Clarion Review

General

Backstage at the White House
Jean Candlish Kelchner
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Four Stars (out of Five)

It's undeniable that the last presidential election turned many people into political junkies. Blame it on the dramatic struggle for votes in the primaries the accessibility of candidates through social media or the almost constant yammering of political pundits on cable news channels. As the new administration gets to work many people who followed every tick of election coverage long for the intrigue and excitement of politics—a feeling that is captured almost perfectly in Jean Candlish Kelchner's *Backstage at the White House*.

On the surface Stacey Lea Forbes is the ideal first lady to Goodman Palmer Forbes the nation's popular president. Behind the scenes however Forbes is a tantrum-prone tyrant and Stacey is unhappy. When a luncheon for one of Stacey's causes takes a turn for the worse the President has a fit that sends the First Lady home to Mississippi. There she begins to uncover a conspiracy to keep women out of politics and power. With the help of a few well-placed female friends Stacey finds a new cause—to get a woman into a position of real power in the White House.

At first *Backstage at the White House* may seem like another witty wise and sometimes wicked book in the Chic Lit canon. But this isn't your typical foray into the world of girl power. Kelchner has crafted a group of dynamic characters who possess southern manners an elite lifestyle and an intelligent effervescence that propels them through a world bound by those who crave power.

Balancing social commentary and satire Kelchner weaves this tale with an ear for history and politics. Nowhere is this clearer than when a discussion by Stacey and her friends references the prominence of the rose as a symbol in British history General William Sherman the *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes and Immanuel Kant in the span of a page.

This makes *Backstage* a dishy fun read but may leave some readers wishing for less talk. Stacey and her companions are so busy chatting sometimes that they don't allow the reader to

experience the glittery world of Washington politerati: the beehive of White House offices the elegant luncheons or the boudoirs where desire and control are sometimes indistinguishable. Nonetheless *Backstage at the White House* is a fascinating novel sure to keep readers longing for a sequel and political junkies counting down to the next election.