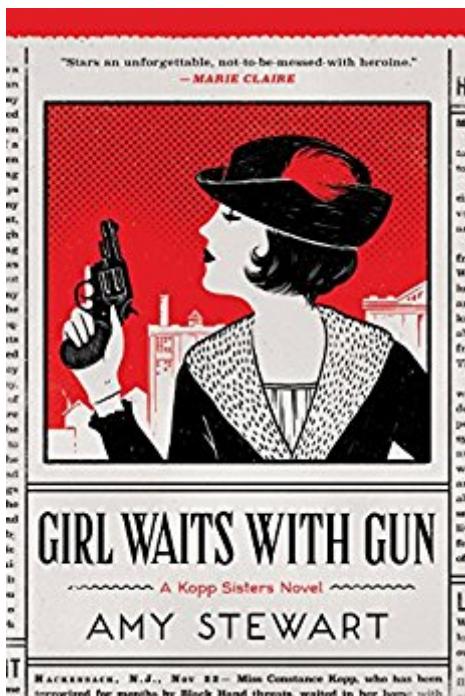


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# Girl Waits With Gun (A Kopp Sisters Novel)



## Synopsis

A National Bestseller A New York Times Editors' ChoiceA September 2015 Indie Next PickA Publishers Marketplace Buzz Book of 2015, Fall/WinterOne of A USA Today's "New and Noteworthy" One of A New York Post's "Must-Read" BooksOne of A Cosmopolitan's "24 Books to Read this Fall" From the New York Times best-selling author of *The Drunken Botanist* comes an enthralling novel based on the forgotten true story of one of the nation's first female deputy sheriffs. Constance Kopp doesn't quite fit the mold. She towers over most men, has no interest in marriage or domestic affairs, and has been isolated from the world since a family secret sent her and her sisters into hiding fifteen years ago. One day a belligerent and powerful silk factory owner runs down their buggy, and a dispute over damages turns into a war of bricks, bullets, and threats as he unleashes his gang on their family farm. When the sheriff enlists her help in convicting the men, Constance is forced to confront her past and defend her family — and she does it in a way that few women of 1914 would have dared. A smart, romping adventure, featuring some of the most memorable and powerful female characters I've seen in print for a long time. I loved every page as I followed the Kopp sisters through a too-good-to-be-true (but mostly true!) tale of violence, courage, stubbornness, and resourcefulness. • Elizabeth GilbertCheck out the brand-new Kopp sisters adventure *Lady Copy Makes Trouble* available now!

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A Conversation with Amy Stewart And Christina Baker Kline, author of *Orphan Train*.

[View larger](#) CBK: *Girl Waits with Gun* is based on a true story, but it's an obscure one that no one had ever written anything about. How did you find the Kopp sisters, and how did you go about your research, given that you had so little to work with? AS: It started with one newspaper clipping. I was writing about a gin smuggler named Henry Kaufman for my previous book, *The Drunken Botanist*. I found an article from 1914 about someone named Henry Kaufman who ran his car into a buggy being driven by these three women, Constance, Norma, and Fleurette Kopp. I liked the Kopp sisters immediately, so for one afternoon I forgot all about the book I was writing, and kept digging. Right away, I thought, "Well, someone's already written a book about them. I'll just order it." But there was no book, no Wikipedia page, nothing except these hundred year-old newspaper stories. So I dug up as much as I could from the papers, courthouse documents, and genealogical records on ancestry.com. The smartest thing I did was to hire a genealogist in New Jersey who knew exactly where to go to find out more. Thanks to her, I got birth certificates, wills, and even land deeds, all of which told me so much more than I could have imagined. But yes, you're right—I really had to chip this one out of the historical record myself. It definitely made the research more exciting—I was uncovering family secrets! CBK: You've been writing nonfiction for years. What made you decide to make the switch to fiction for this story? How was the experience of writing it different from writing nonfiction? AS: You know, I did think about writing it as nonfiction, but there were all these gaps in the record that frustrated me. I had no idea what they were doing for months at a time. Also, I couldn't say for sure why they did some of the things they did. What drove Henry Kaufman to attack these women? And what led Constance to stand on a street corner with a gun in her handbag to defend her family? I mean, who does that in 1914? Who does that today, even? I loved being able to fill in those blanks and to explore all the small, intimate moments in their lives that sometimes go missing in nonfiction.

