

# ***ORGANIZED FOR SCHEDULED SABOTAGE***

## **CHAPTER ONE EXCERPT**

### ***STACKED IN YOUR FAVOR, LLC***

***KATE MCKENZIE, CEO (Chief Executive Organizer)  
MEG BERMAN, VIP (Very Indispensable Partner)***

**BUSINESS PLANNER FOR MAJOR JOB # 3**

**DATE Monday, July 15<sup>th</sup>**

*9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. – Meet with Liz Tillman, business calendar author, on her Vermont animal rescue farm located near the New Hampshire border. Hired by her publisher to facilitate photoshoot for upcoming calendar release. From what publisher’s assistant said, author may not be as organized as her calendars imply. Will reserve judgement until more info is known. Besides calendar, Tillman runs a full-time rescue and is married with children, so need to show small business & family organization too. At present, no more specifics known.*

\* \* \*

Kate McKenzie pulled her van onto the rural driveway and the view changed from tree-lined country road to picturesque farm with white railed fences and a weathered red and gray barn. A quintet of horses, each a different shade of brown, grazed quietly in the pastoral acres running along the left side. The majestic animals took turns raising their heads to watch the van pick its way among the dips and ruts in the graveled drive. As they neared the white frame house snuggled under a couple of hundred-year-old oaks, a long-eared red hound and a chocolate Labrador retriever loped into sight. The vehicle neared the turnaround in front of the broad single story house and each dog let out several deep *woofs* to announce the arrival.

“Isn’t this a pretty setting?” Kate asked her friend and co-worker, Meg Berman.

“Almost worth the long drive out here,” Meg replied. “We’re nearly in New Hampshire.”

Kate owned Stacked in Your Favor, an organization business she’d started in their Hazelton, Vermont hometown. Meg, her next door neighbor, had become her go-to person to help with any extra work. When Kate was hired to organize the home office of recent New York Times bestselling calendar author, Liz Tillman, and ready everything for a photoshoot, Meg jumped at the chance to ride along. So, Kate knew her line about the drive was not really a complaint.

“Besides, someone needs to watch your back,” her neighbor added. “And keep you out of trouble.”

There it was. An unspoken reference to the partners-in-crime nickname her family and Meg's had recently given to the women. It was all teasing, she knew, but Stacked in Your Favor was barely a name on letterhead before people were more often talking about the murder investigations the two had become involved in than about the new business.

"Getting everything done for the photoshoot will keep us too busy to stumble onto anything else," Kate replied.

Tillman's publisher set everything up, though the women's schedules had been difficult to bring together. This was the first date everyone could successfully meet at the author's place, a fifty-acre farm north and west of Kate's Hazelton, Vermont home. The photoshoot was less than a week away and the organizer was feeling the pressure.

"Do we need to worry about the dogs?" Kate asked. Her family had only recently acquired a pet, a large loveable cat who was rather lazy most of the time. While she was getting used to the lively pair of dogs at Meg's house, Kate wasn't particularly adept yet at knowing which canine breeds were more aggressive than others.

Meg shook her head and her red curls danced. "Nah, the hound doesn't look threatening, and Labs are mostly known for their ability to lick a person to death."

"I'll trust you on this," Kate turned off the engine and pushed her sunglasses up to hold her blonde bob away from her face.

The women climbed from the van and the dogs took turns sniffing their shoes and pant legs. At the same time, a tall woman rounded the back corner of the squat farmhouse and strode toward them, her short dark hair half-hidden by a hat. As she walked she finished rolling one denim sleeve to her right elbow, then brushed both hands on the sides of her jeans. "Hi, I'm Liz. I hope you're Kate and Meg."

Kate stepped forward and extended a hand, "I'm Kate. It's nice to finally meet you in person."

Liz took a second to look at her right palm. "They're mostly clean. Sorry. I'm babying a sick colt in the barn. The place is filled with straw and dust."

"If you need to go back—"

"No, all done for now." Liz shook Kate's hand, then Meg's. She directed them toward the backdoor. "Hope you don't mind the rear entrance. I have coffee inside, tea, water. My oldest son made cookies last night, too." She smiled and led the way. "He's quite the baker. Here, this way. We'll go through the mudroom."

The sun hit them full on when they turned to the back of the house, and lovely dark pink roses climbed the wall beside a deep green Dutch door. Before Liz opened the door, she stopped with her hand on the knob, holding it rather than turning. "Guess I'd better start apologizing now. My house is perpetually in a lived-in state. I have three boys and a husband, a lot of rescue animals, and I'm not the type to get up each morning and think 'what can I clean first?' I don't know what my publisher told you, but I'm not a little-Susie-homemaker type."

