

*Dancehall*  
**REBEL**

**STACEY ROBINSON**

**JAMES LORIMER & COMPANY LTD., PUBLISHERS  
TORONTO**

Copyright © 2024 by Stacey Robinson

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

James Lorimer & Company Ltd., Publishers acknowledges funding support from the Ontario Arts Council (OAC), an agency of the Government of Ontario. We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts. This project has been made possible in part by the Government of Canada and with the support of Ontario Creates.



Cover design: Tyler Cleroux  
Cover image: Sabira Langevin

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Dancehall rebel / Stacey Robinson.

Names: Robinson, Stacey Marie, 1978- author.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20230541054 | Canadiana (ebook) 20230549268 | ISBN 9781459418158 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781459418141 (softcover) | ISBN 9781459418165 (EPUB)

Subjects: LCGFT: Novels.

Classification: LCC PS8635.O264 D36 2024 | DDC jC813/.6—dc23

Published by:  
James Lorimer & Company  
Ltd., Publishers  
117 Peter Street, Suite 304  
Toronto, ON, Canada  
M5V 0M3  
www.lorimer.ca

Distributed in Canada by:  
Formac Lorimer Books  
5502 Atlantic Street  
Halifax, NS, Canada  
B3H 1G4  
www.formac.ca

Distributed in the US by:  
Lerner Publisher Services  
241 1st Ave. N.  
Minneapolis, MN, USA  
55401  
www.lernerbooks.com

Printed and bound in Canada.

# Contents

<b>CHAPTER ONE:</b> One Love	9
<b>CHAPTER TWO:</b> Sitting and Watching	16
<b>CHAPTER THREE:</b> Skylarking	23
<b>CHAPTER FOUR:</b> If I Had the World	40
<b>CHAPTER FIVE:</b> Hold On to What You Got	45
<b>CHAPTER SIX:</b> Things in Life	50
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN:</b> How Could I Leave	57
<b>CHAPTER EIGHT:</b> Bun Dem Out	62
<b>CHAPTER NINE:</b> Better Must Come	68
<b>CHAPTER TEN:</b> Equal Rights and Justice	74
<b>CHAPTER ELEVEN:</b> Greetings	83
<b>CHAPTER TWELVE:</b> Pirate's Anthem	102
<b>CHAPTER THIRTEEN:</b> Unchained	106
<b>CHAPTER FOURTEEN:</b> It's Me Again, Jah	115
<b>CHAPTER FIFTEEN:</b> One Blood	125
<b>CHAPTER SIXTEEN:</b> Never Give Up My Pride	136
<b>CHAPTER SEVENTEEN:</b> Queen Majesty	141
Acknowledgements	151
From the Author	152



*To the ancestors and artists who established the special musical force that is reggae, and to the generations of creators carrying the rhythms and culture into the future.*



## CHAPTER ONE

# One Love

“Denise, you look good, girl! You coloured your hair!” my Auntie Claudia said when we arrived in Mandeville, Manchester, Jamaica. My older cousin Rohan had picked us up from the Norman Manley International Airport in his silver Toyota RAV4.

It wouldn’t be a visit to our beloved Jamaica (aka *Yard*) without someone commenting on my weight, skin, or clothing within the first few seconds of seeing me . . . after a hectic drive in from Kingston on the highway. “Thanks, Auntie Claudia. I missed you!” I said, fluffing my lime green-dipped curly ponytail. It had been flattened from leaning against the car’s headrest.

“I missed you, my baby!” she responded, squeezing me into her thin frame with a smile. “I know you’re going to have

some new style every time I see you . . . your outfit, or your hair colour. Or another piercing,” she whispered. “Me and your mommy have to keep an eye on you to make sure you don’t go too far and get a tattoo next.”

“Denise!” my cousin Shelly-Ann squealed, rushing down the stairs of her new apartment complex. “I’m so excited to show you everything in person!” she said. A new lawyer, Shelly-Ann rented the space for herself. Her brother, Rohan, was living with her while he finished his Music Education degree at Northern Caribbean University in town, and Auntie Claudia lived further into the countryside.

“I guess you don’t need to stay by me anymore now that Shelly has her place,” Auntie Claudia teased.

“Mommy, you’re literally fifteen minutes away,” Shelly-Ann said, rolling her eyes and reaching for my hand. “Anyhow, you guys will be out with Uncle Fitz and Auntie Charmaine, so Rohan and I can keep Denise company.”

“True, it’s just a quick visit. Next time though, you can spend one night back at the house,” Auntie Claudia decided.

“Shelly Belly!” I said, kissing my cousin’s cheek, and adding her to the hug with Auntie Claudia. Soon after, Uncle Linval joined in. My parents and Rohan were rearranging the bags in the car and called for me to come and get my hand luggage.

