

Time With Children



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著者:

出版者:

出版时间:

装帧:

isbn:9780394557830

An American woman is caught between the solid husband she counts on never leaving, her five-year-old son, and an English boyfriend who is determinedly trespassing in her life: "Far down the street, seen from behind, with his worn Levi's, scuffed leather jacket, and close-cropped fair head, Brian could have been a rough American kid, even a gang member. This was a London ideal, and an illusion he spent some effort perpetuating: as she ran after it, it

charmed her." Through four linked stories set in London, the theme of love chaste, evaded, mistrusted, or returned to--is pursued with a novella-like complexity. Complex, too, are the links among a second set of stories, set in New Mexico ("After reading the book's first quarter," the Los Angeles Times reviewer wrote of Elizabeth Tallent's *Museum Pieces*, "you could find your way around Santa Fe by moonlight"): a crumbled adobe house is renovated by a young husband, short on time yet long on generosity, who tries to please both his somewhat prickly (and newly pregnant) wife and his miserly but truly needy Hispanic neighbor.

Elizabeth Tallent's two previous books have established her reputation as an elegant, engaging writer whose special territory is (in the words of Michiko Kakutani in *The New York Times*) "the complicated geometry of emotions between men and women, parents and their children." In this, her second collection of stories, we see her skills and emotional range deepen as she presents crucial episodes from a number of very varied lives: His young wife's pregnancy disturbs a professor of mathematics, especially when she turns for comfort in an entirely unexpected direction --to his ex-wife; an infatuated eighteen-year-old receives a mysteriously affecting birthday gift from her older, married lover, in a rendezvous set entirely in a pickup truck; under the frightened eyes of his father a

son dives into the Rio Grande to try to rescue a pair of struggling canoeists; and, in a moment of crisis, a battered married woman seeks out the gentle high-school boyfriend she has ignored for years.

Not only in the sweep of its settings, but also in its insight, seriousness, and wit, *Time with Children* is the strongest fiction yet from a young writer whose work has appeared in *The Best American Short Stories*, the O. Henry Award Prize Stories, *The Graywolf Short Story Annual*, and the Pushcart Prize and Editors Choice anthologies.

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目录:

[Time With Children 下载链接1](#)

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评论

[Time With Children 下载链接1](#)

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