Jackie, right?' said one of the men. He was more dressed up than the

others, wearing a dark suit. He put his hand out to shake and Jackie took it, trying to hide her confusion.

'Yeah, that's me. Sorry, I wasn't expecting... anything today. Was there something I can help you with?' Jackie replied.

The smile on the man's face faded. Jackie noticed the folder he carried in his off hand, filled with what looked like pictures and print-outs.]

(align:"<==")+ (box:"====XXX") [[Next->Passage 7]]

Passage 7

(align:"<==")+ (box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====") ["Well, I'm Cameron, your agent from Melbourne Family Real Estate, and this is Michael and Laura, the property owners. I hope you remembered today's inspection. I sent an email a month ago." he said. Jackie felt a note of pointed accusation in his tone.

"I... don't think I received anything. Maybe one of the others got it and forgot to bring it up?" she said. The couple were exchanging small looks and raised eyebrows.

"It was sent to all tenants. It was notice for today's inspection," Cameron said, gesturing to the owners to move inside. "There's a bit to deal with today, so if we can get moving."

Jackie wasn't sure how to take the moment. Before she could say anything in protest, Cameron stepped through the doorway. He walked by her and peered down the hallway. He made to walk into the living room through the doorway on the right. If there was a time to protest, Jackie had to do it now.]

(align:"<==")+ (box:"====XXX") [[Next->Passage 8]]

Passage 8

(align:"<==")+ (box:"=XXX")+ (text-size:1.5)+ (text-color:#7FBF3F) [[But there wasn't much she could do..->Passage 9 - Acquiesce]]

(align:"<==")+ (box:"XXX")+ (text-size:1.5)+ (text-color:#B43A3C) [[Of course she wasn't about to let this go..->Passage 10 - Protest]]

Passage 10 - Protest

(align:"<==")+ (box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====") ["Come on, this is kinda bullshit. There's no way all three of us would have missed an email. So I'm pretty sure you shouldn't just be walking in like this." Jackie was bad with confrontation, she felt her voice start to shake as she went on.

The agent took her outburst in stride. He turned back from the doorway, smiling

insincerely.

"We've satisfied our requirement to provide notice. We also have several private buyers that are coming through today and the property doesn't look like its in the expected state." He beckoned towards the messy living room.

"Sorry about this. We didn't really want to impose anymore than we had to," said Laura, entering and approaching Jackie. She had a soft voice, and Jackie felt like at least the regret in her voice was sincere.

"I guess it's not worth making a fuss over...," Jackie said.

"Now if there wasn't any cleaning done...," the agent said as he found the switch for the living room. "We have an hour," he said, checking his watch, "before our first arrives, so we can at least get some things put away by then." Jackie could help, if only to finally check cleaning off her own list.]

(align:"<==")+ (box:"XXX====")[[Help (Play Bitsy Section)->Bitsy - Cleaning the Living Room]]

(align:"<==")+ (box:"====XXX")[[Leave Them To It (Skip)->Passage 11]]

(set:\$tension to (\$tension+3))

Passage 11

(align:"<==>")+ (box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====") [The kitchen wasn't too dirty, so Jackie wasn't going to go out of her way and clean it. The table, however, was in full view of the living room, where the agent was shoving things inside cupboards. It was awkward, at the very least. She grabbed her bowl and went to hole up in her room.]

(align:"<==")+ (box:"====XXX")[[Next->Passage 12]]

Passage 13

(align:"<==>")+ (box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====") ["It was my grandparent's originally. Nearly sixty years ago I think. This was their bedroom, so I never really got to see inside it," he said. He stood just inside the doorway. It was a small room, you immediately saw everything there was to see. Still, Jackie could see that it held him. "Oh wow. I knew it was an old house, but I didn't know it was that old," she said. "Yeah, it's a bit of a relic. Just a few years older than my dad," he said, smiling, "I love using that line on him. Sorry, I'll stop being weird. I just wanted a final look." "Yeah, I guess I get it, it has to be an important place for your family." "But everything changes," he said, "my parents have moved north to the tropics and now we're leaving the country for work. Very different times..."]

