

~ How I Met a Cow Girl ~

by Red Hope

Disclaimers: Violence: None currently.

Subtext: Oh this is my fav disclaimer, yes there's subtext. Mark the calendars if I don't ever do a subtext story!

Foul Language: Yup, I'll say this contains some cussing but nothing too bad.

Copyright: Xena and Gabrielle are owned by good old RenPics and company. Or do the fans really own them anymore? And I own the story line along with Shannon, Peter, and Megan.

Time Frame: Let's see, this is a Uber! Isn't that scary coming from me? Well, its half of a real Uber, taking baby steps.

Started: January 1st 2001, Monday

Mini-Series Two: Today's Partner's of Destiny **Story:** One

If anybody has comments about my story please let me know at:

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Section One

~*Part 1*~

Gabrielle groaned and leaned her head to her right. She stared at the long line in the music store. "Come on," she grumbled under her breath. She peered down at the three CDs in her hands then she looked back up at the five people in front of her. *Christ, I can't spend all my time in here.*

The small woman put her weight onto her left foot while she continued to wait in line. She glanced to her left at another longer line. She studied the other people in the second line. Her pastel green eyes then got caught up on one particular woman.

The other woman, in the second line, was tall with long, black hair, and looked to have a fairly muscular form.

Gabrielle glanced back at her line and moved up a little. She was even with the taller woman, currently; directly across from her. She examined the woman again, her eyes roaming up and down the tall woman.

Slowly, the tall woman turned her head toward the smaller shorthaired blond. She'd felt those eyes on her.

Gabrielle hadn't noticed the woman was looking at her, she was too busying looking at the tall woman's lower body. She then looked up and realized the taller woman was staring at her now. She widened her eyes. *Oh shit!* She instantly looked away and went deep red. *She saw me checking her out. Oh shit!* She closed her eyes and bit back her laughter.

Gabrielle licked her lips, opened her eyes, and tried very hard not to look at the other woman.

The taller woman arched an eyebrow, to herself, before she returned her focus to the line ahead of her.

Gabrielle shivered because she just realized how blue that other woman's eyes were when they locked on her. *What is my problem?* She laughed inwardly. *I'm checking women out now... I'm desperate.* She shook her head and noted it was her turn to pay.

The cashier took Gabrielle's CDs and scanned them. He hit subtotal button before he glanced back at the young woman. "Fifty-five dollars and ninety-eight cents, Ma'am."

Gabrielle pulled out her leather wallet and thumbed through the bills. She pulled out three twenties and handed them over. She got her change back plus the CDs in a bag. "Thank you," she said.

"Have a good day." The cashier watched her go then smiled at the next customer.

The shorthaired blond went into the mall and glanced around at the huge crowd. *Why did I come here on a Saturday?* She groaned but went down the mall. She felt her stomach growl suddenly and well she decided it was best to feed it.

The young woman instantly found a pretzel place and went in. After she waited in a quick line, she had a soft, salty pretzel and raspberry tea. She sat down at one of the booths inside. She slowly ate the pretzel while she relaxed.

Gabrielle glimpsed around in the small restaurant. Her eyes flickered over to the short line of people, her jaw dropped. "Oh great," she muttered.

At the end of the line standing tall, was the same dark woman from the music store.

"What I do... what I do?" mumbled Gabrielle. "Run and hide?" She chuckled at herself. *Maybe she just won't notice me.* She groaned and sipped on her tea a little. She looked back at the tall woman, glad that she hadn't noticed her. Well, instead of her idea of running and hiding, Gabrielle begun looking over the back of the woman.

Not only was the woman tall, dark, and blue-eyes but Gabrielle noticed how nice her ass was. *Damn, she must work out or something,* considered Gabrielle.

The young woman leaned forward over the table when a person got in her view of the tall woman. She still could not see the tall woman with this person in front of her. "Come on, move," she growled under her breath. Her hand around the tea tightened in frustration.

Finally, the person moved out of the way. When the person had moved, there was another person before Gabrielle.

"Oh please..." Her eyes had begun lifting up. "Get out of the..." She instantly smiled sheepishly as her eyes locked on rich blue ones. "Way," she finished quietly. "Hi," she greeted while crimson crept up her neck.

The tall woman raised an eyebrow. "Was *I* in the way of your view?" she asked in a deep tone.

Gabrielle rubbed the back of her neck and she shook her head. "No." *More like in my view.* "I was just... trying to look... at the menu." She shrugged. "Doesn't matter now," she muttered. *I'm toast.*

The tall woman nodded, but the tiny twinkle in her eyes said she knew the truth. "Seat taken?" She held her free hand at the empty booth seat.

The blond looked back up instantly, wide eyed. "Um... uuuh... no, go ahead."

"Thanks." The tall woman settled her lemonade and pretzel down. Then she started slowly sitting down.

Gabrielle gazed across and got a face full of cleavage in her view. She blinked, trying not to stare, but... how couldn't she? She dropped her eyes down at the table and bit down on her straw tightly. *How many hale Marys is this now? I'm going straight to hell!* She chuckled inwardly.

The tall woman put her two bags aside and drank a little of her lemonade.

Gabrielle laughed quietly and asked, "I'm Gabrielle... you're?"

"The name's Xena," answered the dark haired woman.

"Xena," repeated Gabrielle. "Huh... odd name."

Xena corked an eyebrow. "Family name," she stated.

"Hmmm." The younger woman nodded. "I can relate."

The older woman's eyebrow went higher. "Gabrielle is a family name?"

"Actually yeah," answered Gabrielle. She pulled her tea in close and drank some of it.

"What did you buy?" She signaled at Gabrielle's bag of CDs with a nod.

Gabrielle glanced at the bag then back at the older woman. "CDs."

Xena grinned at that. "Really?" she asked in a taunting voice.

The smaller woman cracked up laughing and fell back into the seat. She covered her mouth while she laughed. "I'm sorry..." She dropped her hand and shook her head. "Of course they're CDs, you were there, duh." She combed her short hair back with her fingers then calmed down. "David Gray, Elton John, and Creed."

Xena tilted her head. "Quite a combination."

"I'm versatile."

The older woman grinned. "That's real good to know."

Gabrielle expression masked into surprise. She could have taken that a number of ways. "Well... versatile for the most part," she corrected hastily.

"Ah, I see." Xena sat back and begun eating her warm pretzel in small bits.