[View larger](#) CBK: That's an important point, I think—that we read novels for the

intimacy. I think the key to writing a novel based on real people and events is to figure out when to enter the story and how to tell it. Getting the perspective right is so important. You decided to write from Constance's point of view, in her voice. What went into that decision? Did you try any other approaches? AS: I wish I could say that something went into that decision. The truth is that Constance just spoke to me. If there was a mystical, spiritual component to the process of writing this book, it was the very personal obligation I felt to Constance. From the beginning I knew that this was her story, and that she deserved to have it told in her own words. Norma and Fleurette, in real life, had such unique and contradictory personalities that I wanted to see them through Constance's eyes, and to experience her reaction to them. CBK: Every writer of historical fiction has to decide for herself where to draw the line between fiction and fact. Did you have a rule of thumb about this, or did you figure it out as you went? AS: Oh, yes. I was very deliberate about that. If it actually happened, it stayed in the book, exactly as it really went down. I allowed myself to add fiction around the truth—for instance, Henry Kaufman's employee Lucy Blake is fiction—but if I had a real person or a real event, I stayed faithful to it. I did change a few minor characters to suit the story, but I explained all of those changes in the source notes at the end. My whole motivation for writing about the Kopp sisters was to share their weird and wonderful story with the world, so I just didn't see a reason to make it into something else.

[View larger](#) CBK: The fact that something really happened can add interest and excitement to fiction. Novelists can do some crazy things in the name of research—it's not unheard of for a writer to go around wearing corsets, eating period food, et cetera. Did you do anything like that to put yourself into the world of your novel? AS: Corsets! I didn't go that far. But I did learn how to fire a gun. I'm terrified of guns and have never been around them, but the most pivotal moment in the book comes when Sheriff Heath puts a gun in Constance's hand. I had to know what that felt like. I'm glad I did, actually: I had a few details wrong about what Constance would have experienced, so going out to a firing range with an instructor really helped me live in that moment alongside Constance in a way that I couldn't have otherwise. My instructor even let me fire one-handed, the way people did back then, which requires a different stance. I learned a lot—and I was a pretty good shot! CBK: This makes me wonder: What would the real Kopp sisters think if they read this book? AS: Believe it or not, I think about that all the time. The Kopp sisters are very real to me and their opinions matter a great deal. If I could somehow travel through time and hand them my book, I think Norma would arch an eyebrow and write corrections in the margin, Fleurette would demand that all the parts about her be read aloud over

and over, and Constance would just shake her head, lean forward, and tell me all the secret truths about their lives that I never could have guessed. I dream about that moment.

I'm a fan of Amy Stewart's non-fiction books *Wicked Plants* and *Wicked Bugs*, so when I saw that she'd written historical fiction based on the life of a real woman, I was eager to read it. *Girl Waits with Gun* satisfies on some levels, but not all. Stewart found the bare bones true story of one of the country's first female deputy sheriffs and fleshed it out by piecing together genealogical records, newspaper articles, and court documents. Excerpts from actual letters are used, and all the newspaper headlines throughout the book are real. Constance, Norma, and Fleurette Kopp were raised by their deeply distrustful Austrian mother, and it led to a very strange upbringing indeed. Norma seems to have inherited most of her mother's suspicious nature and just wants to be left alone so she can raise her pigeons. Fleurette, much younger than the other two, is pretty, flighty, willful-- a young woman poised to bring all sorts of calamities raining down upon her sisters' heads if she's not put on the right path. Soon. Constance is the most "normal" of the three, but she harbors her own secrets and thwarted dreams which are told in brief flashbacks. The collision with Henry Kaufman's automobile is in many ways fortuitous. It shakes the sisters out of their limbo, and gives them all a good chance to live lives unencumbered by their mother's prejudices. But as interesting as this all is, the story moves much too slowly and is in dire need of tightening. Weighing in at over 400 pages, *Girl Waits with Gun* waddles when it should dance. At about the 300-page mark, Constance should've stopped waiting and fired the gun. Then my mere liking would undoubtedly have turned to unabashed enthusiasm.

