



The *Reluctant* First Lady

Venita Ellick

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BREAKING NEWS: First Lady Rejects the Role, President to Seek Replacement

DALLAS, TEXAS—When the wife of newly elected president Michael Taylor refuses to give up her position as the director of a prominent art museum in New York to take on the traditional role of First Lady, it ignites major controversy setting off a media feeding frenzy.

“This is clearly an issue whose time has come,” says Venita Ellick, author of *The Reluctant First Lady*. “If a woman were elected president, would our nation expect her husband to be the official White House host?”

Timely and relevant to the world we live in today, Ellick delves into the world of politics, bringing to light the consequences of being a public figure in the media’s spotlight, while also exploring what it means to be married to the president of the United States.

The Reluctant First Lady addresses the questions: When (if ever) should a woman have to give up or set aside her own professional career for the sake of her husband? How much should she give up for the person she loves? And would he be willing to do the same, if their positions were reversed?

While the nation debates the role of First Lady, the novel focuses on the president-elect’s wife Ashley Taylor, who has been straightforward with her husband from the beginning. She always supported his candidacy but never had any intention of changing her position to become what she describes as “First Hostess.”

While Ashley’s decision to continue as director of the museum triggers reactions from the public, news commentators, and even late-night comedians about whether the role of First Lady is a necessity, Ashley and Michael wrestle with saving their marriage and preserving their professional lives – bringing to light how much the media influences the lives of public figures.

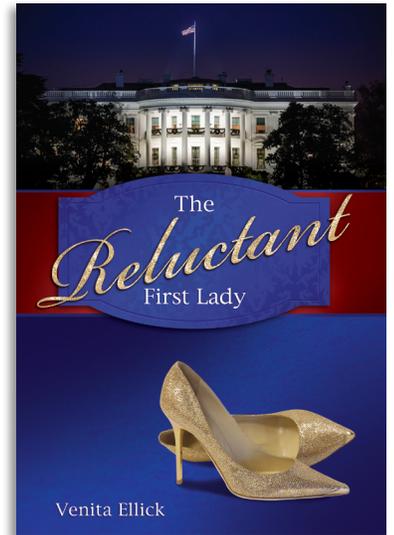
Drawing from her own experiences as a wife, mother, teacher, and principal to create her characters, Ellick’s sense of humor and recognition of the absurd and often whimsical nature of life is refreshing and allows her to capture her characters’ lives with authenticity and emotional resonance.

“If a woman chooses to support her husband and become First Lady, I believe she must do so with the understanding that the public expects the full-meal deal,” says Ellick. “If you look at past First Ladies, you’ll see that none of them continued their careers while their husbands were in office. Personally, I think that expectation should change.”

Ultimately, Ellick wants readers to consider these issues themselves. Should the president’s wife have the right to choose whether or not she wants to accept the position? How does a woman maintain her career and still have a successful relationship? How much should anyone sacrifice for a partner’s career?

To learn more, visit www.VenitaEllick.com.

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TITLE: THE RELUCTANT FIRST LADY | AUTHOR: VENITA ELICK
CATEGORY: FICTION/CONTEMPORARY WOMEN | ISBN: 978-1-61254-113-6
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About the Author Venita Ellick



Venita Ellick was fated to be a writer. She was named for a character in a book her mother was reading at the time of the birth. As a young girl, she spent so much time in libraries that librarians would save books for her almost daily visits. She began writing stories in the first grade, which her mother patiently read. The intervention of a career as an educator and raising three sons delayed her focus on writing, but she has now completed three novels. *The Reluctant First Lady* is her fourth.

Mistress of Mellyn by Victoria Holt and *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen captivated her as a teenager. The power and imagery of the printed word made her wonder what each heroine was thinking and feeling. She wanted to be the woman with the cape and hood standing on the edge of the cliff with the wind whipping around her. The mysteries that could be found in stories fascinated her and are echoed in *The Reluctant First Lady*.

Ellick draws on her experiences as a wife, mother, teacher, and principal to create her characters. Her sense of humor and recognition of the absurd and often whimsical nature of life have allowed her to capture her characters' lives with authenticity and emotional resonance.

Venita and her husband David have experience as a two-career couple. They live on an island in the state of Washington.



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Q&A with Venita Ellick

***The Reluctant First Lady* has an intriguing premise. What inspired or triggered the idea to write a book addressing this particular topic?**

The idea occurred to me during a family dinner. I was telling my sons what a great president I thought their dad would be, but that he would be hindered by me because I would refuse to be First Lady. One of my sons said if I took that position on the role, I would automatically become the most famous First Lady of all time. Out of that conversation, the idea for the book was born.

If your husband were to run for president of the United States, would you be willing to join him in the White House, or would you be more like the character in your book—a reluctant First Lady?

