

Meet the Characters of *Rules of Disengagement*

Welcome to Montreal and the world of *Rules of Disengagement*.

Stephanie Mitchel has spent years following a set of rules designed to keep her confident, in control, and—most importantly—safe. Unfortunately, the people who enter her life don't always cooperate.

Here are the characters, friends, family members, musicians, neighbours, and four-legged companions who make up Stephanie's world.

Stephanie Mitchel

Twenty-five | Musician, songwriter, music-store employee

Stephanie has rules for everything.

Always be in control. Always look your best. Never show weakness. And never let anyone get close enough to hurt you.

On the outside, Stephanie is stylish, confident, sarcastic, and completely capable of commanding a room. She sings in a local band, works in the music store she's loved since childhood, and knows exactly how to create the impression she wants people to see.

Underneath all that confidence is someone quieter.

Stephanie loves playing guitar more than being the centre of attention. She can spend hours writing music. She's surprisingly good with kids, hopeless in the kitchen, and far more sentimental than she'd ever willingly admit.

And when the life she's carefully constructed begins falling apart, Stephanie has to decide whether the rules she's been following still belong to her.

A few Stephanie facts:

- Music is her happy place.
- She'd rather play guitar than sing.
- Her CDs are organized by genre and then alphabetically.
- Her housekeeping is considerably less organized.
- She has been known to arrive deliberately late for dates.
- She considers uncomfortable footwear a reasonable price for looking good.

- Sarcasm is both a hobby and a defence mechanism.
- She talks to her cat as though they're roommates.

Jake

Painting contractor, renovator, amateur chef, terrible communicator

Tall, blond, brown-eyed, and equipped with one very distracting dimple, Jake comes from a family full of doctors.

He chose paintbrushes instead.

Jake owns a successful painting business and hopes to expand into full contracting. He's practical, capable, observant, and comfortable enough in his own skin that Stephanie's carefully cultivated confidence doesn't intimidate him.

He hikes. He cooks. He bakes. He renovates houses. He packs first-aid kits.

And he notices things.

What Stephanie finds slightly more challenging is Jake's habit of assuming he's told her important information when he absolutely has not.

A few Jake facts:

- He is pathologically punctual.
- His idea of lunch may involve hiking boots.
- He makes his own hummus.
- He has a loud, deep laugh Stephanie notices immediately.
- He renovated much of his own home.
- He has three sisters.
- He gives terrible nicknames.
- He runs his fingers through his hair when nervous or frustrated.
- He's a much better listener than communicator.
- He believes a relationship should be a partnership.

Family

Chelsea Mitchel

Stephanie's older sister

Bold, beautiful, talented, competitive, and impossible to ignore, Chelsea was everything young Stephanie thought she wasn't.

As children, the sisters were inseparable. They dreamed about music, fame, fabulous apartments, and the exciting lives they were certain awaited them.

As teenagers, things became more complicated.

Chelsea died at eighteen, but her influence remains woven through Stephanie's life—especially through one childhood creation known as *The Mitchel Sisters' Guide to an Awesome Life*.

A few Chelsea facts:

- Wanted to become a singer.
- Loved being the centre of attention.
- Was fiercely competitive.
- Had very expensive tastes.
- Loved oatmeal-raisin cookies.
- Once imagined that she and Stephanie would live together downtown and have a dog named Eddy.
- Helped create the rules Stephanie still remembers years later.

Helen Mitchel

Stephanie's mother

Helen has survived loss, divorce, and more than a few difficult years with her youngest daughter.

She's practical, caring, patient, and slowly building a new life for herself.

Helen loves Stephanie deeply. The problem is that the two of them have become very good at talking around the things that matter rather than about them.

And when twenty-five-year-old Stephanie unexpectedly moves back home, Helen eventually decides that a little parental encouragement toward independence might be overdue.

A few Helen facts:

- Loves gardening.
- Shows affection through practical acts of care.
- Has rebuilt her life after divorce.
- Is extraordinarily patient with Stephanie.

- Knows that sometimes helping an adult child means giving them a push.

Stephanie's Dad

Stephanie and her father were once connected by family, music, and all the ordinary routines neither appreciated until life changed.

Now they speak only occasionally and meet once a year.