"Your publisher just told us we needed to get your office set up so it would photograph well for your next calendar. That they want to put a shot on next year's cover and spaced throughout the pages," Kate explained. She smiled. "Don't worry, we're not here to conduct a white glove test. Only to help."

"I hope part of that help includes actually finding me an office. Due to the needs of running this animal refuge, I kind of work all over the place," Liz said, waving everyone inside. A gray tabby took that as an invitation as well and streaked in ahead of the women, disappearing down the hallway like a flash of fur.

“That’s Chester,” Liz said. “He’s headed for one of my son’s room, probably to grab a snack. Every time I need dishes I tell my boys to go clean their rooms. Only the two youngest still live at home, but you would not believe the food bills.”

A long bench faced them as they entered, hooks above holding all kinds of ropes, tools and gadgets apparently used around the place. Strewn beneath were several sizes of athletic shoes, boots, hats, and... a bowling pin. Liz grabbed the pin. “My youngest is the worst packrat in our family, but he gets it naturally. You also don’t want to go into my middle son’s room. Trust me.”

Glancing through to the family room, Kate saw an overstuffed reading chair and couch upholstered in coordinating blue patterns. A coffee table supported a month’s worth of books and animal magazines, and the pictures on the walls were a mix of framed family and animal photos. On the front window ledge, an orange cat and a black kitten slept in the sun.

They followed Liz into a bright farmhouse kitchen, lots of white, big sinks, long countertops. A bill paying workstation was set up under one cabinet and a large planner on the wall offered a half-dozen different colors. Kate realized Liz used individual colors for family members, exactly like she did for her husband, Keith and twin seven-year-old daughters, Samantha and Suzanne.

“Your boys are green, blue and purple,” Kate remarked. “I can tell by the activities.”

Liz nodded. “Correct. I’m red, my husband is black, and our animal intern is brown. Not that she keeps to the schedule though. Having the colors saves space and time since I don’t have to add names when I post notes and activities.”

“What do your guys think about the photo shoot?” Kate asked.

“That they needed to get out of Dodge.” Liz laughed. “No, actually this week and the next were already planned as a group wilderness adventure trip for my husband and two youngest sons. My oldest son is away at college in Massachusetts, so he lives an hour or so away. That’s why purple isn’t as prevalent on the calendar as the other colors.”

“Kate has bins for her family to use in their colors, too,” Meg said. “The practice has helped me get my boys to put their stuff away, as long as I gather everything up from all the rooms and put it into the right bins first. So now I’m well-trained even if they aren’t.”

“I’ve found most boys are works in progress,” Liz said.

“Girls, too.” Kate added.

Liz waved her hand around a kitchen that was clean and a little cluttered. “I’m not a natural organizer. My personal design style is *comfortable*. But I keep so many balls in the air at one time I absolutely have to keep my schedule on-track.”

“And that led you to create your bestselling calendars?” Kate asked.

The author walked over to one of the cabinets and pulled open the door, removing a lidded box marked EXPENSES and the current year. Liz set the box on the countertop and slid back the lid. “Money is the reason for my calendars. The farm here had been surviving on small grants and donations. Well, more like struggling and barely surviving. I design my calendars to handle the scheduling for an active family, a small family business, and reminders to make sure a woman cares for her own self-interests. I did the first one hoping it would make a little money to add to reserves. Needless to say, I was surprised by the outcome.”

The outcome, Kate knew from her research was a *New York Times* bestseller status for the author. However, the better outcome, the one she was sure the author was more proud of, was enough money after the first two calendars to allow Liz to create a foundation to help other rescue groups with small emergency grants to tide them over when needed.

“I like what you just said about a woman taking care of her own self-interests,” Meg said, smiling as she leaned against the beige Formica counter and crossed her arms. “We all get so wrapped up in our to-do lists, we tend to give everyone extra credit over ourselves.”

A half-grin crept onto Liz’s face, and Kate realized her client wasn’t yet a total convert of her own philosophy. Kids weren’t the only works in progress. She knew the feeling. There was always something else that needed to be done before she could allow herself to take a break.

Liz didn’t respond to what Meg said, but changed the subject, saying, “Coffee is probably burnt by this point.” She opened a stainless steel refrigerator door practically covered in a white board and notes held by magnetic clips. “But I have fairly fresh lemonade and some unsweetened tea. Oh, and bottled water. The lemonade would go good with the cookies I mentioned a minute ago.”

“Anything is fine with me,” Kate said.

“I’ll take lemonade.” Meg turned to the cabinet near the sink. “Are the glasses up here?”