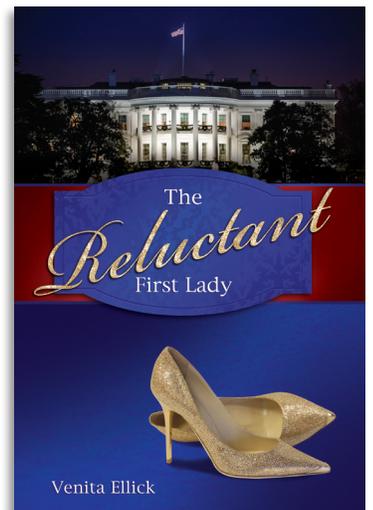
Currently, I don't believe a candidate's presidential aspirations would go very far if it was common knowledge that his or her spouse wasn't willing to join the president in the White House. But to answer your question, no, I wouldn't be willing to join my husband in the White House. I would absolutely be like Ashley in the book. However, I'm keenly aware that the public expects a package deal.

Anna Quindlen wrote an article for *Newsweek* in February 2004 about this topic. When Howard Dean ran for president, his wife, Judy, was busy running her medical practice. Howard Dean said his wife wouldn't be used as a prop in his presidential campaign, yet his wife was criticized for not being a proper political helpmate. Ms. Quindlen wrote, "The wives who get the most scrutiny are those who least conform to the little-woman standard. If you have a career or are outspoken, beware!"

Further, one must ask: Would the same standard be applied to a man if a woman were elected president? I think not.

Do you believe it's possible to be First Lady of the United States of America without being obligated to attend important functions or spearhead a cause and still maintain a separate and independent career?

If a woman chooses to support her husband and become First Lady, I believe she must do so with the understanding that the public expects the full-meal deal. If you look at past First Ladies, you'll see that none of them continued their careers while their husbands were in office. Personally, I think that expectation should change. People vote for whom they believe will be the best president and representative for our country. The First Lady is not on the ballot.



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How do children factor into this equation?

For the most part, young children take their cues from their parents or role models. Older children, I believe, develop opinions of their own. So if this hypothetical situation were to occur, most children would be aware of what their parents thought and why. I know I wouldn't want to raise my children in the White House or under so much public scrutiny. Yet we have excellent examples of past presidents and First Ladies who have done a wonderful job raising their children in the limelight.

Are you independent by nature?

I think my answer depends on a person's definition of what it means to be independent. I consider myself independent. I choose what I do and what I get involved in. In some situations, I'm very independent; in others I'm conventional. The pertinent point is that I've made the choice in each situation.

When my children were young, I chose to give up my job to stay at home with them until they began kindergarten. It was my choice. My husband didn't insist I stay home.

When my husband and I were both principals at different schools, I didn't think it was necessary for me to attend social events at my husband's school, and I didn't think it was important for him to attend events at my school. I've always felt the important issue was that we be very good at our jobs.

You and your husband are both educators and have been happily married for many years. How has your independent nature impacted your marriage, or has it?

Of course it has. My husband is not always happy with the choices I make. Likewise, I'm not always happy with the decisions he makes. But we've always been supportive of one another, even when we've disagreed.

Has your independence affected your children? If so, in what way?

I don't know if my independence has affected my children or not; you'd need to ask them. However, it was important to me to raise children who looked beyond the obvious and questioned the why of things, children who knew when to challenge the status quo—respectfully, of course.

The Reluctant First Lady invites readers to think and reflect on a situation that has yet to occur but could easily happen in the near future. What is the main message you hope readers will take away after reading your book? What do you hope they will learn?

First, I hope they enjoy a good "what if" story. Second, I think it's time to ask these questions: Is a First Lady truly a necessity? Shouldn't each wife of a president have the right to choose to accept the position or not? Also, it's time to start thinking about what role a husband would play when a woman is elected president. So the answer is in the question. The reader is invited to think and reflect on this topic.

Do you have plans for a sequel?

Possibly. . .

Where do you get your ideas for your books?

Like most writers, I find my ideas come from everywhere and everything. A writer looks at an issue and asks, *What if this were to occur? Or what if that was thrown into the mix? What would that look like?* I've also dreamed two of the books I've written.

How can readers contact you?

By going to my website, www.VenitaEllick.com.





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Excerpted from Chapter 3

*A*ppause and pandemonium broke out on the other side of the curtain, indicating Michael had reached the end of his speech.

A stage manager nodded and, with Ashley and the twins leading the way, followed by the vice president-elect, his wife, and family, she stepped onto the stage and into the bright lights. The noise from the crowd grew in intensity as each of them came into view. They all walked forward to stand beside Michael, Ashley and the twins to his left; Robert Hughes, Catherine, and their children to his right.

The chaos and elation vibrating through the crowd was intoxicating. Cheers from a wildly exuberant audience and music blocked out what individuals were saying, but the camaraderie of those on the stage was evidenced by their smiles, hugs, and claps on the back. Before the world, she and Michael looked like the perfect couple. Michael pulled his family, plus Richard and his family, toward him while photographers snapped pictures of this historic event.

Amid the excitement, it almost went unnoticed that a reporter shouted a question at Ashley. She ignored him, hoping he would go away.

The reporter repeated his question. “Mrs. Taylor, what causes do you intend to champion during the next four years in the White House?”