Although he remains mostly at the edges of Stephanie's life, memories of him—and of the family they once were—are never far away.

A few Dad facts:

- Loves hockey.
- Introduced his daughters to Van Halen.
- Smokes.
- Remembers how much Stephanie loved writing music as a girl.
- Has never quite figured out how to bridge the distance between himself and his daughter.

Bruce

Helen's partner

Bruce is dependable, practical, and fiercely protective of Helen.

He tries not to interfere in mother-daughter disagreements.

Usually.

When he does decide to say something, however, subtlety isn't exactly his specialty.

Stephanie doesn't always appreciate his opinions, but Bruce may be one of the few people willing to tell her exactly what he sees.

A few Bruce facts:

- Drives a station wagon.
- Smokes.
- Believes adults should take responsibility for themselves.
- Helps Stephanie move even when things between them are frosty.

- Is excellent at preparing for power outages.

Friends, Neighbours & Four-Legged Family

Vicki

Stephanie's downstairs neighbour

Friendly. Artistic. Cheerful.

Suspiciously cheerful, as far as Stephanie is concerned.

Vicki lives downstairs with her rescue dog, Gunner, works at an art-supply store, volunteers at an animal shelter, and seems endlessly willing to help people.

Stephanie initially finds her exhausting.

Fortunately, Vicki is very difficult to discourage.

A few Vicki facts:

- Draws and paints.
- Decorates cookies like tiny works of art.
- Has a *Hallelujah* tattoo on her forearm.
- Loves thrift-store bargains.
- Takes Gunner to work.
- Hums while concentrating.
- Calls Stephanie “neighbor” for an embarrassingly long time.
- Is much tougher than her sunny personality suggests.

Ginger

Stephanie's elderly orange tabby

Ginger has green eyes, white paws, impeccable grooming habits, and the quiet confidence of someone who assumes every comfortable surface belongs to her.

After losing her previous owner, Ginger ends up at the local animal shelter.

Stephanie goes looking for a quiet, low-maintenance pet.

She finds Ginger instead.

Stephanie may believe she's the one doing the rescuing, but Ginger has her own ideas about that.

A few Ginger facts:

- Is believed to be in her mid-teens.
- Immediately makes herself at home.
- Has a luxurious pink cat bed.
- Frequently ignores said bed in favour of Stephanie's.
- Becomes Stephanie's confidante.
- Has excellent timing when someone needs company.

Gunner

Vicki's rescue dog

Gunner is a husky-pit bull mix, enthusiastic neighbour, and professional belly-rub enthusiast.

He accompanies Vicki on walks, goes to work with her, and has very definite opinions about sharing her attention with other animals.

Stephanie claims she isn't a dog person.

Gunner appears unconcerned by this.

A few Gunner facts:

- Was adopted from the local animal shelter.
- Wears booties during Montreal winters.
- Goes to work with Vicki.
- Gets jealous when Vicki pets other animals.
- Will happily roll over for belly rubs.
- Makes himself part of almost any gathering.

Exes & Complications

Trevor Robertson

Stephanie's ex-boyfriend

Practical, cautious, financially responsible, and methodical, Trevor might be Stephanie's exact opposite.

He plans for retirement. He watches World War II documentaries. He carefully manages his money.

Stephanie does none of these things.

Their breakup at the beginning of the story leaves Stephanie suddenly single, temporarily homeless, and forced to rethink the future she assumed she was building.

Trevor may not be the villain Stephanie would prefer him to be.

But she isn't quite ready to admit that.

A few Trevor facts:

- Loves terrible puns.
- Is a meticulous financial planner.
- Has money but lives modestly.
- Is painfully honest.
- Is not a natural risk-taker.
- Once returned to a restaurant because they forgot to charge him for two drinks.
- Pops his gum, much to Stephanie's annoyance.

Bridgette

Trevor's longtime friend and roommate

Bridgette is practical, friendly, unpretentious, and comfortable in her own skin.

She knits. She works as a civil servant. She values comfortable shoes.

And she has absolutely no interest in competing with Stephanie.

Stephanie isn't sure what to do with that.