"Ummm..." Gabrielle trailed off while she felt the heat of embarrassment arise inside.

"Sorry about earlier."

The older woman grinned and finished chewing on the pretzel tidbit. She finally replied, "You were just looking at the CD singles behind me huh?"

"Oh yeah..." The blond chuckled, spotted one of Xena's bags from Victoria Secret, and instantly looked back at Xena. "I hear Sysquo's Thong song is pretty good these days," she joked but then she picked up on what she'd said and went brick red yet again. "Oh god..." She stood up. "I'll be... right back, excuse me."

Xena watched the younger woman migrate to the bathroom. She shook her head, totally amused, and went back to eating her pretzel. "Love them flustered and cute," she mumbled to herself.

Gabrielle came back out with a cool and calm expression. She grabbed her tea and pretzel remains, still standing, and announced, "I gotta go." She paused. "Got a hot date... you know how it is." She leaned over and grabbed her bag of CDs. *Hot date my ass... wish the hot date was you, blue eyes.* She straightened up with the bag. *What am I saying?!* "Maybe I'll see you around here again."

Xena nodded. "Maybe," she agreed. "Take care huh?"

"Uh, yeah, you too." *Ask for her number... ask for her number... I can't do it!* She sighed in frustration. Her eyes locked on the CD bag and Victoria bag Xena had. "Enjoy the thon- CDs," she corrected instantly. "See ya." She gave a gesture with her bag and headed out into the mall after she threw her stuff out.

"See ya," muttered Xena with a grin. She glanced at her Victoria Secret bag. "Now why does everybody assume I buy thongs at that store?" She sighed, finished her lemonade and grabbed the bags.

The small woman strolled through the mall, she went to the nearest bookstore. *Why do I feel like I just missed the best thing in my life?* She pushed the sad thought away and went into the bookstore. She stopped, once inside, she glanced up at the book topics. "Trashy romance no, biography no, science fiction no, children no, fiction... bingo." She went into that department of the books.

Gabrielle knelt down in front of one of the shelves. She scanned the books with her eyes. She pulled out a book with her free hand. She turned the cover up and smiled. "Beating the Storm... by Gabrielle Troubadour." She grinned at seeing her own name on her own book. "I love being a writer." She chuckled and put the book back in its home. She noted how it was the only copy, the rest sold in a weeks span since she was last here.

After she rose up, Gabrielle left the store with a content feeling about her writing. She glimpsed at her silver watch; it was two-thirty in the afternoon. "Oh crap." She briskly walked through the mall, heading for her car. She went outside a set of double doors and stopped at the walkway edge, she let the cars pass by.

Gabrielle scanned the parking lot while she waited. She spotted her car then she noticed something else. "Oh my god... you've got to be kidding me!" She stepped off the walkway and walked towards her car. "She's stalking me." Her eyes stayed pinned on Xena.

Xena was at the trunk of her car, putting something away. Her car was parked beside Gabrielle's car. She closed the trunk as Gabrielle neared. She caught Gabrielle in the corner of her eye. She turned to the younger woman. "Hi again."

"Did you do this on purpose?" asked the writer. "Park beside my car?"

The older woman laughed quietly and looked at Gabrielle's car. "Yours?"

"Yup." Gabrielle unlocked her car then she tossed her CDs onto the passenger seat. She faced the darker woman. "You rigged this," she stated with a small laugh.

Xena chuckled and shook her head. "Afraid not." She grinned. "I hardly know this area."

The small woman knitted her eyebrows. "How's that?"

"Come here." Xena stared at the back of her car.

Gabrielle came beside the other woman and looked at the tail of the car. The license plate said Wyoming and this was Pennsylvania. "You're a long way from home, Cow Girl," she teased.

The Cow Girl chuckled and nodded. "Yup, just moved here." She peered up. "Looking for all the help I can get."

The writer's head bobbed. "Well... Pennsylvania isn't that bad."

Xena put her hands on her hips. "I take it you've never been to Wyoming."

"Can't say I have."

The tall woman grinned. "Then you don't realize exactly how bad Pennsylvania is... especially in these parts."

Gabrielle chuckled and shook her head. "Lived here for a number of years... I guess I don't." She smiled at the other woman and soon became lost in crisp blue eyes. She snapped to and said, "I've really gotta go." *Ask for her number!* The thought reentered and tugged hard at Gabrielle.

"Well... like you said, I'll see ya maybe," stated Xena. She walked around her car towards the driver's side.

"Wait um..." Gabrielle trailed off but gave herself more courage. "Got a number? Incase you need some help or something around here."

The older woman nodded. "Sure." She came back around the car. She fished through her jeans' pockets and found a receipt. "Have a pen?"

The writer pulled one out of her back pocket. "A writer always has a pen," she joked.

Xena took the pen and peered up before she wrote anything. "You're a writer huh?" She nodded with a smile. "I'm impressed, that's not easy."

Gabrielle smiled softly. "Thank you... some people don't think so." Her voice was quiet and sad.

"Mmm, as they say... ignorance is bliss." Xena clicked the pen and put the blank side of the receipt on the trunk. She wrote down her name and number. "What's yours?" she asked.

"310... 375... 8021," answered Gabrielle. She received her pen back.

Xena carefully tore the receipt in half and handed her name and number to Gabrielle. "Thank you." She smiled at Gabrielle.

"Thank you too." The writer pulled out her wallet and tucked it away inside. She put her wallet in her back pocket once more. "Let me know if you need... any help around here." She glanced over at the busy highway far off in the distance. "I can see how its confusing around here." She peered back up.

Xena chuckled. "It is... we normally just ride horses around in Wyoming."

"Really?"

The older woman laughed quietly. "No not normally but its been known to happen."

"Let me guess, you're were a rancher."

Xena laughed quietly. "You could say that." She held her hand up. "Nice meeting you, Gabrielle."

The small woman took the large hand and gave a brisk shake. "Nice meeting you too, Xena." She smiled softly as her stomach curled from the warm hand holding hers.

The handshake continued while their eyes stayed locked.

Xena then slowly ended the handshake by lacing her fingers through Gabrielle's. Her arm lowering to her side with Gabrielle's.

Gabrielle's heart raced but she couldn't fight it nor did she want too. She just gave a warmer smile of reassurance.

Xena mirrored the smile and lowered her head closer, her eyes searching Gabrielle's shining, green eyes.

