We hope they will be able to come to modulating to, and learn from, differences. ‘The hope is that students will be accommodating to, and learn from, differences between themselves and their roommates. We hope [they] will be able to come to mutual agreement about how to share their space and that arriving at mutual respect for differences in opinion or worldview will be an essential part of a Harvard College education.’ When clashes arise, Torrance says, ‘We don’t have a set procedure’ because ‘Every situation is different and, like other issues that arise for students, the College handles each on a case-by-case basis. Those working with students, whether in the Yard or the Houses, try to help them develop the skills to make their needs known, and to listen carefully to those with whom they live, and we listen, too. We then work with students to address the issues that they have identified.’

In John Updike’s short story ‘The Christian Roommates,’ the protagonist, a Harvard freshman saddled with a flamboyantly sanctimonious roommate, ‘enjoyed all the roommates, whatever the bond between them—geography, race, ambition, physical size—for between himself and his eccentric roommate, a vegetarian who spins thread in his spare time in imitation of Gandhi, he could see no link except forced cohabitation.’ The roommate’s habits drive the stolidly Midwestern protagonist to ‘the verge of going to the student clinic, which had a department called Mental Health.’ Eventually, though, the roommates ‘finished out the year sitting side by side at their desks as amiably as two cramped passengers who have endured a long bus trip together.’ Both the protagonist’s midyear frustration and the roommates’ eventual reconciliation ring true; most of my anonymous informants (‘Becky’ being a notable exception) remember reaching a rapprochement with their roommates. ‘Never really completely adjusted, but I guess it was easier than I expected,’ one said; another overlooked her roommate’s conflicting personality and “got along just fine, because we were both messy.’ A third says diplomatically, ‘I guess I had to learn how to live civilly with people who are not friends per se.” This is the sort of lesson impressed by a double’s forced intimacy.

When I arrived in my Weld suite two Septembers ago, I made the same observation my charge’s well-groomed mother would later make to me—there were only four bedrooms for five girls—and came to much the same unhappy conclusion: however the rooms were apportioned, it wouldn’t be quite fair. And just as my charge’s mother would be, my new roommates cursed with n bedrooms (where n is the number of roommates) push a bed into the common room to make ersatz singles.

I know that not all bedroom-sharing arrangements are felicitous. Single-prefering friends who have insisted upon anonymity are quick to cite doubles’ disadvantages, which include: ‘Smells. First hamster, then pickled feet;’ ‘Getting annoyed at the silliest things;’ and ‘My roommate (don’t tell) taking forever to turn off his alarm in the morning. I’m a really light sleeper, so I would wake up the second it went off and by the time he turned it off I was completely awake...and he always [set his alarm to wake] up earlier than me.’

An informant who requested the nom de confession Becky Sharp bitterly remembers a freshman-year roommate whose sins included “taking up too much space, putting her rubbish on my bureau, refusing to take out the rubbish and recycling bin, and, crème de la crème, pilfering chocolates and Teddy Grahams off and from my desk”—this last offense “finally” squelched with the offering of a single Reese’s peanut-butter cup “with a piece of paper emblazoned with the plaintive and reproachful ‘enjoy.’” Among her roommate’s less specific sins, “Becky” recalls, were “just the mere squandering and flaunting of wealth.” Her sophomore year, the luckless “Becky” roomed with a young woman whose faults included “commandeering the room arrangement, too much intimacy with boyfriend in room, irregular hours,” and “unthinking rudeness ranging from unapologetic banging on the door at seven and “unthinking rudeness ranging from unapologetic banging on the door at seven 0'clock on a Saturday morning, or leaving a cup of caramel macchiato to spoil and fester for several days on her desk” to “addressing one in baby talk with much horrific cooing.”

Especially during freshman year, when the freshman Dean’s Office assigns roommates, personality clashes can make living in a double uncomfortable. Assistant dean of freshman Wendy Torrance explains, “The hope is that students will be accommodating to, and learn from, differences between themselves and their roommates. We hope [they] will be able to come to mutual agreement about how to share