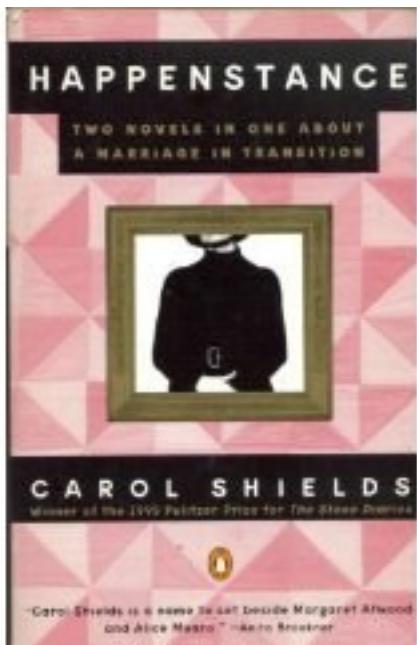


Happenstance: Two Novels in One About a Marriage in Transition



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著者:Carol Shields

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From Publishers Weekly

Shields (The Stone Diaries , Fiction Forecasts, Dec. 13) delivers a tour de force with these companion novels examining the two halves of one 20-year marriage. Quiltmaker Brenda Bowman leaves her home in a Chicago suburb to attend a crafts convention in Philadelphia. Aware of her lack of independent experience of the world, she is elated by this chance to escape from routine. The convention leaves Brenda wide-eyed with wonder. She is thrilled to share a room with the renowned quilter Verna Glanville, but enters to find Verna in the midst of a sexual encounter. Brenda

becomes increasingly intimate with a kind man attending a metallurgists' convention, whose life reveals to her the variety of arrangements people make in their marriages. All of this is set against the background of meetings on crafts: one lecturer, on the Freudian interpretation of common quilting patterns, says the Star of Bethlehem represents "an orgasmic explosion." Back home with their two adolescent children, historian Jack Bowman is struggling with demons. After working for several years on a book about the trading practices of Native Americans, he sees an announcement about a book on the same subject written by an ex-lover. His best--and perhaps only--friend, Bernie Koltz, has been deserted by his wife and shows up to sleep on his couch. Later, a neighbor, an affected drama critic, attempts suicide after reading a scathing review of his performance in an amateur production of Hamlet. Jack is as introspective as Brenda is practical, and were it not for Shields's inventive specificity, their views could serve as textbook illustrations of the differences between male and female thought. Brenda grows at breakneck speed, getting a jolt of reality yet retaining her sweet sense of openness to the world. Shields chooses language carefully. In remembering the one moment in their marriage when she felt a "lapse of love," Brenda reflects that "she had been assailed by a freak visitation, and preserved the knowledge that it could happen again." Jack muses at one point that, just as a written record of events can never express history, "a marriage licence wasn't the history of a marriage." As Shields handily demonstrates here, a marriage is the culmination of a million tiny moments, and she strings them together with intense cumulative power.

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From Library Journal

Issued here for the first time upon the U.S. publication of Shields's prize-winning *The Stone Diaries*, this early Eighties chronicle of a marriage is actually two novels in one ("The Wife's Story" and "The Husband's Story") published in a back-to-back format. Over the period of one particularly eventful week, the husband and wife each experience midlife crises. Brenda, a quilt-maker, travels to Philadelphia for a craft convention and a journey of self-discovery. Jack, a historian, who remains behind to look after the children, wrestles with his own set of problems--troubled friends and the long-delayed completion of his book on Great Lakes Indian trading practices. The two stories were originally published as separate novels, and the unique format of the current publication forces the reader to choose whose story to read first. Ultimately, it makes little difference since the parts form such a well-meshed whole that you will leave this couple and their stories with reluctance.

- Barbara Love, St. Lawrence Coll., Kingston, Ontario

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