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**Sinopsis**

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The immense appeal of Näkki Goranin's American Photobooth stems from two separate yet inextricably linked frissons. First comes the intellectual excitement to be derived from the author's essay "The History of the Photobooth" (nearly 80 pages long). Extensively researched and buttressed by much visual material, this fascinating and charming text begins by detailing the invention of the photobooth by Russian émigré Anatol Josepho and its commercial debut in 1925, then covers the subsequent eight decades of widespread photobooth usage in nearly as thick and vivid a welter of curious forgotten facts. (Goranin looks backwards as well to prototypes existing prior to Josepho's brainchild.) This kind of social history on a topic previously neglected by scholars constitutes the finest caviar for those of us who revel in the past's more obscure pop-culture niches. The second round of aesthetic sparks flies when Goranin displays hundreds of photobooth photos from her personal collection. Recalling Luc Sante's *Evidence* (1992) and Michael Lesy's *Wisconsin Death Trip* (1973), these anonymous found images offer candid and intimate revelations into the lives of the portrait sitters, evoking entire eras and allowing the viewer to conjure up imaginary personal narratives. I wish Goranin had used additional sequential strips -- multiple images of the same sitters -- rather than just single frames, as those time-lapse sequences she does include tend to convey more of the animation and liveliness we classically associate with such dimestore amusements. Incredibly, page 66 features a 1953 photobooth record of JFK and Jackie on their honeymoon. It proves to be neither more nor less glamorous and captivating than any of the other images of romantic couples throughout the book, establishing the photobooth as the ultimate visual technology for our American democracy.