The writer squeezed the other woman's hand. "You're going to... kiss me?" she whispered.

"If you want me to," uttered the older woman with a gentle smile.

"I can't say no," responded Gabrielle.

Xena took that answer and finished the distance. Her smooth lips softly touched Gabrielle's. She had complete control of the kiss, so she made it gentle and seeming like nothing. Just lips pressing against lips then she lifted her head again. It wasn't much of a kiss but she knew what effect it would have on the small woman.

Gabrielle opened her eyes and chuckled faintly. "Okay, that wasn't bad."

"No need to... overwhelm." The tall woman started stepping back while she released the small hand. "I'll let you go."

The writer didn't second that and pulled the other woman back by her hand. "Hold on." *What am I doing?! Awe, who's looking? I'm just in the middle of parking lot kissing another woman.* She put her left hand behind Xena's head and pulled her back down.

Xena found her lips covered by the silk ones. She wrapped her free arm around Gabrielle's waist and gave into submission with the kiss. Her breath was stolen as a tongue entered her mouth. She glided her tongue into the younger woman's mouth as they tasted each other.

Gabrielle pulled away slowly but the heat was coming more to life with each second spent with this woman. It came to her just how much that kiss took out of her when her knees were weak. She grasped Xena's car's trunk for support and smiled sheepishly.

Xena released the small woman and stepped back a few times. "Well... I better let you go."

The small woman straightened up. "Yeah... I gotta get going." She laughed uneasily while she moved to her driver's door. "Um... Welcome to Pennsylvania." She opened the door.

The older woman grinned and said, "Thanks for the warm welcome." She opened her car door.

Gabrielle pulled out her keys and gave a wave with them. "Anytime, give me a call if you need anything."

"Thanks."

Xena watched the writer get into her car and start it up. She got into her car and started her own car. "I love them cute and flustered." She chuckled before she closed the door and backed out of her spot.

Gabrielle stopped her car at the red light. She hit her steering wheel, missing the horn thankfully. "Damn it, come on." She drummed her fingers on the wheel while she waited. Her mind jumped back to the kisses with Xena a few ago. "I can't believe I did that," she muttered.

With a flick of a switch, she turned on her car radio. She relaxed in her seat, still waiting for the light. She furrowed her eyebrows. "Oh my god... I'm gay!" She broke up laughing.

The light turned green.

"Oh boy." She hit the gas and continued down the three-lane highway. She left the King of Prussia mall and went northeast to Ramblewood.

"I'm not gay," she stated randomly to herself aloud. "One kiss doesn't mean I'm gay or whatever." She chuckled. "Two kisses," she corrected. "I'm straight as a line... curved line." She sighed and paid more attention to her driving. "I'll probably never hear from her again." She shrugged it all off and focused on her driving again.

Three Days Later...

Gabrielle came out of her thoughts as she stared into the computer screen. She grabbed the cordless phone on the desk as it rung. She hit the talk button and lifted the phone. "Hello." She paused. "God, how are you?" She grinned and said, "About the same myself." She shook her head. "No, no I was working on my story." She chuckled. "No, come on over, Eph." She groaned. "Yes, Shannon can come over too." She paused before saying, "Yeah well... you and Shannon still owe me after you both kissed in front of me." She laughed and added, "That's what Shannon gets. Come on over, I'm bored out of my mind." She chuckled. "Yeah, yeah Eph. I'll see ya. Bye." She lowered the phone while she clicked it off.

The writer reread the last paragraph of her story, trying to recall where she was going with it.

The phone rung again.

"I can't get anything done." The small woman groaned and picked up the phone, she turned it on. "Hello." Her eyes went wide. "Hey... uh how are you?" She shivered in her seat from the voice over the phone. "Yeah um sure if you want." She chuckled. "Oh right sorry..." She paused. "I know, well you know where Ramblewood is?" She chuckled. "Yeah just east of there." Her head bobbed. "Yup, you got it. Well I live in a small apartment building. Rambling Wood Apartment Housing." She laughed softly. "I think you're right, it probably was a joke the landlord has on the apartment name." She glanced out the window behind her computer monitor and studied the scene of the fall day. "Right, right that's exactly it. You can't miss the place. I'm on the third floor... apartment three, ten." She smiled to herself. "Alright, drive safely Cow Girl... see ya then." She turned the phone off and chuckled. "That was definitely random."

Gabrielle continued working on her story but stopped after a few moments. She sat back in her seat and reread what she'd written.

The doorbell buzzed of visitors.

The small woman hopped out of her chair as the buzz came again. She rushed over and opened the door and there in front of the door stood two women around Gabrielle's age. "Hey, what took you both?"

"The iinsane traffic," joked one woman, whom was a little taller than Gabrielle with long dark brown hair and brown eyes. They lived two floors up in the apartment building.

"At least we came, Gabrielle," teased the other woman and she had long dirty-blond curly hair. Her amber eyes lit her face up, as did the smile. "So, gonna invite us in?"

"I guess so, Eph." The writer stepped aside. "Please come into my castle, ladies."

The two women chuckled and shuffled in.

"How's the story going?" asked the curly blond.

"Not bad," answered Gabrielle. She led them over to the main part of the room where the living room was contained. She sat down in a small couch while her friends sat down on a sofa beside each other. She grinned evilly. "So... did you two work

through your spat?"

"We did," said the brown haired one arrogantly.

Gabrielle laughed. "You two have a fight a week."

The curly blond grabbed a pillow and threw it at Gabrielle.

The writer caught it and laughed again. "Can't handle the truth, Eph?"

"Hey, don't make Shannon and I kiss again," warned the curly blond.

"Oooh, that is a pretty bad threat," teased Gabrielle. "Watching you two kisses makes me wanna gag."

This time the brown haired woman chucked a pillow at Gabrielle. "Our kissing isn't as bad as when you're kissing-" the doorbell buzzing again cut her off.

"Oops." Gabrielle hopped up. She crossed over to the door through the small kitchen.

"Who is that?" asked the curly blond.

"Um." The writer faltered in her answer as the door buzzed again. "She's this... friend I met just really randomly." She was faintly blushing. "Just... be nice."

The two women exchanged glances when Gabrielle opened the door.

Gabrielle smiled at the tall, dark woman before her. "Hi."

"Howdy... looks like I found the right place." Xena smiled warmly.

"You definitely did, come in."

