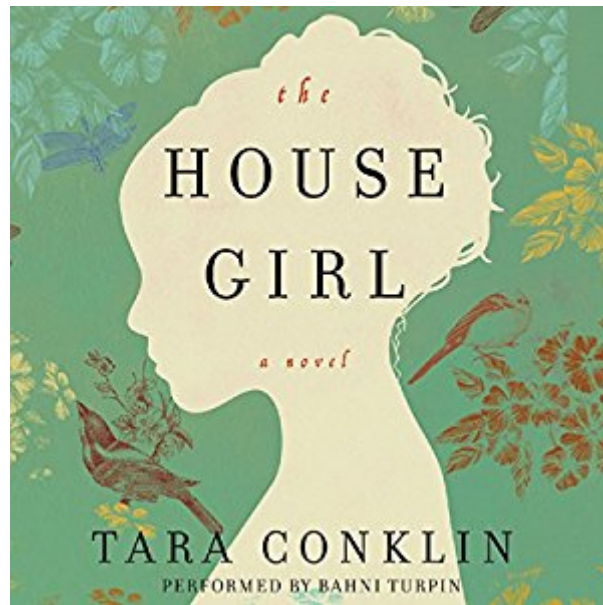


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# The House Girl: A Novel



## Synopsis

Two remarkable women, separated by more than a century, whose lives unexpectedly intertwine.... The year is 2004: Lina Sparrow is an ambitious young lawyer working on a historic class-action lawsuit seeking reparations for the descendants of American slaves. The year is 1852: Josephine is a 17-year-old house slave who tends to the mistress of a Virginia tobacco farm - an aspiring artist named Lu Anne Bell. It is through her father, renowned artist Oscar Sparrow, that Lina discovers a controversy rocking the art world: Art historians now suspect that the revered paintings of Lu Anne Bell, an antebellum artist known for her humanizing portraits of the slaves who worked her Virginia tobacco farm, were actually the work of her house slave, Josephine. A descendant of Josephine's would be the perfect face for the lawsuit - if Lina can find one. But nothing is known about Josephine's fate following Lu Anne Bell's death in 1852. In piecing together Josephine's story, Lina embarks on a journey that will lead her to question her own life, including the full story of her mother's mysterious death 20 years before. Alternating between antebellum Virginia and modern-day New York, this searing tale of art and history, love, and secrets explores what it means to repair a wrong, and asks whether truth can be more important than justice.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I'm afraid I'm going to break from the pack here and only give "The House Girl" by Tara Conklin, a two-star review. The novel is comprised of two interwoven narratives, one takes place in modern day concerning Lina, a young attorney who is looking for a plaintiff who is a descendent of a slave to

participate in a huge slavery reparations case. The other story is of Josephine, a young slave who disappears from the records in 1852. Josephine's story revolves around one day, the day she decides to run for freedom. I felt this story dragged and had too many holes in it that Lina would magically come to fill. Josephine's story did have moments of suspense about whether or not she would be caught trying to escape. Lina's story moves quicker and is full of coincidences that propel her to find out about Josephine. I found myself not liking Lina as a character. I don't need to like a character to like a novel, but Lina annoyed me. Her passivity about her own life irked me; there are secrets that she knows are being kept from her about her mother, but she doesn't press to find out about them. The feasibility of a billion to trillion dollar slavery reparations case is only nominally questioned and then presented as a moral imperative. Only a few of the many legitimate arguments against such as class-action case are presented in a brief discussion and then utterly discounted. Additionally I found it unbelievable and irritating that Conklin would make it seem that finding a person who could prove they were descendent from slaves with a credible story of harm, to be such a haphazard, needle-in-the-haystack situation. Surely there are millions who could fit that bill.

From 1852 to 2004....from one artist to another....from a farm in Virginia to the hustle and bustle of New York City. THE HOUSE GIRL flawlessly switches between these two time periods telling of the life of Josephine, a slave girl, Lina, a New York City attorney, and Lina's father, Oscar, an artist. The book leads you through the life of Josephine as she struggles with her decision to "run, it leads you through the life of Lina who is researching families who may benefit from wrong doing during the period of slavery in the United States, and it leads you through the life of Oscar trying to make amends through his artwork. The most significant question, though, along with finding descendants is that of who really did create the paintings found in Lu Anne Bell's home? Was it really Lu Anne or was it Josephine? Corresponding with this painting mystery and the mystery of Josephine's descendants is that of Lina's mother...what really did happen to her when Lina was only four? You will get caught up in both stories because of the great detail Ms. Conklin uses and because of the research. I love "digging" for historical information. As you switch between the two stories, you will ask yourself to choose which life you were more interested in....Lina's or Josephine's....it may be difficult to choose since both were appealing and drew you in, but for me Josephine's story wins hands down for interest. It took a few chapters, but you will become so involved, it becomes difficult to stop reading....you want to know what will become of the characters and the answer to the mysteries. Each character comes alive with the vivid detail Ms. Conklin uses, and she puts their

feelings out in the open...

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