

Happenstance By Carol Shields There really is no better half here: both sides are interesting and full of insight written in third person but with full access to the darkest recesses of these two human hearts. I think the upshot of this most enjoyable deep and playful exercise of a novel or two novels in one about a marriage in transition as it says on the cover(s) is that we all have our stories and our histories. Shields chose/created this couple to examine theirs upon the occasion of the wife Brenda going away for a quilting conference and leaving the husband Jack to fend for himself and the kids for one long week. What I particularly liked about this couple of novels in one was the do-it-yourself element to the reading in that one can decide to read wife's story first or husband's story first or as I ended up doing bit by bit back and forth a few chapters of Brenda then a few chapters of Jack till one really does reach the middle (obviously not at the exact same time.) I found the two stories kept perfect time with each other so that whatever was going on in one when I flipped back to the other it all made 100% sense and seemed serendipitously to fit perfectly. 5) Jack a museum curator in Chicago is writing a book about "Indian" trading practices (this isn't the word we'd use nowadays but the terminology ends up being important to the plot). He and his best friend Bernie who's going through a separation are obsessed with questions of history: what gets written down and what it means to have a sense of the past (or not). I loved all the little threads like Jack's father's obsession with self-help books memories of Brenda's vivacious single mother and their neighbor's failure as Hamlet in a local production. A story told from both sides of a husband as one novella and then from the wife's side as a novella (and you had to turn the book over to go from one novella to the other). and it didn't hurt that I like the word 'happenstance'! Paperback I first read Carol Shields in 2003 (with Unless) then read a few of the novels and short-story collections published right before. I enjoyed the dated aspects of this novel set in 1970s Chicago though while I'm sure there's a Chicago man who loved the Green Bay Packers at that time I don't think he'd call a game in January between the Packers and the Chicago Bears a post-season special. The ending especially has elements that will later develop into pure Shields humor and wit even lovely thoughts but the reader knows that Shields is not overly optimistic as there's a alarming nod to a new issue of the times that certainly this historian father will have to deal with shortly though he is clueless and even happy about it as the story ends. Paperback His wife away for the first time Jack is at home coping with domestic crises and two adolescents while immobilized by self-doubt and questioning his worth as a historian,



I really enjoyed this book (even though it was full of typos)! An entertaining story well-written engaging: Reading Brenda's story felt like I was reading my own story sort of: Paperback Such great writing such a wonderful story told through the eyes of husband and then wife. However I've know few marriages this nice although rocky at times. Do people really love like this or were my exes just jerks? Anyway good book: Paperback Carol Shields happenstance was a nice diversion from the ordinary: Liked the original approach of having the wife tell her story and the husband telling his. Marriage and the journeys we take either away from home as Brenda or at home as her husband are often filled with surprises and learning about ourselves: It was fun to revisit the 70s when cell phones did not exist and you could be alone with your thoughts, Paperback I read this while going through Shields' output and found it less fulfilling than books like The Stone Diaries and The Republic of Love, It is a bittersweet story which left me feeling as if I had missed out on the essentials of the relationship. Too much was left unsaid for me to find this novel truly accomplished,

Paperback This time it really worked Carol Shields' playfulness with form, She literally turned things upside down having half the book (the wife's story) be right side up and the other half (the husband's story) be upside down, Of course the reverse could be said that the husband's POV is right side up and the wife's is upside down, Point being you had to turn the book upside down to read the other half's story. Brenda and Jack are decent people so there is nothing bizarre or twisted it's all very subtle. Sometimes I thought that Jack the husband of the couple was probably basically Carol Shields herself speaking and thinking through him: Certainly this was more the case with Jack than with Brenda the wife. Maybe because despite Jack being a man he's also an intellectual like the late Shields whereas Brenda is not quite so sophisticated, I don't know if it was as much fun to write as it was to read or whether Shields had a bit of a headache pacing things so perfectly, I do think that this worked much better than her award winning *The Stone Diaries* which placed photographs in the middle of the book: This middle being an abstract meeting point is much more powerful, I also enjoyed an epic trek in the snow in a final section potentially modeled on *Ulysses*: After that I moved further backwards in time to her first two novels with plans to read all of her one day, While her third novel is not as good as the others I've read by her it's still worthwhile especially if you are a Shields fan: I know Shields lived in Canada for most of her adult life but I would guess that's not a term in Canadian football either: I also know the Packers and Bears have rarely played each other in January in the post-season and certainly not in the 70s so that made me kind of cringe too, Shields published *A Fairly Conventional Woman* shortly after this which tells the wife's story of the same week, The two novels were later collected in one volume called *Happenstance: Two Novels in One About a Marriage in Transition*, My library has neither the wife's story nor the two-in-one so I'm off to find a used copy now. Paperback Have been reading everything I can find by Carol Shields after picking up *Stone Diaries* at an estate sale, Altho *Happenstance* is considered two novels in one and I'm sure each reads as a complete novel I chose to switch back and forth as the mood struck me, But the rest of us interested in other people's lives will find this very satisfying. A dad taking care of the two teens while wife at a quilting convention realizing how much that entails and appreciating his wife even more: Good subplots the husband's best friend a neighbor's attempted suicide, This is the husband's story now found in *Happenstance: Two Novels in One About a Marriage in Transition* originally published on its own in 1980 as *Happenstance*: *Happenstance* Carol Ann Shields was an American born Canadian author, She is best known for her successful 1993 novel *The Stone Diaries* which won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction as well as the Governor General's Award, Her novel *Swann* won the Best Novel {site_link} Arthur Ellis Award in 1988, She is best known for her successful 1993 novel *The Stone Diaries* which won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction as well as the Governor General's Award, Her novel *Swann* won the Best Novel {site_link} Arthur Ellis Award in 1988. Paperback I read the wife's side first then the husbands. This book is told in a very interesting fashion. Marriage from both sides. I liked how she played with this form. Paperback (Nearly 3. Paperback I loved this book. A very clever concept. Until this week I hadn't picked her up since late 2008. She's a marvelous writer storyteller. Quilters might really appreciate this book. I'm not one. Carol Ann Shields was an American born Canadian author. {site_link}.