The brown haired woman leaned towards the curly one. "Look how tall, dark, and gorgeous gets welcomed in so quickly," she whispered with a grin.

The curly blond huffed. "Did you see how Gabrielle blushed?"

"Did I ever. Friend my ass... more like fuck friend."

The curly blond rammed her elbow into the smaller woman's ribs. "Sssh." She nodded at the pair coming over.

Gabrielle peered up at Xena then back at her friends. She held her hand out to the small brown haired female. "Xena this is Shannon." Then she glanced at the curly blond. "And that's Megan... we all call her Eph though... short for Ephiny."

Xena raised an eyebrow at the writer. "Ephiny?"

"Yes, it's a real old family name," answered Megan with a grin. "Goes wwwway back. Shannon, Gabrielle, and I did a little family tree research on my side." She paused and grinned. "Came to find out one of my ancestors was Ephiny." She shrugged. "Thought it was a pretty cool name."

Xena chuckled. "What is it about family names?"

Gabrielle grinned. "They're contagious huh?"

"Seem to be."

"Sit down." The writer watched her tall friend take a couch and relax. "Want anything to drink?" she offered.

"No, I'm fine." Xena smiled. "Thanks though."

"No problem." Gabrielle sat back down in her seat and sighed contently.

"Where are you from, Xena?" asked Shannon. "You don't look like you're from these parts."

Xena grinned and laced her hands together in her lap. "I'm from Wyoming."

"Really?" Megan chuckled and shook her head. "A red-blooded, spitten tobacco Wyoming gal?" she teased.

"I wouldn't... quite say that," answered the tall woman.

"Were you a rancher?" asked Gabrielle.

Xena nodded and glanced at her friend. "I worked and lived on a ranch."

"Why'd you leave?" Shannon corked an eyebrow.

The dark woman sighed and responded, "Some issues arouse... my best option was to leave."

Megan narrowed her eyes while she thought, *You're looking pretty shady to me, Xena.*

Xena glanced at Gabrielle. "How was the story going?"

Megan studied how Xena's eyes warmed to Gabrielle and caused Gabrielle to smile softly. *And why are you after my friend?*

Shannon saw this and glimpsed at Megan.

"Not too bad," answered Gabrielle.

Megan shook her head in signal to Shannon.

Shannon nodded and gazed back at the pair. *Wait till Xena gets the surprise coming soon.* She chuckled inwardly.

"How many books do you have out?" asked Xena.

The writer shrugged. "Just have my first out."

"Doing well?"

Gabrielle chuckled but her friends gave the answer for her.

"Yup," answered Megan. "Gabrielle knows how to whip up a real good story."

The tall woman glanced at the two women on the sofa. "What's the title?"

"Beating the Storm," responded Shannon. "You should read it."

"I'll have to look into it," stated Xena.

Gabrielle shrugged. "You may not like it," she mumbled.

The dark woman glanced at Gabrielle again. "I'll read it and let you know." She creased her lips with a smile.

The writer sighed. "Alright... I warned you."

"It's doing real well on the shelves," spoke up Megan as she shot a grin at her friend.

Gabrielle glared back. She was about to say something else but the door to the apartment opened up with a key. She peered across the room and saw a small, young man step in with his officer's uniform on.

The writer got up slowly and came over. "Hey honey, how was duty?"

"Was nice and quiet," replied the young man. He chuckled and kissed Gabrielle softly on the lips.

Xena glanced over and caught the kiss. She closed her eyes briefly and opened them again to have the officer's badge shine in her eyes. She looked away.

Shannon and Megan watched this reaction the entire time.

Gabrielle took the man's hand and led him over. "Peter, I want you to meet a friend of mine, Xena."

Xena stood up while she forced a smile on her lips. "Hi Peter." She held her hand out.

The small man took the larger hand and gave a shake. "Nice to meet you, Xena." He released Xena's hand. "You don't look like you're from these parts."

"Nope." Xena shook her head. "From a far."

Shannon cut in. "Xena was a rancher from Wyoming." She grinned inwardly.

Megan jabbed her girlfriend in the side. She narrowed her eyes.

"Really?" asked Peter. He folded his arms. "I heard there's been some bad drug problems over in parts of Wyoming."

Xena nodded. "Yeah, there are amazingly." She paused. "Decided I wanted to get away from that."

The officer tilted his head, suspicion kicking in. "Really?" He chuckled amusingly. "There's more drugs here in Philly than all of Wyoming."

"There are more people in Philadelphia than all of Wyoming," countered Xena. "Well..." She glanced at Gabrielle. "I need to head off."

The writer nodded, she felt the thick atmosphere. "I'll walk you to your car."

"Thanks." Xena glanced back at the two women on the sofa. "Catch you both later."

"Later," said Megan and Shannon together.

"Be back," said Gabrielle to Peter.

"Don't take long, babe." Peter watched his girlfriend go to the door. "It's a bit cold out."

"I'm a big girl," Gabrielle teased.

Peter chuckled then he looked at Xena. "Xena... I didn't catch your last name."

Xena faintly lifted an eyebrow. "Dusk... Xena Dusk."

The officer nodded. "Nice meeting you, Xena." He watched her leave with Gabrielle. He turned to the two women. "She's a rancher?"

"That's what she said," replied Megan. She shrugged.

Gabrielle and Xena quietly went to the elevator and went in.

Gabrielle hit the ground floor button. "Were you really a rancher?" she asked quietly.

Xena nodded and stared at the metal door in front of her. "Yup, partner... a rancher." She grinned. "I played with horses and lassos," she joked.

The smaller woman chuckled and peered up. "I could see it." She grinned evilly. "Boots and hat too?"

"The whole nine-yards." The tall woman folded her arms. "The long leather trench coat to my knees." She nodded. "The works."

The writer laughed quietly and touched her stomach at the waist. "Even the huge belt buckle?"

"Oooh yeah." The dark woman showed a grin. "The bigger your buckle the more... prestige you had among the ranchers."

"You're kidding!" Gabrielle shook her head. "You musta had a huge buckle."

Xena grinned. "You... could say that. It was big and black." She winked at her friend.

"Had a gun?" she asked in a small voice.

"Two." The older woman shrugged. "Still have them for protection. They're family heirlooms."

"That's wild." Gabrielle saw the elevator door open and she went out. She strolled over to the doors and went outside. The cold air hit her and it made her shiver. "You may have to pull out the leather jacket soon."