A few Bridgette facts:

- Has known Trevor since childhood.
- Knits.
- Prioritizes comfortable footwear.
- Is genuinely kind.
- Is not interested in becoming anyone's enemy.

The Music World

Riley

Stephanie's guitar student

Riley walks into Just Music looking for a trombone.

He leaves with a guitar.

Quiet, uncertain, and easily discouraged, Riley isn't convinced he has much musical talent—especially with an athletic older brother who seems to be good at everything.

Fortunately, Stephanie knows something about growing up in someone else's shadow.

Helping Riley discover music may also help Stephanie rediscover something about herself.

A few Riley facts:

- Loves hockey.
- Initially thinks the trombone looks easy.
- Is not impressed by boring practice exercises.
- Responds much better when music connects to something he already loves.
- Has an older brother named Dillan.
- Creates the guitar-string mnemonic **Eight Angry Dogs Grab Boiled Eggs**.

Diane

Stephanie's manager at Just Music

Diane has watched Stephanie talk to musicians and customers for years.

She also notices something Stephanie hasn't fully recognized herself: Stephanie has a gift for explaining music in a way that makes people want to keep trying.

Sometimes another person can see the beginning of a new path before you're ready to see it yourself.

A few Diane facts:

- Manages Just Music.
- Appreciates Stephanie's musical knowledge.
- Notices talent in people.
- Encourages without pushing.
- Strongly regrets the store's black staff shirts because they show every speck of dust.

Marc

Stephanie's bandmate

Tattooed, shaggy-haired Marc hosts rehearsals, helps keep the band running, and has known Stephanie long enough to recognize exactly how stubborn she can be.

He takes the music seriously—but he also understands that being in a band requires more than simply being talented.

A few Marc facts:

- Has tattooed arms.
- Rarely seems to wear sleeves.
- Hosts band practices.
- Helps manage the band's transportation and logistics.
- Believes heartbreak is useful songwriting material.

Erin

Stephanie's bandmate

With straight black hair, bright red lipstick, and a bass guitar in her hands, Erin can more than hold her own around Stephanie.

She's observant, practical, and direct enough to say things other people might prefer to leave unsaid.

Stephanie doesn't always appreciate this particular gift.

A few Erin facts:

- Plays bass.
- Has jet-black hair.
- Loves bright red lipstick.

- Has a dry sense of humour.
- Is rarely intimidated by Stephanie's attitude.

Sébastien

Stephanie's bandmate

Sébastien would generally prefer everyone stop discussing the problem and get back to rehearsal.

Armed with drumsticks and an occasional *vas-y, vas-y*, he helps keep the band moving.

A few Sébastien facts:

- Plays drums.
- Speaks French.
- Has little patience for unnecessary drama.
- Can produce an impressively intimidating stare.

The Animal Shelter

Darcy

With flaming red hair and an obvious soft spot for animals, Darcy is one of the first people Stephanie meets when she finally takes Vicki's advice and visits the local shelter.

Darcy cares deeply about finding the right home for every animal—especially the ones people might otherwise overlook.

A few Darcy facts:

- Usually wears her bright red hair in a ponytail.
- Knows Vicki and Gunner immediately.
- Gets emotionally invested in adoptions.
- Has a particular soft spot for harder-to-place animals.
- Is exactly the kind of person you want nearby in an animal emergency.

Josh

Josh looks more like an offensive tackle than someone who spends his time gently introducing people to homeless cats.

Huge, patient, and kind, he knows that choosing a pet isn't about finding the cutest animal in the room.

It's about finding the right match.

A few Josh facts:

- Is well over six feet tall.
- Has a soft spot for difficult-to-place cats.
- Knows the animals' individual personalities.
- Talks to cats very sweetly.
- Gives potential adopters room to make their own connection.

And One More Character: Montreal

Snowstorms and spring slush. Metro rides and music stores. Old apartment buildings. Late-night diners. Wedding halls. Neighbourhood streets. Mont Tremblant waiting beyond the city.

Montreal surrounds Stephanie as she begins building a life that feels less like something she inherited and more like something she chose.

And scattered throughout that world are the people—and animals—who keep challenging the rules she thought would protect her.

Because sometimes starting over isn't about becoming someone new.

Sometimes it's about finally figuring out who you were all along.