(align:"<==")+ (box:"====XXX")[[Next->Passage 14]]

Passage 12

(align:"<==>")+(box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====") [As Jackie walked down the hallway, she noticed a door was open. It was Scott's room, which had been closed since he had disappeared. It had always been so full that Jackie wasn't sure how Scott moved around safely. A desk piled with books and paper, his clothes spilling out of both a standing wardrobe and several plastic storage boxes that took up most of the floor. Underneath the fabrics were various lumps and shapes. Jackie could see one of the owners, Michael, inside. It was going too far, entering someone's bedroom like that. She stepped up to the doorway, thinking of a way to interrupt him politely. He noticed her, as he was looking around the room.

"Sorry, I know how it looks," he said, "but this is a very nostalgic room for me. The whole house is, really."]

(align:"<==")+(box:"====XXX") [[Next->Passage 13]]

Passage 14

(align:"<==>")+(box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====") [Jackie considered the timing for a moment.

"How did you get the house then, if you don't mind me asking?" she said.

"Well, my grandma passed, and then not long after my parents moved to Queensland. It wasn't going to work for Dad to keep an eye on the place," he said. He motioned that he was leaving the room. "Dad sold a construction business that he'd built up, so work wasn't a problem either. It was a very gracious gift."

Jackie wondered what Scott would say if he found out who was the original owner of his room. She wondered if it would be funny or morbid to tell him. Michael seemed nice. but she couldn't help feeling envious of his luck.

"I wanted to say sorry again, about the mix-up and the inconvenience today is. I know it's a worrying time in the rental market...", he said. Jackie felt like he stopped himself short of saying more.]

(align:"<==")+(box:"====XXX") [[Next->Passage 15]]

Passage 15

(align:"<==")+(box:"=XXX")+(text-size:1.5)+(text-color:#7FBF3F) ["Thanks for the concern Michael."->Passage 16.2 - Accept]]

(align:"<==")+(box:"XXX")+(text-size:1.5)+(text-color:#B43A3C) ["I mean, pity doesn't make it any easier."->Passage 16.1 - Rebuff]]

Passage 17

(align:"<==>")+(box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====") [By the time Jackie set her bowl down at her desk, it felt like she'd been up for hours. She thought of looking back through her emails. Perhaps if there was some sort of evidence there, she could storm back out and shove it in the agent's face. A shit idea all round, when the three of them were already comfortable roaming around the entire property.

Jackie realised she was holding herself quite tensely -- her teeth were clenched tight. There was something about being alone, about being walled into her room by implication, about the house suddenly being claimed like this. She felt unnecessary in her own bedroom. She didn't really want to dwell on this. The day was already shaping up badly. She stood back up, leaving her breakfast again, and walled to the bathroom.]

(align:"<==")+(box:"====XXX") [[Next->Passage 18]]

Passage 18

(align:"<==>")+(box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====") [She felt a measure of relaxation as she washed her hands, then carefully towelled them dry. She wanted to shower, but realised that would be another frustration for the three outside. This realisation brought the irritation back.

As she turned to leave, she noticed that through the mirror mounted above the sink, she was able to see the agent as he paced around the backyard. Backyard was a generous term for the concrete carport that bookended the narrow block, but it sufficed. From this angle, the bathroom was a great place for looking down anonymously.

The agent was animated, gesturing wildly with one hand as he held his phone to his ear with the other. Jackie was curious. His body language showed real frustration. She leant by the window, opening it further to eavesdrop.]

(align:"<==")+(box:"====XXX") [[Next->Passage 19]]

Passage 19

(align:"<==>")+(box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====") ["Yes, I know. I know," he said, with growing emphasis on each word. "I can't get out there at lunch, because I'm not at the office today."

He paced in a short, tight rhythm. "I'll try to get it after I'm done here, but I'm not sure when that will be. And it will take as long as it takes." The person on the other end of the line didn't like his tone. Jackie didn't either. She thought she could hear the tinny voice all the way up here.

"It's a sale, I work with rentals," he said, like he was explaining to a child, "and it's

the difference between paying for the wedding and begging our parents for the money. And I can guarantee, the longer it takes to find a buyer, the more chances someone else at the agency swoops in."

Ah, Jackie thought, that paints a clear enough picture. She'd had her fill of Cameron's relationship problems.]

(align:"<==")+ (box:"====XXX") [[Next->Passage 20]]

Passage 20

(align:"<==")+ (box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====") [Finally, she finished her breakfast. Any plan she'd had for the day was fully derailed. Looking around herself, she aimlessly imagined what the room would have looked like in the 60s.