The older woman nodded. "Tell me about it." She walked quickly to her car and hopped in. She put the window down once she started the engine.

"Drive back safely." Gabrielle folded her arms.

"I will." Xena buckled her seatbelt.

The small woman laughed shyly then asked, "Can I come by your place this evening?"

The older woman hesitated but said, "Sure, come by for dinner." She paused. "I'll warn I am no cook."

Gabrielle chuckled. "Order something then. I'm easy."

Xena grinned. "I can do that... come by at six." She lost her grin. "I live in Musser... third place down on the main street."

"Sounds good." The writer was very tempted to lean down and kiss the other woman but considering everything, she wasn't going to. "See you then." She moved out of the way and back up behind another car.

Xena backed her car up and drove off, headed back to her town., Musser.

The small woman sighed and raced back into the apartment building. She went up by the elevator again.

Peter looked up when Gabrielle came in. "Cold enough?" he teased.

Gabrielle sighed dramatically. "Winter is definitely coming."

"Come over here."

The shorthaired blond sat down beside her boyfriend on the sofa. She gazed at her friends across from her. "I hope you two didn't cause any trouble."

Shannon batted her eyes. "Never, Gabrielle." She chuckled.

The writer rolled her eyes. "Cha'right." She glanced at her boyfriend. "This evening I am going over to Xena's place."

The police officer nodded. "Alright, I think I'll take your friends out to dinner."

Shannon and Megan laughed.

"Oooh are you flirting, Peter?" teased Megan.

The young man rolled his eyes. "How can I flirt with you two?"

They both laughed together.

Gabrielle chuckled and shook her head.

"Oh honey." Peter looked at his girlfriend. "Do you have Xena's number or address?" He paused while coming up with an excuse. "Incase I need to call you."

"Yeah sure." The writer got up and went to her desk. She came back over with the old receipt Xena had scratched her number down on. "I'll write it down." She walked over to the kitchen counter and grabbed a note pad. She quickly wrote down the number, tore the paper off, and gave it to Peter.

"Thanks, love." Peter patted the seat beside him.

Gabrielle sat back down. She still held her wallet in one hand and the receipt on the other. She turned the receipt over and noted what the items were. She went deep red after she read the items from Victoria Secret.

Megan corked an eyebrow. She quickly decided a distraction was in hand. "So, where you taking us, Peter?"

Five-Thirty That Day...

Megan entered her friend's bedroom and watched her button up a white blouse. "You're looking nice."

Gabrielle spun around and sighed. "Hey Eph." She sat down on the twin bed and put on her black, dress boots. "Thank you." She peered up. "Is Peter and Shannon waiting out there?"

Megan nodded and sat down beside her friend. "Yup, I'm excited *your* boyfriend is finally taking us out."

The writer chuckled and grinned. "I guilted him." She chuckled. "Said he had to get along with you two better."

The curly blond chuckled and shook her head. "Yeah... he's getting use to Shannon and I better... that gay couple," she joked.

The shorthaired blond sighed and patted her friend's leg. She had finished putting her boots on. "He's giving you both a chance... consider this dinner a peace offering."

Megan laughed quietly. "Well... Shannon and I will be oh so proper to him."

"Good, that's what he needs to see." Gabrielle stood up and turned to her friend. "How do I look?"

Megan sighed and inquired, "You're not going out on a date, right?"

The small woman rolled her eyes. "No... but I do need to look nice somewhat." She wore a button white up shirt, tight jeans, and a black belt with a silver buckle. "Eph, help me out."

"You look beautiful, darling." Megan stood up. "You know that." She paused and added quietly, "So does Xena."

Gabrielle tilted her head with a confused look. "Eph, what you saying?"

Megan grasped her friend's shoulders. "Let me spell it out for you, Gabrielle." She paused and said seriously, "Xena wants to have sex with you."

The small woman's shoulders dropped and she looked away.

"I'm not joking," whispered Megan hotly. "You're talking to the Queen of Sex Vibes here." She shook her head. "Shannon felt them too." She turned her friend's head back. "Be careful, Gabrielle." She paused and added, "You don't know her that well. You could be messing with fire."

Gabrielle sighed and nodded. "I know." She ran her fingers through her hair. "I trust

her."

Megan narrowed her eyes. "I would not trust anybody that's tall, dark, and gorgeous like her." She coked an eyebrow. "She's looking for somebody as beautiful as you to snare." She grinned faintly. "Don't make Shannon and I kick her ass."

The writer chuckled quietly but nodded. "Alright, I'll be careful."

"Thank you." Megan pulled her friend in and hugged her tightly.

"Besides..." Gabrielle grinned. "I'm not gay."

Megan laughed and whispered, "Anything is possible, Gabrielle." She pulled back with a smile. "Alright, get going and be careful."

"Yes, mother." The young blond grinned and left the bedroom with her friend.

Six O'Clock and All's Well...

"Howdy," greeted Xena when she opened her door. "Get in before you freeze."

Gabrielle came in quickly and turned to her friend.

The older woman closed the door and held her hand out to her small home. "Welcome to my humble abode." She grinned.

The writer glanced around and noticed just how humble it was. The house was very modern with the latest gadgets and gadgets. "Wow, do I get a tour?"

Xena chuckled and nodded. "If you hand over your jacket first."

"Right." The small woman got out of her red coat and handed it over.

The tall woman took it and hung it up on the coat rack behind herself. "Easy finding the place?"

"Oh yeah."

"Good." Xena held her hand out to the hallway ahead. "Right this way, we'll start in the kitchen that I'll never use."

Gabrielle laughed and ambled down the hall into the kitchen, which held a small dinning table too. She looked around. It was entirely modern with a chef's table in the middle. "For somebody that doesn't cook, you have all the latest stuff."

"I know." The tall woman sighed. "Didn't have much choice." She nodded to the door at the left. "This way."

They came into the next room, which was the living room. There was a huge flat television with a black leather sofa in front of it and a nice glass table. Under the television was a stereo system, surround sound that included a subwoofer. Then below that was a DVD player and VCR. The shades were down giving it all a dark air.

Gabrielle shook her head. "What do you do for a job?" she asked quietly.

Xena grinned and grasped her friend's shoulder. "Upstairs next." She backed up and

walked through the kitchen again. She went through the hall once more and pointed upstairs.

The writer went up and heard her friend's footfall behind. "This is an amazing place."

