

A Conversation with
AMY STEWART

author of **MISS KOPP'S MIDNIGHT CONFESSIONS**

This is the third installment in the Kopp sisters' adventures. Does this book pick up where LADY COP MAKES TROUBLE left off?

Yes, almost exactly. In the last book, we left Constance and her sisters on Christmas Eve, 1915. Now we meet up with them again in January of 1916. Constance is facing a new kind of trouble at the jail: she's seeing more and more young women locked up on so-called "morality charges." This novel tells the story of two of those real-life cases: a young woman who was arrested based on a complaint from her mother that she was "wayward," when she'd only left home to find work, and a teenager who ran away from home with a man she met on a steamboat, which was a more serious charge. In both cases, Constance tried to help the girls, and to keep them from being locked up for months or possibly years.

Were these so-called "morality crimes" a real problem at the time?

Yes! Actually, what was a real problem at the time was the idea of women having any sort of independence. Before World War I, it was unusual for women to live on their own, hold a job, and do whatever they wanted in their free time. It was a very new development for young, single women to go out in public, unchaperoned, and meet men at dances, saloons, movie theaters, and amusement parks. The assumption was that virtuous young women would never willingly participate in any sort of "moral degradation" with a man. They were seen as victims, so laws were passed to protect women from the corrupting influence of modern city life.

How long were those laws in effect?

The Mann Act, named after the congressman who wrote it, was passed in 1910 and is still in effect, although it's been greatly changed. Originally the law made it a crime to transport across state lines "any woman or girl for the purpose of prostitution or debauchery, or for any other immoral purpose." Today the law is used for a worthy purpose—to stop sex trafficking—but in those days, it was often used to prosecute any man and woman who were not married to each other and might have been getting together for some "immoral" reason.



THE "WHITE HOUSE," TRENTON GIRLS' REFORMATORY

What kind of defense could a woman put up, if accused under the Mann Act?

Not much, really! Remember, this was long before the Supreme Court definitively established the right to an attorney. Most of these young women couldn't afford an attorney and were given no defense at all. By 1916, it was increasingly common for policewomen to act as advocates in cases like these. Otherwise, women could be sent to a reformatory or state prison for behavior that we would today call "going on a date."

**MISS KOPP FINDS
STORIES AGAINST
GIRL ARE UNTRUE**

Edna Heustis, age 18 years, whose mother, Mrs. Monvillia Heustis, of Edgewater, caused the young woman's arrest Thursday at the plant of the Dupont powder works in Pompton Lakes, was released here yesterday by Judge Seufert, the charge of incorrigibility not having been proven.

Miss Constance A. Kopp, Under Sheriff, who investigated the case, accompanied the girl back to Pompton Lakes and saw that she was reinstated in her old position at the powder plant, where she is earning 30 cents an hour in the fuse department.

"I am fully convinced," said Miss Kopp yesterday, "that the girl is high minded and of good character and that her only desire in leaving home was to go to work and earn her own living. It was selfish in her mother to want her back. She bore a good reputation in Pompton Lakes and the stories concerning her being wayward, I can't believe are true."

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Fleurette has an adventure of her own in this book. Was any of that based on real life?

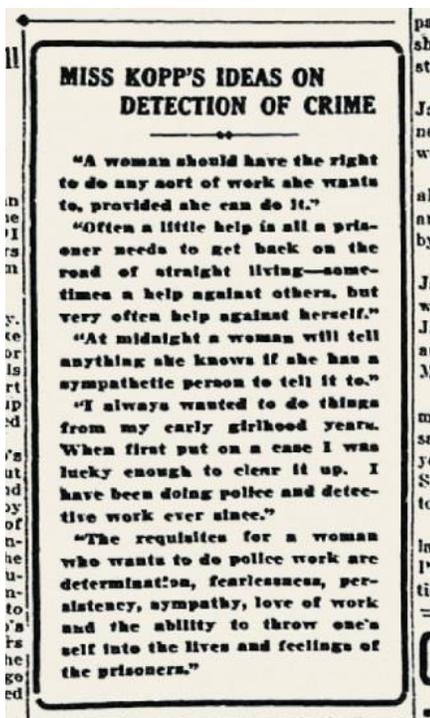
What happened with Fleurette's part of the story is that I found one small case that Constance worked, and the more I researched it, the more fascinated I became with the people involved. I wanted more of a chance to explore the lives of these people, so I gave Fleurette a fictional role in their real case. It involved a vaudeville performer named May Ward, who had a dispute with her husband and stage manager, Freeman Bernstein. I started researching the two of them and found one scandal after another. I decided to give them a larger role in this novel than they had in Constance's real life—and to involve Fleurette, who dreams of a life on the stage like May Ward has—because I very much want to bring them back in future books as their real-life scandals unfold.



