

So NOT Happening

A *Charmed Life*, Book One

JENNY B. JONES



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

NASHVILLE DALLAS MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO BEIJING

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This book is dedicated to my grandmother, Mildred Jones Griffin. She was my family, but most importantly, she was my friend. She taught me so much, but mostly taught my brother and me that our tails had better be in a pew on Sundays. She is the reason I'm saved. She was Jesus in my life. She was shopping trips, long talks, sugar cookies, outrageous laughter, and chicken and dumplings. Though she had dreams of a red convertible, she helped pay for my college instead and proudly drove a green four door Ford.

chapter one

One year ago my mom got traded in for a newer model. And that's when my life fell apart.

"Do you Jillian Leigh Kirkwood . . ."

Standing by my mother's side as she marries the man who is so not my dad, I suppress a sigh and try to wiggle my toes in these hideous shoes. The hideous shoes that match my hideous maid of honor dress. I like to look at things on the bright side, but the only thing positive thing about this frock is that I'll never have to wear it again.

" . . . take Jacob Ralph Finley . . ."

Ralph? My new stepdad's middle name is Ralph? Okay, do we need one more red flag here? My mom is marrying this guy, and I didn't even know his middle name. Did she? I check her face for signs of revulsion, signs of doubt. Signs of "Hey, what am I thinking? I don't want Jacob Ralph Finley to be my daughter's new stepdad."

I see none of these things twinkling in my mom's crystal blue eyes. Only joy. Disgusting, unstoppable joy.

"Does anyone have an objection?" The pastor smiles and scans the small crowd in the Tulsa Fellowship Church. "Let him speak now or forever hold his peace."

Oh, my gosh. I totally object! I look to my right and lock eyes with Logan, the older of my two soon-to-be stepbrothers. In the six hours that I have been in Oklahoma preparing for this “blessed” event, Logan and I have not said five words to one another. Like we’ve mutually agreed to be enemies.

I stare him down.

His eyes laser into mine.

Do we dare?

He gives a slight nod, and my heart triples in beat.

“Then by the powers vested in me before God and the family and friends of—”

“No!”

The church gasps.

I throw my hands over my mouth, wishing the floor would swallow me.

I, Bella Kirkwood, just stopped my own mother’s wedding.

And I have *no* idea where to go from here. It’s not like I do this every day, okay? Can’t say I’ve stopped a lot of weddings in my sixteen years.

My mom swivels around, her big white dress making crunchy noises. She takes a step closer to me, still flashing her pearly veneers at the small crowd.

“What,” she hisses near my ear, “are you doing?”

I glance at Logan, whose red locks hang like a shade over his eyes. He nods again.

“Um . . . um . . . Mom, I haven’t had a chance to talk to you at all this week . . .” My voice is a tiny whisper. Sweat beads on my forehead.

“Honey, now is not exactly the best time to share our feelings and catch up.”

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My eyes dart across the sanctuary, where one hundred and fifty people are perched on the edge of their seats. And it's not because they're anxious for the chicken platters coming their way after the ceremony.

"Mom, the dude's middle name is Ralph."

She leans in, and we're nose to nose. "You just stopped my wedding and *that's* what you wanted to tell me?"

Faint—that's what I'll do next time I need to halt a wedding.

"How well do you know Jake? You only met six months ago."

Some of the heat leaves her expression. "I've known him long enough to know that I love him, Bella. I knew it immediately."

"But what if you're wrong?" I rush. "I mean, I've only been around him a few times, and I'm not so sure. He could be a serial killer for all we know." I can count on one hand the times I've been around Jake. My mom usually visited him when I was at my dad's.

Her voice is low and hurried. "I understand this isn't easy for you. But our lives have changed. It's going to be an adventure, Bel."

Adventure? You call meeting a man on the Internet and forcing me to move across the country to live with his family an adventure? An *adventure* is swimming with dolphins in the Caribbean. An *adventure* is touring the pyramids in Egypt. Or shopping at the Saks after-Thanksgiving sale with Dad's credit card. This, I do believe, qualifies as a *nightmare*!

"You know I've prayed about this. Jake and I both have. We know this is God's will for us. I need you to trust me because I've never been more sure about anything in my life."

A single tear glides down Mom's cheek, and I feel my heart constrict. This time last year my life was so normal. So happy. Can I just hit the reverse button and go back?