Lazer Land Outing with Boys

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Lazer Land Outing with Boys

Abstract
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that he shouts, Happy Mother's Day...

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Debra Marquart

Lazer Land Outing with Boys

I'm not their mother, although the picture so convinces the arcade manager that he shouts, Happy Mother's Day,

the moment we storm the entrance, escaping the rain, these two blond boys, their dark-haired father, and me,

the female free radical attached to this all-male atom. Quirks of custody result in the boys spending Mother's Day

with their father, and Father's Day with their mother, who is presently in Chicago having lunch or skiing

in the Sierra Nevadas or possibly snorkeling off the coast of Bermuda. Pot roasts are simmering somewhere

but not in our kitchens. Decided to take Mom out on her special day?
The arcade manager persists.

I should correct him. Truth is, the weather's been bad, television worse, church out of the question,

and short of killing each other we've elected this morning to hurl basketballs through electronic hoops,

grip the careening wheels of race cars, our feet heavy on the accelerators as we pass through movie landscapes
where we can lose the road, spin out,
roll over and walk away unscathed.
Now, time for the heavy artillery—

flak jackets with velcro straps, combat
helmets, power packs, and lazer pistols
with hair-sensitive triggers in our palms.

Do we want teams, the attendant
asks, or every man for himself?
We look at the boys—teams, they nod,

the big people against the little.
He powers up the computer,
a small whine rising from its belly

spreads through our power packs
and pistols, our chests and torsos
light up in fluorescent patches—

the targets worth hitting, the tender
spots only those we love can see.
Be good to her now, the attendant says,

still misunderstanding. We enter
the dark cave of the shooting gallery,
where we will lay in wait behind barriers,

roll, tumble, and dodge, where we will
lurk on one knee and search the dark,
then take aim, as only family can.