

Unravel

by H. L. Nelson

We tangle out of the club, drunk and laughing about the chick in the too-short minidress who fell down on the dance floor and flopped like a strange pink fish. The man she was with took a picture of her, then texted or tweeted and/or facebooked it. She could have been having a seizure, but I don't think about that until later. I'm sure you don't think about that at all.

I step off a curb I don't see, and you grab my wrist too hard, tell me to watch where I'm going. Your voice is Jack and Coke rough. Flash back to an ex who broke my same wrist, anger that began with his mother and ended with a fractured me. I yank it to my chest, muscle memory still stinging. You slit your eyes and flick your cigarette in front of an oncoming car. I see how easily you could be that oncoming car.

Across the street, a homeless man is selling tiny dolls made of string. His sign says *Dolls 4 Cheap*, and passersby tiptoe around it, as if on a tightrope. Untethered, we wind past rushing cars, over to the man. I take a doll in my palm and hand him two dollars. The doll has one eye, no mouth. I ask why. The man tells me she was his first try. She's made from just one string. He hands me back one dollar, and I'm sad he'd sell her so cheap. You shoot me the "Let's go now" face. It looks like anger, uncoiling from your center.

I regard the doll again. Not a thought in her small head, only nylon and cotton. No way to articulate thoughts, if she had them. Limbs and body and heart, the same fibrous stuff. Tucked into her left foot, I see the string's end. Her fibril fragility. I finger it, glance at weak-chinned you, wait for the break. I know what will happen if I pull.