Ashley winced inwardly, but no outward expression marred her serene expression. She had a choice. She could tell the truth or continue to go along with the lie. Damn it. She’d been dodging questions like this for months about what special causes she intended to champion if her husband were elected. In fact, she’d become a master of evasion, not something she was proud of. Unquestionably the smartest thing to do would be to give the same canned response she’d been giving throughout the campaign. It would be a lie, all of it. But then she wouldn’t be accused of rocking the boat, a boat, she might add, that she knew was taking on a lot of water.

She was tired of being evasive. She was sick to death of lying by omission. Michael’s managers had convinced her that he wouldn’t be elected if she declared her intentions. But, Michael had been elected. Was it possible that she was making more of this than necessary?

She leaned toward the reporter and his microphone and began speaking in a quiet, clear voice.

“First, I’d like to thank everyone here and at home for their incredible support throughout the campaign. I’m extremely proud of Michael and have always believed he’d be a great leader and a great president. The American people have chosen wisely and well this day. As for me, with the election over, I’ll be returning to my job as director of the Cameron Museum of Art in New York. It’s never been my intention to serve as the First Lady. Over half of the families in our country are two-career families. Our family isn’t any different. In fact . . .”

Ashley felt Michael’s hand on her elbow. “Ashley, just smile and wave. We’re getting off of the stage now.”



Excerpted from Chapter 8–The Reluctant First Lady



The reaction to the early morning press conference was swift and varied as network news, cable news channels, special interest groups, and even late-night comedians weighed in with their opinions. Within minutes of the press conference, a media frenzy had begun and a national debate was underway.

NBC News

“President-elect Michael Taylor and Mrs. Ashley Taylor just concluded a press conference in which it was confirmed that Mrs. Taylor does not intend to uphold the duties of the First Lady. Mrs. Taylor stated she’ll be returning to her job as the director of the Cameron Museum of Art in Manhattan, one of the most prestigious museums in the nation. At the press conference this morning, one day after Taylor was elected by a significant majority, Mrs. Taylor had this to say.”

The tape rolled as millions of viewers watched Ashley give the speech she’d delivered earlier outlining the reasons for her decision to return to work in New York.

Brian Williams noted, “This is a completely unprecedented situation that raises many questions and observations.” Williams turned to address Tom Brokaw. “I really don’t know what to say. It’s such surprising news. I’m sure as we receive additional information, we’ll see how the White House intends to respond.”

Brokaw concurred. “It’s very unorthodox. First Ladies have served alongside their husbands since the founding of the presidency in 1789. The only exception was when James Buchanan was president. He wasn’t married and asked his niece to fill in as hostess for the White House. Most First Ladies have tended to champion causes they were interested in that were relevant to their times. Mrs. Taylor will be the first president’s wife who has refused to accept the traditional role.”

Late Show with David Letterman

David Letterman stood before his audience with his hands in his pockets. “Did you hear today that Mrs. Taylor, the wife of our new president, says she doesn’t want to be the official First Lady or live in the White House? I find that interesting. Don’t you, Paul?”

Paul Shaffer began playing “Hail to the Chief” and let the strains dwindle into silence. “Yes, I find that very interesting.”

Letterman continued. “Well, we got to thinking. Why wouldn’t you want to live in the White House? I mean it’s a national monument, for God’s sake. Here are some reasons Mrs. Taylor may have decided to forego living in a national monument.

- Everything in your house is a hand-me-down.
- Tours come through your house daily.
- Trying to get a good parking spot is a bitch.

“I’ll bet you can never get a good parking spot at the White House.” Letterman grinned. “I’d hate that. Next.

- You can’t run around in your pajamas.
- You can’t paint your house any color you want.

“Here again, don’t you hate it when you live in a neighborhood and there’s some kind of organized rules saying what color you can paint your house? If I want to paint my house lime green, it’s my business.

- Creepy secret service guys are always around talking into their wrists

“And finally,

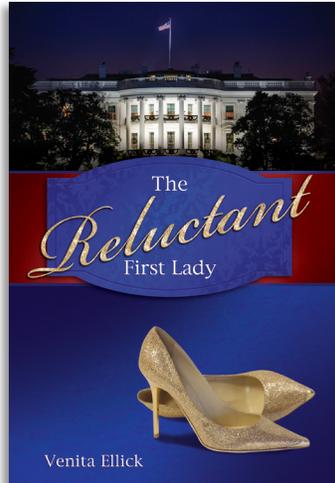
- Your favorite take-out restaurant won’t deliver to your address.”





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Synopsis

Venita Ellick delivers savvy, thought-provoking contemporary women’s fiction with *The Reluctant First Lady* where she introduces us to a very modern presidential First Lady – Ashley Taylor.

Ashley Taylor has been straightforward with her husband, the president-elect of the United States. She supported his candidacy, but she has no intention of assuming the traditional role of First Lady—a position she describes as “First Hostess.” Instead, she will resume her own career as head of one of the largest art museums in New York. The aftermath of her decision triggers reactions from the public, news commentators, late night comedians, and other political factions. While Ashley and Michael wrestle with saving their marriage and preserving their professional lives, the country debates whether the role of First Lady is a necessity, how the media influences the lives of public figures, and how much a woman should sacrifice for the person she loves.