If I could give a book 10 stars I would!!! this was beautifully written, and I do love an author who proof reads and has others proof read, the grammar was impeccable, no constant misspellings nor any jargon that would be inappropriate for the era the story took place. She brought to life a piece of American history that most of us would never have known about. Thank you dear author, for such a wonderfully written slice of American history; I enjoyed it so very much, and can hardly wait to get the next book. I hope you keep writing....there are endless slices of history like this so many of us would love to learn about, and you bring it to life! and what a fun way to give life to History! And maybe because I am old and used to reading overly long books, " War and Peace " comes to mind, I did not think this book too long, or drawn out, I found it to be perfect!

I have to say that I really enjoyed this book. It's set in 1914 in New Jersey and is about three sisters

living on their own and trying to make their way in a world that is not female friendly. Women in America still don't have the right to vote. This is based on the real life of Constance Kopp and her two sisters, Norma and Fleurette. The story opens with an automobile running into the Kopp sisters' buggy and causing considerable damage. Constance tried to collect from the driver, Henry Kaufman, an owner of Kaufman Silk Dyeing Company. Kaufman is not cooperative at all and Constance goes after him with an invoice. This is remarkable for her as they were raised by an emigrant mother who was mistrustful of everyone especially Singer sewing machine door-to-door salesmen. The girls have no friends and barely even acquaintances. There is a secondary story of a girl working in the factory and the conditions the workers were subject. The main story though is Constance's search for justice amid Kaufman's unrelenting attacks against her. It really points out how little resources women had in those times. The sense of time in this book is excellent and makes you appreciate how far we've come in power and amenities. This author is from my neck of the woods, Eureka, CA. and owns a bookstore there. She has written some really interesting nonfiction books including one on earthworms.

Constance Kopp was an unusual woman for her time. Faced with harassment from a local factory owner, she did not wait for men to come to her defense; she armed herself to defend her rural New Jersey farm and her sisters from the man and his criminal associates. Amy Stewart excels at presenting true tales in an enjoyable way. "Wicked Plants" and "The Drunken Botanist" are examples drawn from her gardens. The Kopp sisters novels—yes, there's a second out already, and eventually "maybe as many as 10 novels...," according to the author—rise from learning about the Kopp sisters while she was researching "The Drunken Botanist." Stewart's path to discovery would mean searching reels of microfilm and boxes of old newsprint, photos and documents to find the bare bones of the tale. Fleshing out the skeletal truth to create the fictionalized novel was a job peculiarly suited to her, considering the whimsical and fantastic "The Last Bookstore in America." In that all-fictional account, Stewart took real-life experience in her bookstore and local knowledge of stoner culture in Humboldt County, and parlayed it into an entertaining tale of battling diminishing book sales in the age of the Kindle. (Ironically, the novel is still only available as an eBook, making it the only book of Stewart's that I do not possess in a signed version.) In "Girl Waits With Gun," we learn Constance Kopp's back-story. How did she become a woman capable of hunting alone through the seedier sides of the city, in an age when respectable women even entered a hotel by a separate door to avoid the appearance of impropriety? What gave her the courage to stand up against a man whom many men feared? Her

story is fascinating, not least because of the ways our lives have changed in such a brief time. Women in this time did not vote—“were not even citizens in a legal sense” and were restricted to a tiny range of jobs outside the home. And yet here was a woman who ignored the mores and conventions of the day and found a way to do what she needed. Brava, Constance! And brava, Amy Stewart! I can’t wait to begin “Lady Kopp Makes Trouble,” the next episode in the lives of the daring Kopp sisters.

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