"It works," stated the older woman nonchalantly.

"I'd like to see your version of impressive."

Xena chuckled lowly. "To the left."

When Gabrielle got up the stairs, she headed left and went into a bedroom. "Yours, I take it?"

"Yup."

The room was fairly large and a huge bed in the center with black sheets over it. Against the opposite wall of the bed was another flat television but smaller and with a VCR player.

The dark woman strolled over to a huge closet.

"You like black... I'll say that." Gabrielle turned around.

"It's a great color," stated Xena. She opened up the closet door. "Come here, you'll like this."

The younger woman came over and peered in. A smile lit up her face. "Now that's wild."

There inside of the closet was a long leather trench coat hanging, on the floor three pairs of cowboy boots then hanging off the left side on hooks were a hat and a belt of bullets with guns.

"Here, hold on." Xena reached in and took the leather jacket out. She tossed it on the bed. "Sit down, I'll put the getup on."

The writer laughed. "You're serious."

"Sure, you'll enjoy it, partner"

"Alright." Gabrielle sat down on the bed.

The Cow Girl collected her jeans, boots, hat, belt with gun and bullets, stirrups, and jacket. She disappeared into the bathroom.

"You wore this all the time?"

"For the most part," called Xena.

"Ha, that's awesome." Gabrielle shook her head. "Didn't think people still wore that stuff."

The older woman chuckled. "The West is caught in time of the old West." She grinned. "Especially Wyoming. They don't have that bucking bronco on the license plate for nothing, partner."

The small woman laughed and shook her head. "I'm noticing."

"Alright... here comes the Cow Girl."

The writer grinned and watched as Xena came back out of the bathroom.

Xena stood tall, her jet, black leather jacket past her knees, her hat was on masking her face. At her waist sparkled and shined a black buckle while the bullets stood out along the belt. Revolvers at both sides and her black, leathered stirrups had tassels all up and down her legs at the sides. She tipped her hat while she said, "Howdy Miss, how do you do?" She grinned at Gabrielle.

Gabrielle laughed hard before she stood up. "Talk about the Wild, Wild West here in Pennsylvania."

The Cow Girl grinned and folded her arms. "You don't beat this stereotypical Cow Girl."

The young woman gave another small laugh. "This is one for my novels." She shifted a smirk on her lips. "How I met a Cow Girl." She peered up into those deep blue eyes under the brim of the hat.

Xena smiled softly. "I'm sure you'll come up with the perfect story."

"I already am," stated Gabrielle. She searched her friend's dangerous, blue eyes. "What was it like over there?"

"Just like in the movies." The Cow Girl took a step closer. "It is the Wild West." She shrugged. "Quite the opposite of here."

"Sounds like it." The writer fell silent. Without care, she grasped Xena's belt buckle and pulled her in closer.

Xena chuckled and grasped her friend's hips.

Without thought, Gabrielle pulled down the older woman's head down. "Come here, Cow Girl." She sealed her lips over Xena's in a long sensual kiss.

The tall woman moaned softly and pulled the other woman in closer. She ended the kiss and whispered, "I thought you had a boyfriend."

"Holy shit." Reality snapped back in Gabrielle. She laughed and jumped back. "Woo, sorry." She blushed deeply. She dropped her head and folded her arms. "Goddamn it," she muttered.

Xena corked an eyebrow. *I'm not sorry*, but instead she said, "It was the hat." She tipped it. "Trust me, I know." She turned and walked towards the bathroom. *It gets all the women*, she thought while she changed.

Gabrielle sat back down on the bed and groaned quietly. *My ass is going to be grass if I keep this up*. She kept repeating that to herself until Xena came back out with a warm smile. *She's going to be my downfall*. She laughed inwardly.

The Movie After Dinner...

Xena stretched out on the long, leather sofa. She grabbed the remote off the table. "Are you sure?" she yelled.

"Yes, it's a good movie," stated Gabrielle from the kitchen.

The older woman shook her head but hit play on the DVD remote. She watched as the movie previews came up on the screen.

The small woman entered with a glass of tea. She glanced around for a spot to sit. She simply put her tea on the glass table then sat on the floor. She leaned back against the leather sofa's chair arm.

Xena peered down. "You could sit up here."

Gabrielle shook her head. "I'm okay down here." She smiled and held her hand out to the length of the couch Xena was outstretched on. "You're comfortable."

"No, it's not a problem." The older woman started sitting up.

The writer put her hand on her friend's stomach. "It's okay, really." She then realized her hand had slipped under Xena's black fleece sweater and was touching warm skin. She pulled her hand away. "It's fine," she whispered and relaxed back against the chair.

The tall woman chuckled. "Thanks."

They both relaxed and watched the movie.

"I can believe you wanted to see this, Gabrielle," she whispered.

Gabrielle snickered. "I need a good laugh... Plains, Trains, and Automobiles is perfect."

"It's so old."

"It's so good." The writer laughed quietly.

"If you say so." Xena hung her arm off the couch, near Gabrielle.

"Besides... you're the one that owns the movie."

The dark woman chuckled. "You've got a point."

The small woman propped up her legs and slumped down some.

Xena moved her hand over and touched Gabrielle's neck faintly. Her fingertips just brushed the smooth skin there.

"Mmm." Gabrielle leaned into the touch. She felt her friend's thumb come up a little behind her ear.

The older woman kept her hand there, idly caressing Gabrielle's neck.

As the movie went on, Xena's touch became more intoxicating for Gabrielle. She soon found Xena's fingertips gliding over her chest now and again. Then gradually through the movie, Xena's fingers roamed further on her chest and more often.

About halfway through the movie, Gabrielle forgot about it and moaned softly from the relaxing sensation. "Xena," she whispered.

Xena rolled onto her side and lowered her head towards Gabrielle's. She gently kissed the smaller woman as her hand slightly dipped down Gabrielle's blouse. She slowly ended the kiss but kept her head lowered.

Gabrielle moaned again, sat up, and dropped her head back into Xena's breasts.

The dark woman glided her hand down the writer's blouse faintly then came back up. She lowered her head to Gabrielle's neck and kissed her. She then trailed her lips up the smooth neck to Gabrielle's ear. "What about Peter?" she whispered. Her lips grazed over the soft ear. "You love him, right?" While she waited for an answer, she turned the television off.

"Not really." The small woman was breathing heavily. "He's a... more of an... old friend." Xena's hand went even lower this time down her blouse. "Xena," she said in deep tone.