She had her computer, so there was certainly something she could try and do. The idea came to her of figuring out the price of the house. What if she could go out there and tell them to leave her property. The calculators she found online were unhelpful to her daydreaming. The jargon was just as bad for her fantasies. Looking up loan structures, credit scores and stamp duty - she might as well go out to drinks with a crowd of Big Four interns.

Jackie could hear conversation in the hallway outside her door. She thought it didn't quite sound like Cameron, or the owners.]

(align:"<==")+ (box:"====XXX") [[Next->Passage 21]]

Bitsy - Cleaning the Living Room

<iframe src="./bitsy/embed/index.html" style="width:100%;height:100%;"></iframe>

(align:"<==")+ (box:"====XXX") [[Next->Passage 12]]

Passage 9 - Acquiesce

(align:"<==")+ (box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====") [Jackie felt helpless. She had no idea what had happened with the email, but she wasn't comfortable making a conflict out of the situation.

"Sorry about this. We didn't really want to impose anymore than we had to," said Laura, entering and approaching Jackie. She had a soft voice, and Jackie felt like at least the regret in her voice was sincere.

"So I can imagine there wasn't any cleaning done...," the agent said as he found the switch for the living room. "We have an hour," he said, checking his watch, "before our first arrives, so we can get some things put away by then."

"Would you be able to take anything of yours from the shared areas, Jackie, or at least give us a hand tidying up?" Cameron said.]

(align:"<==")+ (box:"XXX====") [[Yes (Play Bitsy Section)->Bitsy - Cleaning the Living Room]]

(align:"<==")+ (box:"====XXX") [[No (Skip)->Passage 11]]

3

Passage 21

(align:"<==>")+ (box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====") [Jackie opened her door enough to see the new arrival. Another couple, maybe young thirties, similar age to Michael and Laura. Everyone was shaking hands and greeting each other in the living room. It wasn't spotless but it didn't seem to distract anyone from their niceties.

Jackie didn't care to see the tour that was about to take place, but she couldn't help overhearing their introductions.

"One of the current tenants is home today, but we should be able to show you the extent of the block and the non-private rooms," Cameron said. The new couple nodded politely, before the group began to file through the kitchen, towards the rear of the house.]

(align:"<==")+ (box:"====XXX") [[Next->Passage 22]]

Passage 22

(align:"<==>")+ (box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====") [For the remainder of the morning, Jackie made her best effort at crafting resumes, cover letters and expressions of interest. It took something to put on the costume of the eager, sincere applicant. Well worth it if it works, she told herself. Pick-packing had seen her through a decent few years, but it had become too monotonous recently. Change was something to get used to, she thought, something to practise.

On sending the last of her several emails, she stretched and went to the kitchen for water. She had forgotten, for a moment, what was happening outside her bedroom door. Like walking into the room when your parents have friends over, she stepped into the middle of the kitchen as the inspection group moved through.]

(align:"<==")+ (box:"====XXX") [[Next->Passage 23]]

Passage 23

(align:"<==>")+(box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====") [It was a different couple again, Jackie thought, but also young, also politely smiling.

"This is Jackie, one of the tenants," Cameron said by way of introduction. The prospective buyers murmured greetings but didn't shift their attention from Cameron's lead. Jackie excused herself, stepping around them to get a glass, then the water.

"It's very well-located -- transport, freeway access, schools and shops. It's a little quieter on this side as well, which I think is a bonus," Cameron continued.

"Thanks for showing us around today," the woman said. "There's a fair bit to think about with an older place like this, but we're glad we've seen it in person."

"You're always welcome, I know how much you'll need to discuss, so good luck," Cameron laughed.

"We might be a little crazy; can you believe we're doing our wedding at the same time?" the man said, and the group politely laughed in reply. Jackie could that she was ignored. She could slip back around unnoticed, but the topic of weddings gave her an idea.]

(align:"<==")+(box:"====XXX") [[Next->Passage 24]]

Passage 24

(align:"<==>")+(box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====") [She still remembered the way Cameron had brushed past her earlier...]

(align:"<==")+(box:"XXX=")+(text-size:1.5)+(text-color:#B43A3C) [[Passage 25.2 - Jab<- She could take a veiled jab at Cameron...]]

(align:"<==")+(box:"=X")+(text-size:1.5)+(text-color:#7FBF3F) [[Passage 25.1 - Slide<-Or just let it slide.]]

