



Clarion Review ★★★★☆

ROMANCE

The Next Election

Landon Wallace

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The Next Election marries love and government and exudes sensitivity and charm.

Landon Wallace's political romance *The Next Election* continues the story of star-crossed lovers who throw themselves into their work to avoid their feelings for each other and about their changing lives.

Blake is a moderate Republican politician fighting against his own party, and Cat is a restaurant owner with big dreams. After they had an affair, Blake and Cat's marriages are falling apart; they've gotten distracted from their careers. They vow not to see each other anymore.

Blake has enough on his plate with the illness of his boss and longtime mentor, as well as with a chance to regain his Senate seat. Cat decides to focus on family, but her marriage may be too broken to fix. Drastic life changes and backroom dealings leave them both wondering who is pulling the strings and if they will ever be free to pursue their lingering love.

Blake proves to be charismatic and dedicated, his humorous but honest talking style and empathy for others coming through. His dissenting voice in the Republican party helps the novel to touch on themes of conservatism, racism, and American values, but without deep explorations of these subjects, while his relationship with his daughters is emotional and open, adding vulnerability to the resilient professionalism of his image. His love life is the book's primary focus; as he finds himself on unsure territory with Cat, he expresses mixed feelings toward his ex-wife and pursues a new love interest.

While many of the women characters are present to explore Blake's desires, they are described and treated with respect, their distinctive personalities and attractive features named, but without oversexualizing any one. Cat's attempts to repair her relationship with her husband are an anxiety-producing addition; their disconnected dynamic is rendered with sharp details of resentful encounters between them. In contrast to Blake, Cat's husband is spiteful and distrustful, and hope for their relationship wanes.

Glimpses into the world of political advisors and powerful donors feature small offices smelling of coffee and strategies discussed over early morning pastries, while Houston plays a cultural role as a setting for staunch conservative characters to act as Blake's rogues gallery. Blake's enemies, political team, and law firm partners dance between their personalities and policies, their dialogue quick and entertaining.

As Cat deals with drama surrounding both her marriage and her restaurant, her story weaves its way back toward Blake's—their relationship reaching a resolution, if one that leaves elements of Cat's story open. A rushed wrap-up dulls the impact of some of the plot's twists.

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DELIA STANLEY (January 17, 2020)

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