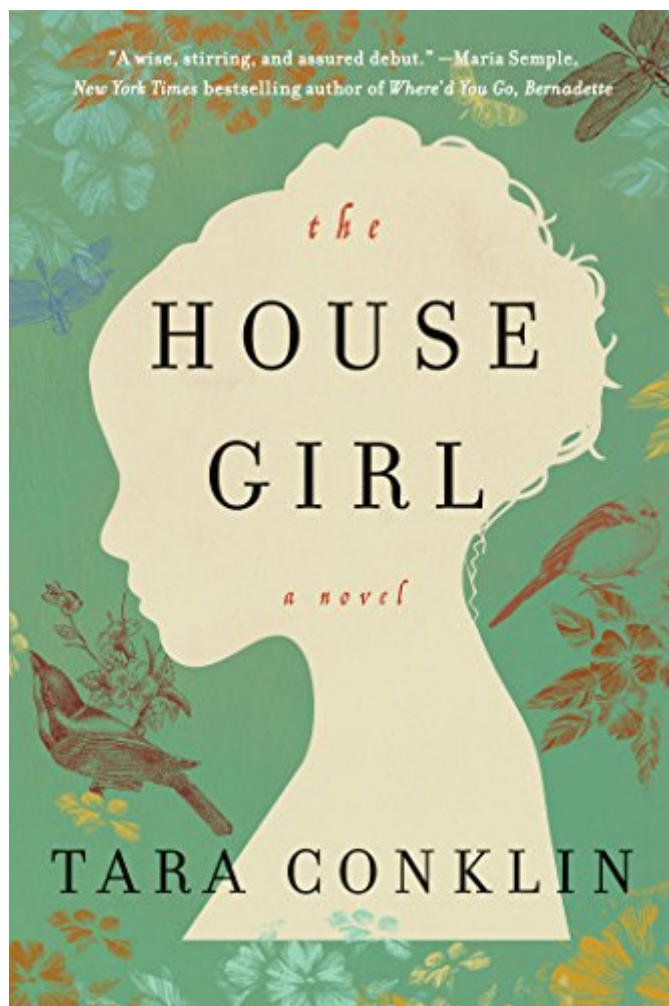


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The House Girl: A Novel (P.S.)



Synopsis

The House Girl, the historical fiction debut by Tara Conklin, is an unforgettable story of love, history, and a search for justice, set in modern-day New York and 1852 Virginia. Weaving together the story of an escaped slave in the pre-Civil War South and a determined junior lawyer, The House Girl follows Lina Sparrow as she looks for an appropriate lead plaintiff in a lawsuit seeking compensation for families of slaves. In her research, she learns about Lu Anne Bell, a renowned prewar artist whose famous works might have actually been painted by her slave, Josephine. Featuring two remarkable, unforgettable heroines, Tara Conklin's The House Girl is riveting and powerful, literary fiction at its very best.

Book Information

File Size: 1415 KB

Print Length: 389 pages

Publisher: William Morrow; Reprint edition (February 12, 2013)

Publication Date: February 12, 2013

Sold by: Amazon HarperCollins Publishers

Language: English

ASIN: B0089LODXW

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #37,106 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #33

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > African American > Historical #47

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > African #48

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > Literary Fiction > African American

Customer Reviews

If you love historical fiction, the Underground Railroad and/or have a penchant for art history this book hits the trifecta. I don't like to do spoilers in my reviews but as with all good things in life proceed with caution. Upfront, I loved that the author doesn't always make it clear who is black/African American or a descendant of slaves unless ironically the concept of being high yellow,

red bone or dark is introduced by another black person. There are a time jumps from a Plantation in the South prior to the Civil War and a NYC modern day law firm. Women and their roles in society dominate the narrative whether it's the frail /sick plantation owner, her house girl (slave), a young hippie artist in the 1980s and beautifully flawed power lawyer today. Slavery reparations is legally and philosophically grappled with along with descendants rights. The "House Girl" and her female master/owner both produce fine art paintings while the moral and legal art rights are debated over a century later. We wrestle with the finding of descendents, children left behind while parents travel the underground railroad and the "better life" centuries later. This is book is one I want my daughters to read. The ongoing sense of self worth, living your passion and parental forgiveness are wonderfully handled. I highly recommend this book for both its historical and modern moral significance.

It took a while to get me invested in this story, or stories I should say. The House Girl employs that literary device of a having dual perspectives, one in the past, another in the present/future, that somehow connect. I admit, I'm not a fan of this device. I'm not drawn to the dual storylines as I usually find it irritating to continually switch back and forth from past to present. And I usually end up liking one storyline much better than the other (the historical one, for the most part) and am frustrated when the narrative leaves it for the present. Such was the case with The House Girl. If I had been reading a physical copy of the book, I probably would have DNF'd it, even though I hate DNFing books. But I was very bored for the most part. As it happened, I was listening to the audio book, and it was easy to put in my headphones and work and just let it play, not caring if I missed snippets here and there because I really wasn't all that invested. On an audio side-note, the narrator employed some unfortunate character choices when it came to voices, and made Lina, the New York born-and-bred, 24-year-old present-day protagonist, who is a law associate on a partnership track at a very prestigious NYC law firm, sound about two peroxide bottles away from being a full blown sixteen-year-old California valley girl. I rolled my eyes every time she had dialogue, which was quite unfortunate.

I really enjoyed this book by Tara Conklin a new and very talented author. Conklin writes a great suspenseful, emotional story with characters that I'll be sure I'll remember for a long time. Character-driven fiction is what I look for, then a great story, and if possible, but not a must, great prose. Conklin gave me all three and made it look so easy. House Girl is really two stories at once; starting off with the life of a young slave girl who works in the house

of a plantation owner who can barely make it on his tobacco farm. Set in Virginia, a few years before the start of the Civil War, or the "War of Northern Aggression" as the southerners think of it, and a modern story of a young, New York lawyer who is working on reparations for slavery case. Lina Sparrow's modern life collides with Josephine Bell's life bringing closure to both in a beautiful way. House Girl had one of the best, and most satisfying endings I've read in a long time. We start following Josephine's life in her late teens when she's decided to run away again. Just 17 and she has the saddest life I've ever heard of, giving the reader a bird's-eye view of just how awful the life of a slave could be. I can't imagine how this way of life was condoned, in fact endorsed by the churches and religious folks of the day. Josephine is a naturally talented artist, helping her mistress, Missus Bell, in her paintings and charcoal drawings. In modern day, there is an art foundation that gives young women artists a chance, all in the name of a woman who is credited with paintings her slave had done. I couldn't help wonder at how Josephine's talent might have been developed if she'd had the freedom to live her own life instead of being owned by someone else. The insight into the very souls of the characters is what really made me love Conklin's writing. "She thought her voice would be steady but it cracked towards the end, the echo of Mister's blow still in her." Page 7 . . . the idea of running seemed so raw to bring out in the sunlight, with tasks to be done, hours to be got through." Page 9 Josephine is remembering all of the slaves that have been lost to beatings, bee stings, running away, or being sold and after listening to a sermon she thinks to herself "It was only the Lord who would not leave her." Page 71 I really loved this book, and I can't wait to read another one by Tara Conklin.

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