

KIRKUS BOOK REVIEW

Hutheesing pays homage to his late second wife, the violinist Helen Armstrong, in this memoir. In 1989, the author, a 50-something investment banker, was surprised by his friend's insistence that he attend her housewarming, an inconvenient 50 miles away. Once there, however, he met latecomer Armstrong, and forgot all about the other guests. After a false start, the two quickly developed a relationship, overcoming their very different ethnic and religious backgrounds, careers and cities of residence. Although the two continued to maintain separate homes after they were married, Ajit lent his business expertise and moneyed connections to Helen's cash-strapped nonprofit, Armstrong Chamber Concerts, which sought to bring music education and performance to children. During one fundraising performance, after complaining about not feeling well, Helen collapsed and died at the age of 63. Hutheesing's memoir contains an excerpt from the touching poem "Requiem for One Violin" by Ellen Perless, the owner of the home in which Helen died ("she was radiant, gilded with light, / A hundred movers and shakers, / stock still in silver chairs / And then, / she fell like snow, / gently, / so gently"). Hutheesing engagingly finds a balance between adulation and veneration; although he adored Helen, her premature death doesn't spur him to imbue her with perfection. He's also frank in his self-appraisal; for example, he regrets not being as open and affectionate with Helen as she was with him, and although maintaining separate lives worked for them – and made many friends envious – he's sorry for not spending more time together with her. His summary of his own history is fascinating.his family connections are impressive (he's a nephew of India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru). Still, Ajit's charms – at one point, he describes himself as a "flirt" – emerge through his writing.

A touching, personal memoir of an uncommon marriage.

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