

Paperbacks

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■ GENTLE JOHN MY LOVE MY LOSS by Helene Chung Martin (Hill of Content, 160pp, \$19.95)

IN a Melbourne private hospital room, gazing at a print of Monet's *Water Lilies* on the wall, John Martin faced the inevitable: death from cancer. It came in 1993, just a few months before his 60th birthday. For his wife, Radio Australia journalist Helene Chung, it marked the finale of an intense and complex relationship with "the only man I had ever loved". He was 11 years her senior, "a Depression baby who grew up with very little"; they had met at evening classes. In temperament they were chalk and cheese: where Chung would act rashly, Martin advised caution. An academic with "a disregard for monetary matters", he sought the spiritual and intellectual rather than the material; by nature and occupation, Chung was inclined to rush into things. "I could hurl us headlong into a costly mistake," she admits, "although John's procrastination could also lead us into trouble." For someone more used to covering the world (Chung was the ABC's Beijing correspondent in the mid-1980s), writing such an open-hearted account of her private life and her grief couldn't have been easy. The result is a moving testament to the often inexplicable forces that bind couples.