

Steven Rydman

——— *contest winner* ———

VACUUM

A cigarette hangs, teetering from the corner of teenage lips. The boy's feet hurt as he vacuums in black patent heels and fake pearls. There are holes in his nylons from the stray embers drifting from his afternoon smoke. His Hoover roars, though he tries not to wake the father who slumbers in an armchair. The father works midnights, drinks whiskey at 10 a.m. But, it's the mother that will find the boy soon, after working mornings at the bookbinding factory, home at three covered in pulpy dust. She will find him, practicing the flick of wrist and tap of forefinger to spritz ash from his stolen Camel cigarette. He sucks it all up from the family room floor as part of his daily chores, hot vacuum bag rubbing against his thigh, illicit pink lipstick leaving tattoos of lips on the blunt edge of the filter. But, the mother will find him, any minute now, she will find him, like Marilyn Monroe on her raft, drowning in pink mohair.