2

4

Passage 25.1 - Slide

(align:"<==>")+(box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====") [Jackie gave the happy couple a quick smile, and congratulated them before moving around the group. It didn't do to twist the knife in, Jackie thought. It sounded like Cameron had his plate full already.

She returned to her room, and began the job hunting that would fill the time before work.]

(align:"<==")+(box:"=X") [[Passage 26 <- Next]]

Passage 25.2 - Jab

(align:"<==>")+(box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====")["Can I just say congratulations to the two of you then?" Jackie said, chiming in with a smile.

"You're amazing, going after both at the same time. Oh, and it's great that you're not putting it on your parents -- getting them to fork out for your big party."

Jackie thought she saw Cameron's face turn down into a frown, but she didn't want to give up her act. She quickly returned to her room, continuing her earlier job hunting.]

(align:"<==")+(box:"=X")[[Passage 26 <- Next]]

(set:\$tension to (\$tension+3))

Passage 26

(align:"<==>")+(box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====")[Jackie's alarm went off around 2:30, telling her it was time to get ready for work. As she walked down the hallway towards the bathroom, she ran into Cameron and the couple.

"We're finished for the day, Jackie," Laura said. "Hope you have a lovely evening."

"Same to you, I hope it was a productive day all around," Jackie replied.

Michael took one last look over the living room, while Cameron pulled his phone out, a call already sending it vibrating.

"I hope this is the last communication mishap we have. I'll probably see you for the next routine inspection. All the best Jackie," Cameron said. The three left, closing the front door behind them. Jackie went eagerly to her shower, finally alone.]

(align:"<==")+(box:"=X")[[Passage 27 <- Epilogue]]

Passage 27

(if:\$Tension is 0)[In the next week Scott and Emily return. They commiserate with Jackie's experience, and no one is able to find the email that was supposedly sent.

Scott moves in with his new partner within the month. The property sells, and settlement takes a few months. Cameron passes along the news that the new owners live a few states over, and if they have plans for the house, it won't be for years.

Jackie's job hunting pays off - from pick packing at a warehouse to an internship with a government communications division.]

(if:\$Tension is 3)[In the next week Scott and Emily return. They commiserate with Jackie's experience, and no one is able to find the email that was supposedly sent.

Scott moves in with his new partner within the month. The property sells, and settlement takes a few months. Cameron passes along the news that the new owners are happy to leave the property as it is, though they'll have plans for it eventually. Jackie resolves to

move on anyway, if the chance presents itself.

Jackie's job hunting pays off - from pick packing at a warehouse to an internship with a government communications division.]

(if:\$Tension is 6)[In the next week Scott and Emily return. They commiserate with Jackie's experience, and no one is able to find the email that was supposedly sent.

Scott moves in with his new partner within the month. The property sells, and settlement takes a few months. Cameron passes along the news that the new owners are looking to redevelop as soon as possible. The brick single-storey will be replaced by a set of units. Emily and Jackie begin their searches.

Jackie's job hunting pays off - from pick packing at a warehouse to an internship with a government communications division.]

(if:\$Tension is 9)[In the next week Scott and Emily return. They commiserate with Jackie's experience, and no one is able to find the email that was supposedly sent.

Scott moves in with his new partner within the month. The property sells, and settlement takes a few months. In the meantime, the routine inspection identifies a slew of issues across the house. Emily and Jackie both agree to end the lease and go their own ways.

Jackie's job hunting pays off - from pick packing at a warehouse to an internship with a government communications division.]

1

Passage 16.2 - Accept

(align:"<==>")+(box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====")["Thanks for the concern Michael," Jackie said, "it's been a strange morning for sure. I hope it's bringing you good memories to be here then."

"Thank you Jackie," Michael said, "I'll try and get back to cleaning then."]

(align:"<==")+(box:"====XXX")[[Next->Passage 17]]

Passage 16.1 - Rebuff

(align:"<==>")+(box:"=XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=====")["I mean, pity doesn't make it any easier," Jackie said. Michael's expression tightened, and Jackie felt a little bad for lashing out at him. Oh well, she thought, he wasn't losing out for the situation. Just her.

"I'll let you get back to things. Good luck with the buyers," Jackie said before excusing herself.]

(align:"<==")+(box:"====XXX")[[Next->Passage 17]]

(set:\$tension to (\$tension+3))