

APHRODITE DUKE

BOOK CLUB KIT

J. J. McAVOY





I must confess that I frequently find myself quite disappointed in reality. My inability to see what is coming and how it will work out frustrates me daily. I believe that's why I sought refuge in the pages of romance. Walking through the aisles of bookstores felt as if I was choosing a key to a world more fantastical than my own.

However, with each new book I read and the worlds I visited, I ignored the glaring fact that the characters often did not look like me—a woman with brown skin and eyes whose hair puffed at the slightest semblance of moisture in the air. It was even more apparent when I entered the world of Regency Romance. As for many, my love for this genre came from Jane Austen. I wanted so badly to join in and not merely watch. But each time that I tried to imagine myself within that era, I thought, "How could a Person of Color (POC) exist as nobility during the Regency?"

The *Bridgerton* TV series answered this by saying, "They simply do." And it made me remember another great inspiration, Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Cinderella* with Brandy . . . As a young girl, I didn't care how it happened; I was merely excited at seeing someone who looked like me. The importance of seeing oneself in books, movies, and on TV allows for the dreams of the world at large to expand, joys to be realized, and gives validation that not only do you exist but your presence matters. You matter. Not just when you are suffering but also when you are laughing.

In my novel, *Aphrodite and the Duke*, diversity exists on every page but is never mentioned because my desire is for you to live in this world freely. Aphrodite is you, she is me, she is all women, and her biggest problem is not how she looks but how she feels for a man who broke her heart.

The Duke, who swore to love only her, left her jilted and open to ridicule by marrying another. Four years later, just as she has returned to society, he reappears in her life with secrets and dangers that put them both at risk.

I pass this book on to you, hoping that you have as much fun reading it as I did writing it. To all the people—especially the independent booksellers/bookstores that have championed this work—I thank you sincerely.

Your author,

J.J. McAvoy

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. What are your thoughts on Aphrodite's parents naming her after the goddess of love and beauty? How did it affect her personality? Do you believe being named after a hero or a goddess can set an unreachable expectation or would it inspire motivation to live up to the name?
- 2. "And when I was sixteen, he made me this one promise. When we are married, you will be free to be however you wish to be. I swear it." Why did these words have such a big impact on Aphrodite? Is being positioned on such a high pedestal worth the cost of the freedom to be herself?
- 3. What similarities and differences do you see between *Aphrodite and The Duke* and the *Bridgerton* Netflix television series based on Julia Quinn's bestselling book series? How are Aphrodite Du Bell and the *Bridgerton* lead character, Daphne Bridgerton similar?
- **4.** Aphrodite witnesses a young couple being intimate behind the bushes at a Ball. She knows this is forbidden behavior, but she can't seem to look away. Why do you believe society kept young women in the dark on sexual intimacies until marriage during the Regency era? But expected men to be knowledgeable and experienced? If these roles were reversed how do you think it would change the story?
- **5.** Aphrodite's sister, Hathor Du Bell, seems to envy Aphrodite because she believes she has it all: the looks, the personality, and all the men at her feet. Have you ever felt this way towards a sibling or friend? Why does she not believe people when they say she is just as beautiful as her sister Aphrodite?

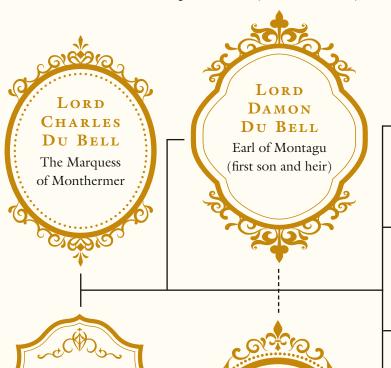
- **6.** How would you describe the Du Bell family? Do you feel they work together and look out for one another or the opposite? Which family member do you relate to the most?
- 7. What are your thoughts on the rocky relationship between Aphrodite and Evander? Despite how much he hurt her, Aphrodite and Evander are wed. Do you believe in second chances? If you were Aphrodite would you have taken Evander back?
- **8.** Before she can marry anyone, Aphrodite must have the approval from her father. How do you feel about women not having the full freedom to choose who they'd like to marry during the Regency era?
- 9. Being a wife is unfamiliar territory for Aphrodite. Her marriage comes with bonus commitments such as Evander's sister, Verity, and his daughter, Emeline. How well does Aphrodite handle this new family dynamic? Would you be able to take on this new role and responsibility?
- **10.** Evander refuses to be anything like his father and he tries his best not to repeat history with his daughter, Emeline. Family trauma can unknowingly affect someone's actions towards others. Give your thoughts on this topic. Has a family trauma affected any of your relationships?



THE DU BELL FAMILY &



One of the most prominent (and fortunate) families in the town: blessed with Title, Wealth, Wit, and Beauty.



LADY

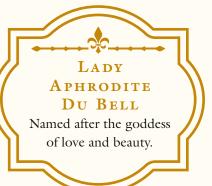
DEANNA

LADY

SILVA

DU BELL

Countess of Montagu





Named after the goddess of the sky, women, and of fertility and love.

LADY DEVANA DU BELL

Named after the goddess of wild nature, forests, hunting and the moon.

LORD HECTOR DU BELL

Named after the Trojan prince hero, the greatest warrior for Troy during the Trojan war.

LADY ABENA DU BELL

Named after the goddess of war, handicraft, and practical reason.