“Yes, right,” Liz said, withdrawing the lemonade pitcher and a plate of cookies, while Meg pulled down three tumblers. Kate passed around napkins from a holder made from three black-painted horseshoes welded together that sat in the middle of the table.

A moment later, cookies were the only things on anyone’s mind.

“Oh, I haven’t had ranger cookies in years,” Meg said. “I’d forgotten how much I loved good ones.”

Liz nodded. “You’re right there. A good ranger cookie is a real treat, but a *meh* one isn’t even worth looking cross-ways at.”

“This is definitely a good one.” Kate brushed crumbs from the corners of her mouth. “I think I have a new favorite. Does your son take orders?”

“Maybe he’ll make us a couple of big batches of dough that we can keep in our freezer,” Meg suggested. She turned to Liz, “My partner here has converted me to the practice of freezing dough ahead of time, making small balls and freezing them on a flat cookie sheet. Then I can just pull out whatever number I want to bake each time without doing a full batch.”

“Don’t the dough balls stick together?” Liz asked.

“That’s why they’re frozen on a flat sheet first,” Kate explained. “Place the individual balls onto an aluminum or plastic cookie sheet or platter, cover them well with several layers of plastic, then let them freeze. Once the balls are frozen, you can dump everything into freezer bags and they won’t all stick together into one big cookie lump.”

“Good to know,” Liz said.

“Best of all, it keeps people like me from having huge batches of cookies sitting around to tempt my willpower.” Meg grabbed another cookie and gave it the evil eye. “Since I have absolutely no willpower when it comes to cookies.”

In the next second the sudden roar of speed coming from the front driveway, followed with a squeal of brakes and a loud skid of displaced gravel, sent them hurrying to the front window. Both dogs barked in a steady loud bass, and the cats fled to hiding places under the couch. Before Kate could ask what was happening, Liz raced out the backdoor and could be seen through the windows circling the house.

“Come on,” Meg said.

Kate nodded and followed as her neighbor traced the author’s path. When they reached the front of the house, it looked like Liz was trying to calm a shorter, red-faced brunette woman. Dust was still settling in the driveway after the wild way the beat-up pickup had stormed into the yard.

Liz tried unsuccessfully to shush the dogs, then said to the woman, “Bren, please, st—”  
“Don’t think you can get away with this,” Bren said, using her left index finger to poke Liz’s sternum bone. “Your publisher may have a few things to say when I call and tell what they don’t already know. I should be smiling in those pictures too.”

Kate and Meg looked at each other and nodded. As they walked closer, Meg used her pinkie fingers to create the high-pitched whistle she usually used to break up a fight between her boys. Seemed to slow down crazily over-charged women too. It even made the dogs stop their howling. Bren halted her rant in mid-poke, and Kate walked over and pulled Liz away so she could stand between them.

“Huh, didn’t know you had your own army to protect you, but I should have guessed,” Bren said and crossed her arms.

“We’re not—” Kate began.

“Don’t bother trying to explain,” Liz put a hand on her shoulder. “Bren has her own idea of reality and nothing you can say will change it.”

Bren shoved Kate aside to get back into Liz’s personal space. “How dare you act so high and mighty!”

“That’s enough.” Meg stepped forward and pushed between Bren and the other two women. “I don’t know what your beef is, lady, but you don’t go around shoving people and poking them. That’s called assault. And unless Liz asks you to stay, you’d better head out immediately, or I’m calling the cops.”

“You wouldn’t dare.”

“Try me.” Meg pulled her phone from her back jeans pocket. “Liz, it’s up to you. Does she stay or does she go?”

“Leave. Now.” Liz said.

Bren hustled closer again. “I’m not—”

“Calling 9-1-1,” Meg said, raising the phone to dial. Bren tried to slap it from her hand, but Meg held on tighter, and said, “Lovely, now you’re three-for-three for assault. And this last one came even after you’d been warned.”

“I didn’t assault you.”

“Try convincing the judge of that. Maybe I need to start taking video, too.”

Bren let out a guttural noise. “Forget it...just... I’m leaving! Satisfied?” She moved around Meg, keeping a wide space between them, and climbed back into the beat-up, faded red and putty-colored pickup she’d arrived in. The tires spewed gravel as the truck bed fishtailed wildly enough to almost clip one section of the white board fence. The Lab kept watch on the truck, to make sure it didn’t return, but the dog didn’t follow.

Thanks for reading this short excerpt.

If you want to know what else happens in the first chapter, and how Kate & Meg get tangled up in another murder investigation, *ORGANIZED FOR SCHEDULED SABOTAGE* will be released in mid-October, and you [preorder now for at a limited time discounted price](#). At the moment the preorder is only available at Amazon, but it will be available at all other booksellers soon at this discounted price.