I actually tracked down May Ward's marriage license so I could get her autograph, and I've had a rubber stamp made of it. So if you come to one of my events, you can get a copy "signed" by May Ward!

What is Norma up to in this installment?

In real life, Norma was very good at staying away from reporters and photographers, so I don't know what she might have been doing in real life. In my version of events, she's working on another pigeon scheme, this one based on what real pigeon clubs were doing around the country at that time (hint: It involves sending messages to the White House by carrier pigeon!). I also have her handling Constance's correspondence. In the early part of 1916, Constance was the subject of two major newspaper profiles that ran all over the country, complete with photographs, quotes, and fabulous hand-drawn illustrations. Constance actually did get lots of fan mail as a result of these stories, and a few marriage proposals! So I have Norma handling her correspondence, and brusquely turning down all offers of marriage on Constance's behalf.



This novel is written in the third person. What made you switch from Constance's point of view?

I've always had the idea that I wanted every book in the series to be different in some way, and that changing point of view would be one way to do that. I really love writing in Constance's voice, but this time, I wanted to get into the heads of two of the young women locked up in the Hackensack jail, and to see what happened before they were arrested. The best way to do that was to tell the story in third person, so we could follow them around. I also had the realization that if I wrote in the third person, then the reader could see people telling lies to Constance, or keeping secrets from her, and that was very intriguing to me.

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What inspired the title?

One of the newspaper profiles about Constance ran a great illustration of her comforting a stricken inmate, with the caption, “‘First Gain Confidence of Women Prisoners and They Will Tell Truth, Especially at Mystic Hour of Midnight,’ Says Miss Kopp, Naming Six Requisites for Detective.” The six requisites, by the way, were “determination, fearlessness, persistency, sympathy, love of work, and the ability to throw oneself into the lives and feelings of the prisoners.”

In those days, a “confession” was understood to mean not just a confession of guilt, but an admission of what, exactly, had happened leading up to an arrest. So when women prisoners went to Constance at midnight to tell the truth, they were “confessing.” I just built a title out of that idea.



What’s coming next for the Kopp’s?

I’m working on the fourth book now. I have two more fascinating cases that Constance worked, both involving women who were being put into state hospitals over illnesses or disabilities. One of the cases deals with the issue of post-partum depression, which was very poorly understood in those days. There’s a lot of political intrigue swirling around the 1916 election, and America is getting ever closer to joining the war. Interesting times—stay tuned!

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MISS KOPP'S MIDNIGHT COCKTAIL

The Midnight



The Midnight (that's its real name!) comes from the 1922 book *Cocktails: How to Mix Them*, and is described as a drink that was "very much appreciated amongst the dancing people at the Savoy Hotel in London a few years ago."

It is basically a Bronx cocktail with absinthe instead of orange bitters, so if you're not fond of the absinthe, try it with orange bitters and call it a Bronx. Just be sure to use good vermouth, and remember that vermouth is wine—it must be kept refrigerated, and used within about a month of opening the bottle.

1 oz gin
1 oz sweet vermouth
1 oz dry vermouth
Fresh-squeezed juice of a quarter of an orange or grapefruit
Dash of absinthe

Swirl a dash of absinthe around a cocktail glass to rinse it, then toss out the extra. Combine the other ingredients in a cocktail shaker with ice and stir well. Strain and serve in a cocktail glass.

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