



In Good Company

by Jen Turano

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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH JEN TURANO

1. Why did you choose to set this particular story in Newport during the summer social season?

Before I began writing A CLASS OF THEIR OWN series, I read a very interesting book *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*. After finishing the book, I knew I wanted to set one of my stories there, and Miss Millie Longfellow seemed the perfect candidate to spend her summer in Newport, especially given her profession of being a nanny, if a somewhat questionable one. With enormous mansions (called cottages by the socially elite) springing up almost overnight along Bellevue Avenue, especially after Mrs. Astor purchased Beechwood in 1881, Newport was becoming *the* place to summer.

Because of that, I thought it would be great fun to introduce readers to this delightful world of days gone by, complete with games of lawn tennis, a Reading Room club where there was no reading done, and the Newport Casino, a lovely establishment where one could play tennis, croquet, listen to music, and dine, and a place that was open to everyone if they had the means to pay the daily admission rate, which was rather unusual given the elitist attitude of Newport. There were also wonderful beaches sprinkled about, the most exclusive being Bailey's Beach, and while it wasn't as snobbish in 1882 as it became after 1900, there was still enough snobbery that guards were posted to keep the riffraff at bay while the celebrities of the Gilded Age (Astor, Vanderbilt, Fish, Oelrichs, and McAllister) bobbed about in water that was known to be less than pristine.

2. Miss Millie Longfellow, the heroine of *In Good Company*, carries a dictionary around with her more often than not, one she pulls out whenever she doesn't understand a word. What compelled you to create a character with such a peculiar habit?

I've always been fascinated with stories centered around people who strive to improve their lot in life instead of simply waiting around, bemoaning their fate. Miss Longfellow, while growing up in an orphanage, has seen relatively few advantages throughout the years, but because she possesses an extraordinary spirit, she's taken it upon herself to become the best young lady she can possibly be. The fact that she isn't bothered in the least by the ladies who take to mocking her because of her peculiar habit has made her one of my favorite characters to date.

3. Mr. Everett Mulberry is involved with Miss Caroline Dixon in *In Good Company* as well as in the first book of the series, *After a Fashion*. Clearly, they don't always see eye to eye, or even seem to like each other at times, and one can't help but wonder why you paired up Everett and Caroline in the first place.

During the Gilded Age, it was still quite common for people of means to marry for mutual advantage. One well-known couple of that age who married for that very reason was Alva and William Kissam Vanderbilt. Alva wanted to marry William because he was from one of the richest families in the United States. William wanted to marry Alva because she was vivacious and socially driven, and she was the Vanderbilt's best hope of becoming accepted within high society, something they were being kept out of by Caroline Astor, the queen of New York society. Alva and William, to no one's surprise, ended up loathing the very sight of each other and eventually divorced, an act that was hardly considered acceptable, but an act that went far in explaining the depth of their loathing. Because of that story, and because of the many similar sad tales of marriage I've researched over the years, I decided to write a couple much like Alva and William, but with a twist—one that might have something to do with...love.