



## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH JEN TURANO



### **Behind the Scenes**

APART FROM THE CROWD  
by Jen Turano

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### **1. Why did you decide to open this story during Alva Vanderbilt's famed costume ball of 1883?**

I've been fascinated with Alva Vanderbilt's ball ever since I stumbled on photographs from that event taken by the famed photographer Jose Maria Mora. Some of those pictures can still be viewed in the digital archives at the Museum of the City of New York, and after I saw a guest wearing a stuffed cat on her head, I knew this was a ball I needed to research. Once I realized the Vanderbilt event was a catalyst in changing New York High Society, since this was when new money began getting a foot in society doors, I decided I needed to include this ball in one of my stories, and *Behind the Scenes* worked well because I'd planned to set it toward the beginning of 1883.

### **2. Miss Permilia Griswold has an unusual occupation. How did you come up with that idea?**

When I decided to write a series about wallflowers, I wanted to write them, not as victims, but as unseen ladies possessing talents no one seemed to notice. Because wallflowers are known to fade into the walls they languish against, I decided it would be a hoot to have one of my characters offered an opportunity to use her status as a wallflower to gather information for a society column. Then, to add additional mystery to the storyline, I made a list of What Ifs. Halfway down that list, a most intriguing thought sprang to mind: What if an anonymous society columnist was collecting information for her column and overheard a plot surrounding murder? Well, after that idea, the book just seemed to take on a life of its own, and months later I can present Miss Permilia's story to the world.

### **3. Mr. Asher Rutherford owns a department store. Was there a reason you gave him that occupation?**

I got my very first job in a department store the day I turned 16. It was at L.S. Good & Company, based in Wheeling, West Virginia, although the store I took a job at was located in the Ohio Valley Mall. From that first day, which was Black Friday in case anyone was wondering, I've had a love of department stores, especially those located in the heart of downtowns throughout the eastern states. There's just something delightful about old-fashioned tea rooms, elevators with grated doors, and gilded mirrors hanging on the walls that makes me sigh in delight. There's also a scent I've only experienced in these old stores, a mix of lemon polish, old wood, and new fabric. Because of the love I have for department stores, I wanted to create a character who opened his own store, adding innovations for the day such as tea rooms and bargain basements. I also have a love of old amusements parks, which means, well, one of those might show up in a book someday.

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**4. What was the most interesting historical tidbit you uncovered in your research for this book?**

The photo album of the actual guests and their costumes was astonishing, but some of those pictures directed me to investigate the quadrille dances that were to be performed during the ball, and that's when I learned I never understood what the quadrille dances during the Gilded Age entailed. I didn't know that these dances were danced by only a select few—young ladies and gentlemen who'd been specifically chosen for each dance. They'd then practice at places like Family Circle Dancing Class—founded by Mr. Ward McAllister—or at Allen Dodworth's Dancing Academy. On the night of the Vanderbilt ball, there were six quadrilles performed: The Hobby Horse Quadrille, The Mother Goose Quadrille, The Opera Quadrille, The Star Quadrille, The Dresden Quadrille, and then, my favorite, The Go-As-You-Please Quadrille. Now, all the quadrilles except for this last one demanded the participants dress in specific costumes and perform specific steps, my favorite being the ivory costumes and powdered white wigs the dancers in The Dresden Quadrille wore, chosen to allow them to resemble pieces of porcelain. I took the liberty of adding a little drama to The Go-As-You-Please Quadrille, but you'll have to read the book to see exactly what type of liberty I took.

**5. Where did you come up with the unusual names of your characters?**

I peruse a lot of old census data, as well as obituaries. I found Permilina in an old obituary, but I got the name Gertrude from a hamster my sister used to have years ago. She was a weird hamster, or maybe she was a guinea pig, but she could escape her cage no matter how well secured she was, and when she was on the loose, she would chew up electrical cords. One can't help but notice that Miss Gertrude Cadwalader is a little odd, although I did refrain from giving her an unusual habit, such as munching on anything electric. As for Miss Temperance Flowerdew, I got her name from a high school friend of mine who was working on her family tree and uncovered an honest to goodness Temperance Flowerdew. As soon as I heard that name, I had to use it, because who wouldn't want to use a name like Temperance Flowerdew?