

The Roommates

Henry Cook had shared many classes with Nhak Bun, an émigré from Cambodia, during his senior undergraduate year at the local commuter college. The two men got along well, and when they discovered they were both going to attend the same medical school, they made arrangements to share a dormitory room together.

During their first week at medical school, the roommates studied together, sympathized with each other's problems, and gave each other moral support.

Then one evening Henry went back to his room early to study, and Nhak attended a campus recital. Henry was sitting with his feet propped up on his desk when his roommate returned. Being very comfortable and a little sleepy, Henry just waved hello and went back to his reading. Much to his surprise, Nhak left their room and did not return. The next day, a staff member packed up Nhak's belongings and removed them, telling Henry that Nhak had asked to be relocated.

Henry was shocked and at a loss to explain what had happened. Can you enlighten him?

Possible Explanations

- (1) Nhak's feelings were hurt because Henry did not ask him whether he had enjoyed the concert.
(Turn to page 111.)
- (2) Nhak had just found out he had failed the last examination he and Henry had taken, and he was so ashamed of himself that he could no longer face his roommate.
(Turn to page 106.)
- (3) Henry's failure to accompany his roommate to the recital was interpreted as a rejection of their relationship.
(Turn to page 116.)
- (4) Cambodian etiquette says exposing the soles of one's feet to view is an intolerable offense to the individual who sees them.
(Turn to page 113.)

From page 111

For The Roommates, you chose Answer No. 1

Nhak's feelings were hurt because Henry did not ask him whether he had enjoyed the concert.

Cambodians, like many Southeast Asians, tend to appreciate scrupulously good manners, so Nhak is probably suffering from injured feelings. But there is a more serious issue in this situation. Go back to page 37 and try again.

From page 106

For The Roommates, you chose Answer No. 2

Nhak had just found out he had failed the last examination he and Henry had taken, and he was so ashamed of himself that he could no longer face his roommate.

There is nothing in the episode about an examination. Return to page 37 and try again.

From page 116

For The Roommates, you chose Answer No. 3

Henry's failure to accompany his roommate to the recital was interpreted as a rejection of their relationship.

This is unlikely. Nothing in the description indicates that Nhak felt the two were inseparable.

From page 113

For The Roommates, you chose Answer No. 4

Cambodian etiquette says exposing the soles of one's feet to view is an intolerable offense to the individual who sees them.

This is the best explanation. Most Southeast Asians consider showing the soles of one's feet an unforgivable insult. So do many Middle Easterners. Another posture one should avoid is crossing one's legs (here, too, the soles may be visible). The next incident is on page 38.