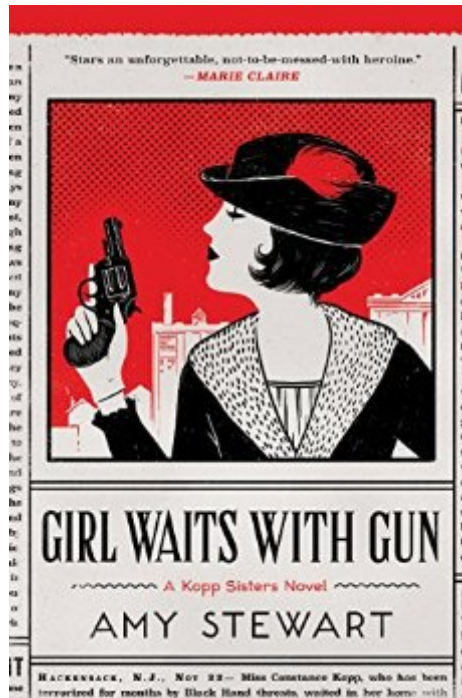


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Girl Waits With Gun (A Kopp Sisters Novel)



Synopsis

A National Bestseller A New York Times Editors' Choice September 2015 Indie Next Pick Publishers Marketplace Buzz Book of 2015, Fall/Winter One of USA Today's "New and Noteworthy" One of New York Post's "Must-Read" Books One of 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 Gilbert

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 Koppes 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 put 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 Koppes 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.

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