

Second Best Thing

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Synopsis

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President John F. Kennedy. Marilyn Monroe. A probing nonfiction short story that reconstructs an enchanting night in history by the ***New York Times*** bestselling author of ***Manhunt: The 12-Day Chase for Lincoln's Killer***. On the night of May 19, 1962, the marquee of the old Madison Square Garden boasted: "BEST THING TODAY...JOHN F. KENNEDY / 2ND BEST THING...MARILYN MONROE." Few things illustrate the magnetism of the Kennedy era like Marilyn Monroe co-headlining the President's massive birthday fundraiser, and suggestively crooning "Happy Birthday." But only a privileged few know what happened months earlier, when the two icons spent a weekend at a private summit hosted by Bing Crosby, and later, after the New York extravaganza, at the top secret, invitation-only midnight affair at a millionaire's Manhattan town house. For more than half a century, this exclusive, no-press-allowed after-party has been shrouded in rumor and myth. Lot 6191 in the 2010 auction of White House photographer Cecil Stoughton's archive - "Marilyn Monroe at JFK Party" - included twenty-three prints. Their negatives, marked in Stoughton's hand with "Sensitive material, Do not file," were seized by the National Archives. Among the collection: the sole existing photograph of Marilyn and the president. Spellbound by the intimacy of the image and the force of public imagination, bestselling historian James Swanson masterfully reconstructs the fabled soiree, bringing alive a night that history nearly left behind.

Reader's comments

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