I loved to visit Jamaica and was there at least two times a year. One or both of my parents would travel, and I'd tag along when I could or when there was nothing important happening at school that week. Jamaica, to me, was paradise. Even though I was born and raised in Brampton, Ontario, Canada, Yard always felt like home.

I was ready to have an amazing time catching up on the decorations in Shelly-Ann's place, and the new music Rohan would introduce me to. The melodies, the food, the delicious scents, and being with my cousins were everything I loved about the island.

Uncle Linval was talking to my dad. "You're almost fifty like me . . . you might as well start building up a retirement house here, Fitz."

"Soon, soon," Dad promised. I knew he eventually wanted to settle and buy a second home in Jamaica, but he had been too busy to move forward with this plan, as well as being focused on paying my upcoming school fees and tuition.

My parents were a big part of the Jamaican community back in Toronto because they were so connected to the music scene on the island as well. My dad had been invited to co-host a Reggae Month launch that weekend, put on by a local restaurant in town that his old schoolmate owned. He loved this event and linked up with his friends there every winter.

Both of my parents were born on the island and had moved to Canada as young teens to live with relatives. My mom came with her Aunt Eunice, and Dad came to live with his older brother Conroy. Although I didn't have their natural Caribbean accents that had stayed with them over the decades, I loved Jamaican culture as much as I loved Canadian culture.

\*\*\*

While our parents were out, we spent our time chatting, eating, and watching the latest music videos on YouTube. Every now and then, I'd catch Shelly-Ann raising her eyebrows at me, but I wasn't sure why.

She would let me know soon enough.

We were driving into Mandeville with our windows up and the AC blaring, going into the Super Plus to grab some ice cream sandwiches when I saw The Girl. Standing outside the grocery store in a pair of yellow basketball shorts, a white Lakers tee, and a matching yellow baseball cap. She had caramel brown skin and long brown locs twisted into braids that fell down her back. She was wearing a few black rings and a black beaded necklace. She had sunglasses in her hand, along with an unsmoked spliff. She was extremely pretty without trying to be. I gave her a complete scan in seconds.

“Afternoon, Sister Shelly-Ann,” the girl said politely as we walked toward the entrance. She grinned. She had a beautiful-but-cute smile, and her eyes were a nice shade of brown, especially with the sun shining her way. She nodded at my cousin and then looked at me.

In those seconds, I believe we saw each other. She saw me the same way I saw her. I was wearing a lot of colour, my hair was combed back into a low ponytail, and I had been experimenting with Shelly-Ann’s Fenty makeup collection. I felt cute, too. I looked away quickly, and back again. When we locked eyes, I could literally feel a pull. Serious attraction.

“Afternoon, Sister Shelly-Ann,” she repeated. “Stop gwan like yuh nuh see me.”

“Mmm, hi,” Shelly-Ann said without looking at her, and she gripped my arm to rush me into the store and grab a basket. “No shame,” she said under her breath. My eyes opened wide, and I looked around at the others in the market to see if there was something weird that I didn’t see.

Now if this was a boy, I wouldn’t think twice about it. I definitely knew a good-looking brother when I saw one. When we landed at the airport, there were dozens of young workers around the baggage claim, around the gates, and outside near the planes.

Dressed in their uniforms, tucked-in shirts, and work vests, they were sun-kissed, neat, and they all had bright smiles. It

was hard not to stare at them, but I kept walking, while they all continued to watch.

“Enjoy your visit,” they would say, cool as ever, hoping their supervisors and coworkers wouldn’t see them flirting.

“Welcome to Jamaica,” they would call out quietly. That always happened at the airport, or even in Mandeville. The locals could always tell you were from out of town, or “from foreign” as they called it, and they would always stop to smile and admire a fresh face while they could.

I was average-looking. About five seven, with thick natural hair that I usually pulled into a low, curly ponytail. I wore glasses with a clear frame and pointy edges. I already had seven ear piercings and was counting down the days until my nineteenth birthday when my parents would consider letting me get my first tattoo: a combination of music notes and The Master Sword from my favourite game series, *The Legend of Zelda*.

“Your acne is clearing up,” Shelly-Ann said to me as we browsed the aisles.

“It comes and goes,” I told her, shrugging. I never worried about my appearance much and was always prepared for the comments I’d get in Jamaica — good and bad. Sometimes I was a lil thick, but this winter I had slimmed down again. Either way, I was comfortable in my skin. Even when the girl

outside had been staring at me from head to toe, from behind her yellow cap.

Most of the shoppers in the Super Plus were minding their own business, so I strolled behind my cousin looking at the familiar and not-so-familiar snacks, cereals, and other items in the clean, air-conditioned store.

We found the ice cream sandwiches my mom was craving and picked up a few other treats for ourselves. After cashing out, I walked behind my cousin so I could take another good look at the pretty girl.