"Come up here."

The writer got up as Xena turned onto her back. She peered down at the older woman and grinned. "I'd be crazy to refuse you." She got on top of Xena and straddled her at the stomach. She slipped her hands up Xena's fleece sweater.

"Oh?" The tall, dark, and dangerous woman grinned with a twinkle in her eyes.

"Yes, you're so damn hot." Gabrielle leaned down and kissed the woman furiously. She lifted her head back up. She sensed Xena's large hands unbuttoning her blouse.

Xena searched the other woman's eyes then she quietly asked, "You're sure?"

It was the first time Gabrielle had seen fear in this stronger woman's eyes. It was fear of rejection and fear of something else that Gabrielle couldn't place. "Yes, I'm sure," she uttered. She gave an evil grin. "I don't know a damn thing about this but..."

"Don't worry." Xena took off the other woman's shirt and put it on the floor. "I do."

"Glad somebody does." The writer chuckled and leaned in for a passionate kiss. She rolled her hips into Xena's body while she moaned.

Xena groaned as Gabrielle's hips kept pressing into her stomach. The fire inside became controlling. She reached up and gradually pulled Gabrielle's bra straps down her shoulders.

The writer brought her lips down to Xena's neck, kissing her softly. She unbuttoned Xena's jeans and slipped her hands down.

Xena arched her hips up and moaned, "Gabrielle." She grinned before she took the small woman's lips in a powerful kiss of passion.

Section Two

~*Part 3*~

A soft moan escaped her lips, from the large hand rubbing her back. "That's real nice."

Xena kissed her lover's forehead. "Good." She shifted a little on the leather sofa, her still hot, nude body sticking to the soft leather.

Gabrielle lifted her head off her friend's chest. She shook her head.

Xena cocked an eyebrow. "What?"

"I am gay," she stated loudly. "Oh my god." She laughed and dropped her head back on the other woman's chest.

The older woman laughed quietly and said, "I wouldn't say that... you just prefer good sex."

"That's an understatement." The small woman kissed her lover's chest. "I don't know how I'll hide this from Peter." Then it clicked in with her. "Oh crap, I need to get back." She head whipped up.

"Damn, I forgot too." Xena groaned and released the writer. "Be careful what you say," she whispered.

The younger woman searched worried blue eyes. "What are we doing?" She was completely confused at this point.

"I don't know," whispered Xena, "just get home and we'll figure this out later."

Gabrielle nodded, not sure what else to do. She kissed Xena as long as she could. At the end of the kiss, she smiled and uttered, "I love you," sincerely.

The older woman's breath caught, she started sitting up. "Come on, we gotta get you moving."

"Right, right." The writer got off her lover and found her clothes. She hastily changed into them.

The darker woman slipped into her underwear, jeans, then she put her bra on. Before she could put her fleece sweater on, she found her lips claimed again by Gabrielle. She was more intoxicated by this small woman than she had planned and it was becoming strong with each glance she received and gave. "Come on, Gabrielle," she warned at the end of the kiss. She pulled her sweater on.

The small woman slipped into her black boots and headed towards the door. "That was a good movie."

Xena laughed while she followed behind. "Rrrright."

"I can't wait to see the next one." The writer grabbed her jacket and put it on.

"Just worry about keeping this on the low, low." The tall woman grasped her friend's shoulders. "I'm serious," she whispered.

The writer turned her head faintly. "What?" She started shaking her head. "What is it?"

Xena released a sigh and lowered her head. "It's a real long story." She paused. "My dark shadow follows me everywhere I go." She kissed her lover once more. "Be careful."

"I will... you better start explaining soon."

"Later huh?" Xena opened the door. "You need to get back to Peter."

"Wonderful," grumbled the writer. She went out of the door but glanced back. "Goodnight, Xena."

"Goodnight, Gabrielle."

Gabrielle got into her car and drove back home. Fortunately, she found that Peter hadn't returned, so she simply crawled into bed. Within a half-hour, Peter returned with good news of a nice dinner. Gabrielle returned her results of a nice dinner as well. Afterwards, the couple was quiet and the officer went to bed beside his girlfriend. He fell asleep pretty soon, however it took Gabrielle longer.

The Following Day...

Xena arched her back up in the car seat. She lifted her shirt and carefully slid the shining revolver down the front of her pants. She pulled her shirt back over and got out of the car. After the passenger door opened, Xena pulled out her black, leather trench coat. She put it on and turned around.

The tall woman strolled into the open door of a warehouse.

A heavysset man stood by the door. He watched Xena enter and go up the set of steps to a small office.

The dark woman entered into the office and smiled evilly at the old man behind the desk. "Howdy, Mr. Cross. How are ya?"

Mr. Cross stood up and held a hand out. "Quite well." He smiled roughly. "You must be the famed Xena."

"I am."

"Have a seat, please." Mr. Cross released the large hand and sat down himself.

Xena shifted in front of the paper-scattered desk, and sat down.

"Well, welcome to Philadelphia," greeted Mr. Cross. "What you think?"

Xena nodded and folded her hands in her lap. "Nothing like Wyoming."

"Yes, quite different." The old man rested back in his squeaky seat. "I heard you have quite the reputation in Wyoming."

"I keep hearing that too," joked Xena. "Just trying to make a little money... following in my father's footsteps." She grinned.

The man laughed. "I can understand that."

"Yes, thought I'd come to his hometown." She shot an evil smile. "Reclaim his territory."

Mr. Cross nodded. "He must have had some fine territory too." He rocked in his seat a little. "I can tell you, Xena. It won't be easy." He paused then added, "The cops have really cracked down on the north and east side. They're working their way west through the city."

Xena laughed deeply. "I'll just have to upset their system then." She arched an eyebrow. "I think I have an inside hand already." She left it there then inquired, "How many dealers in the drug ring?"

Mr. Cross stopped rocking in his seat. "West side has twenty or so... same in the south side."

"What about the east and north sides?" Xena tilted her head. "Nobody will touch it?"

"Not at all, Xena." The man shook his head. "They're too scared of the cops." He sighed. "We need to get around these cops." He narrowed his eyes. "The percent has been dropping quickly."

"Don't worry, Mr. Cross." Xena crossed one leg over the other. "There's a back door, I'll take care of it." She paused and said, "Let me take care of some things for you. And you'll be high back on the market."

