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Shackers

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It's snowing like crazy at 10 p.m. when Sarah Spotts finishes her exam. She drives home without noticing the other cars as they fishtail and spin their tires. Sarah focuses mechanically on the road in front of her, simply keeping the car's tires lined up with the dual paths already worn in the snow.

One thought plays over and over in her head: Levi had better not still be in my parking space. Levi had better not still be parked in my parking space. She pulls into the parking lot, and sure enough, Levi's car is in her spot.

Levi is Sarah's roommate's boyfriend, which wouldn't be a big deal, except he's taken this relationship to the next level and invited himself to move into Sarah's apartment. There are a lot of guys (and girls) like Levi. He watches your TV, lies on your couch, and drinks your beer, regardless of whether or not his girlfriend is even there. As their unwilling roommates know well, these unofficial roommates seem to always be home—except when it's time to pay the bills.

When Sarah signed the lease on this apartment with her three friends last April, she couldn't have imagined things turning out this badly. Sarah, Katie Steinkamp, Alanna Shay, and Kim Schaefer became friends during their first year living in the dorms. Moving off-campus together seemed like the perfect idea. The apartment was exactly what they were looking for. Everyone would have their own bedroom after sharing a room in the dorms.

Set to begin their lease on August 1, Alanna, sophomore in athletic training, announced on the Fourth of July that her boyfriend of three years, Levi, was also moving in. "She never asked us," said Sarah, junior in business. "She was just like, 'Levi is going to move in, isn't that exciting?'" Although she had reservations, Sarah agreed to the arrangement because she was concerned about ruining her friendship with Alanna.

And for the first few months things went okay. But slowly small grievances started to take larger significance. For one, five people now live in their apartment, but rent still only gets split four ways. Also, Levi's name is not on the lease, so to keep from paying over-occupancy fines, the roommates have to keep Levi a secret. "If I was in a situation like that," Sarah said, "I would go out of my way to be considerate."

But Levi has done just the opposite. He leaves dirty dishes and beer cans all over the living room.

He drinks the beer the women buy for themselves and leaves leftover food sit out for weeks at a time. Of two available drawers in the bathroom, he claimed one solely for himself. And when he recently bought a car, he claimed one of the four apartment parking spaces for himself. The one closest to their apartment, of course.

"We each have cars," said Sarah. "So now one of us either has to park on the street or in the overflow lot, which is over a block away. We've asked him not to [park in our spots], but he works nine to five so he gets home everyday before us and takes the spot in the lot closest to the apartment."

Tonight is no exception. As Sarah left for her test she asked Levi to move his car, which was already parked in the spot out front of their apartment. Levi looked up from the TV and shrugged. Now as Sarah pulls into the lot, she sees Levi's car still there quietly collecting snowflakes on its hood and roof. The overflow lot is full, so Sarah parks on the street. She's lucky tonight to find a spot, but fears that tomorrow morning she'll find herself plowed in. On other
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When picking roommates, some students got more than they bargained for. Nights she parks in the overflow lot and has to walk the block back to her apartment in the dark.

"I think the biggest problem is nothing fazes him," said Katie, sophomore in child and family services. "He really just doesn't care." When the women try to confront him, he either shrugs it off or uses defensive comebacks. Once, Sarah confronted him about leaving used condoms lying on top of tissues in the bathroom garbage can. "He was like, 'It's no big deal. I see your tampons.'"

Beyond these problems, living with a couple is also irritating. "I hate how they're always calling each other babe," said Katie. Sarah laughs, doing an imitation. "Babe this, babe that. 'Hey babe, whatcha cookin'? Baby, you're home!'"

But even this can often be too much for the roommates to bear. "There are times when I open the door and think to myself, Please let them be in their room because I cannot deal with them right now," Sarah said.

Sarah and Katie's experience with the surprise addition to their household is not an uncommon one. Colette Ryder-Hall, graduate student in English, spent all her undergrad years in situations like Sarah and Katie's. In six years, she had 14 roommates and seven 'roommate-in-laws.'

"They were fully functioning members of our household," Colette said. "They watched all their favorite shows on our TV, recovered fromental surgery and snowboarding injuries on our living room couch, and had their moms call them at our house instead of their own."

Although not paying the cable bill or rent, the boyfriends and girlfriends of Colette's roommates had keys to the apartment and often left half their wardrobe and grooming supplies at their 'second house.' "Generally I didn't mind," Colette said, accepting 'roommate-in-laws' as a regular part of the student housing territory.

But there were some incidents that went beyond the bounds of common decency. She remembers when her mom visited and stayed at her apartment while Colette was in class. One of Colette's roommates and her 'creepy, greasy-looking long-term live-in boyfriend' decided it would be a good idea to have loud, bed-banging-against-the-wall, screaming-names-and-sexual-orders, scary sex. Colette's mom denies to this day that she noticed, but Colette's other roommate, whose bedroom was on the other side of the apartment, said the sex was so loud that it woke her up.

Another one of Colette's roommates had a boyfriend who lived several hours away, so when he came to visit, he stayed for a while. He was around so much that when the couple began discussing marriage, the boyfriend said whenever he thought about their life together, he pictured Colette there too. Although this may sound sweet, the couple had some serious door-slamming, obscenity-flinging, hour-long fights that Colette couldn't escape. On more than one occasion, she considered taking her tent and sleeping out in the field next to the building.

But the only thing Katie and Sarah can do is regret their permissiveness. If they would have known what they were getting into, they would have never let Levi move in. "You have to start putting your foot down right away," Sarah said. Sarah and Katie aren't sure yet what they'll do next year for housing. They would still like to live with Alanna since Levi plans to move back home. But they're worried they could end up with another Fourth of July surprise.

After six years of falling asleep to the sounds of weird giggling and rhythmic thumping coming through the bedroom walls, Colette came up with a different solution: the one bedroom apartment. "It's nice to know I won't have to intimately witness traumatic break-ups and weird mating rituals."