**Unhinged**

Nikki Williams

Neema stared up at the white stucco ceiling, half listening for her ring tone.

Beads of sweat lined the bridge of her nose.

It’d been happening for nearly a month.

Whenever Neema’s cell phone rang, her roommate immediately went into her closet, the telltale hinges screeching as she flung back the doors. Then…silence.

Neema wasn’t sure she wanted to hear more.

At first, she chalked it up to coincidence. But she knew she wasn’t crazy. At night, Neema found herself lying awake studying the sounds of the dorm.

How much did she know about her roommate? What she liked to cook. Her insincere grin. Her crush. He was a rangy guy who lived two floors above. He’d also stopped coming by their flat.

Once, as Neema sat by the window studying, he passed on his way to the laundry room. She didn’t hide her surprise when he turned back and, with a smirk, asked why she was sitting there.

Staring at him blankly, she sneered "Because I can."

Her roommate’s antics weren’t exactly helping matters.

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One cool October night Neema was spinning around her room frantically, searching for her green belt. Her date was already on his way. When she started sifting through her closet again, she suddenly remembered where it was. Her roommate had borrowed it since orientation. Neema hadn’t seen her all weekend though. Kyle would be picking her up any minute now. Eyeing her roommate’s door, Neema breathed a sigh. She’d quickly check inside for the belt; it wouldn’t take five minutes. An errant drop of sweat coursed past her nose.

Neema tried the knob; the door was open. She gave it a gentle push and turned the light on.

Lavender hung in the air like a ghost. Clothes were spilling out of every drawer, but Neema’s eyes were fixed on the closet. Unblinking. As she moved towards the corner, a breeze rustled the leaves of towering oak trees. Olive curtains blew to and fro as music and laughter floated through the window.

Holding both knobs, Neema drew back the white closet doors. The louvres cast shadows all over the walls, stacked beams that reminded her of a fine-tooth comb. Neema was right; it didn’t take long to find the belt. It was the only thing among the many empty hangers besides a white hoodie. Bone white, teeth on its gold zipper glinting.

Another color caught her eye on the overhead shelf. Burgundy. Dell. The color was the closest thing to her birthstone, rubellite, that she could find that summer.

Blue patent flats on the closet floor seemed to wink at her in the warm light. Beside them were grey fringe sandals – just like the ones she was wearing.

Neema nearly jumped when her phone vibrated. Kyle’s number was on the screen. In one motion, she grabbed her belt and pulled the closet doors shut. She flipped the switch with an elbow, answering the call as she left the moonlit room.

She left without noticing the light trapped behind the closet doors, lucent blades aimed at the nodding shadows.