

## Summer Lightning

**Roberta Silman**

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(328pp)

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*Intertwining historical events with personal milestones, Summer Lightning is a rewarding family saga.*

Roberta Silman's elegant historical novel *Summer Lightning* covers decades of a family's joys and tumults.

In 1927, as both stand among the crowd awaiting the departure of Charles Lindbergh's transcontinental flight, Belle meets Isaac. She is in high school; he is an immigrant from Eastern Europe. Years later, they connect again; this time, they fall in love.

The book follows the couple from Brooklyn to Long Island as they face both personal triumphs and historical challenges. They witness Adolf Hitler's rise from afar, feeling the urgent need to help their loved ones in Europe. They have two daughters, Sophy and Vivie. And they face antisemitic sentiments and McCarthyism, too.

Devoted to Belle and Isaac's long marriage—both its quiet intimacies and its outside influences—the narrative covers both their dreams and their lingering fears. The couple's ties to the past are irreplaceable, but they make little room for nostalgia. Their story is treated as a microcosm of postwar prosperity, though their romance also progresses in a gentle way through their life stages. They have warm encounters with others, too, including a piano teacher whose backstory Isaac recognizes too late; a Black housekeeper with a no nonsense perspective who influences Sophy and Vivie's adult views on racial equality; and friends who introduce Belle to the art world in the 1950s.

The changing periods are captured with details about New York's neighborhoods and glimpses of historical figures including Frank O'Hara, Larry Rivers, and Nell Blaine. The family members are curious observers and occasional sojourners in these worlds. They work to maintain their cultural passions. Indeed: art becomes a means for survival for them.

In addition to the couple's perspectives, the novel includes Sophy's salient childhood impressions of her family, and Vivie's young thoughts on love when she's exploring London and Paris in the 1960s. For all four: family concerns shape their senses of self. Their observations of the world beyond their family bounds are astute, too, as when they act as witnesses while Europe's arts and civility are threatened by war. Indeed, loss becomes ever present in their lives, even as their love for each other enables them to endure. In continually reaffirming love as an antidote to daily struggles, the novel proves to be bittersweet.

Intertwining historical events with personal milestones, *Summer Lightning* is a rewarding family saga.

KAREN RIGBY (April 27, 2022)

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