"First of all." Mr. Cross sat up. "We have a large pick up, today. I'd like for you to come, Xena." He rested his hands on the desk. "Then you begin your mission as to why I hired you." He stood up and held his hand out. "Welcome aboard, Xena."

The tall woman stood and took the hand. "Thank you, Mr. Cross." She grinned evilly. "'Bout time this place had some western spark."

Mr. Cross laughed while he released her hand. "You're the only woman to do it, Xena." He held his hand towards the door. "The pick up is soon, we best leave now."

"Of course." Xena walked over to the door. "Your car?"

"Yes, it's the black limo outside."

The tall woman nodded. "Naturally." She opened the door and left.

Mr. Cross followed out and locked the door behind. He went down the steps and signaled the guard to come with them.

Together the group got into the limousine that was already occupied by a driver and two other men with guns out.

The limousine backed out of the dark alley and onto the ghetto streets of Philadelphia.

A Near by Police Station...

Peter came into the station and took his hat off. He walked over to his desk and sat down.

"Sarge, here's the files you were asking for from Wyoming." The young police officer handed the folder over.

Peter took the folder and looked up at the young man. "Were they hard to get ahold of?"

"Yes, apparently they were, Sarge." The young officer shook his head. "Hardly any of the stations over in Wyoming ever heard of a Xena Dusk." He paused then added, "Her name isn't even Xena Dusk... its some alias she goes by." The man shook her head. "She's something else, boss."

"Thank you, Jonathan."

"No problem, Sarge." The young man headed back to the front desk.

Peter settled the folder onto his desk. He opened the file and the first thing was a copy of a picture of Xena in her cowboy attire. He narrowed his eyes and put the picture on the other side of the folder. The next item was another set of mug shots of Xena.

Peter put those flipped past them and came to the records he wanted. "Xena Dusk... real name Heather Smith." He shook his head and noticed that Xena Dusk was her new name, just changed from Heather. He flipped the page over to all the police records. He gaped. "Holy shit," he whispered in awe.

Later That Afternoon...

Gabrielle entered her apartment after just getting off work. She kicked the door closed behind and went into her bedroom. She sat down on the bed and sighed. She bent forward, preparing to take her boots off but the doorbell buzzed. "Oh wonderful." She got up and went back to the door.

Once the door opened, Megan smiled brightly. "Hey Eph, what's up?"

"Came by to check on you since... last night," emphasized the friend. She stepped in and closed the door behind. "What happened?"

The writer shrugged and made her way to a sofa. She sat down in a flop. "We had dinner and watched a movie."

Megan sat down near her friend. "That's it?"

"Yes, Eph."

Megan sighed and said quietly, "I hope so... and that you're not lying to me."

The small woman looked away.

"Oh no," whispered Megan, "please tell me you didn't, Gabrielle."

The writer ran her hand through her hair. "Look Eph, why would it matter?"

"Because you don't know her," replied the friend hotly. "Tell me you didn't!"

"I did, alright, Megan?" Gabrielle looked back with anger over her expression. "I did, she did, we did." She stood up. "And I gotta say I don't care about who she is." She

walked near the kitchen bar.

Megan got up and came over to her friend. She grabbed her arm. "Do you want to know who she is?" she whispered in pure anger. "She is one of the best drug dealers in America." She narrowed her eyes. "People hire her to 'correct' their drug ring."

The small woman shook her head. "How... how can you be sure?"

The friend sighed and released her friend's arm. "Shannon and I use to be big into crack before we knew you." She paused. "The name Xena was big in the drug department but kept secret from the police." She shook her head. "She's very mysterious, Gabrielle and she's very dangerous." She paused. "She's probably trying to get to Peter through you."

"Why Peter?"

"He is the sargeant in the east side of Philly." Megan paused in thought. "The last time I heard the ring was looking to regain their territory in the east side."

"This can't be true," whispered Gabrielle.

The friend shook the writer's shoulders. "Gabrielle, listen to me, stay away from this Xena." She paused and whispered, "I can't let you get hurt." She squeezed her friend's shoulders. "Please, Gabrielle."

The small woman shook her head. "I don't know, Eph." She breathed calmly and said, "I've gotta hear her side of the story first."

"Here's her side of the story," said Peter when he walked in. He held up the folder. "Take a look, Gabrielle." He dropped the folder onto the table and closed the door.

Gabrielle started shaking, and she opened the folder. She went to the police records and scanned through them. It was one drug offense after another, assault, rape of other women, and then one murder. "Oh my god," she whispered in horror. "She's..."

"Going to be a prisoner soon," finished Peter. "It seems this Heather Smith is a hard one for the law to get a hold of." He shook his head. "Not now, tomorrow we'll have our warrant and her ass behind bars." He took the folder with the files. "She's over due for prison time... if not a death sentence."

"Wait," said Gabrielle as she watched Peter head towards the bedroom.

The officer turned around and waited.

"I'd like to speak with her first."

The man stared at his girlfriend the asked, "Why?"

"So I can slap her," whispered Gabrielle. "I'll keep her distracted while you and your men show up."

Peter nodded. "That'll work perfectly." He raised an eyebrow. "But it'll be dangerous, babe. I don't think I can-"

"She won't do anything, I promise," said the writer. "I'll keep her busy... please Peter."

The officer sighed and stared at the floor. "Alright... but we'll do it a certain way."

"Thank you."

Peter nodded and went into his room.

"Are you nuts?" hissed Megan.

Gabrielle leaned towards her friend. "No," she said hotly. "I am just pissed."

Midday the Following Day...

Xena went to her door and opened it. She blinked but smiled. "Howdy, Gabrielle." She arched an eyebrow. "Didn't expect you here."

"Didn't expect myself here," replied Gabrielle.

"Want to come in?" asked older woman.

The writer shook her head and folded her arms. "Fine right here." She pressed her lips together then she looked up. "Mind telling me what you do for a job?"

"Its complicated, Gabrielle."

"Hmmm, right." The small woman licked her lips and tilted her head. She held her hand out. "I'm Gabrielle Troubadour and you must be Heather Smith."

Xena closed her eyes and breathed heavily. "Gabrielle-"

"You fucken lied to me, you bitch," growled the writer. "You're a fucking drug dealer, murderer, and a rapist." Her green eyes flashed and she was holding back from slugging the other woman. "You bitch," she whispered in anger.

Xena opened her eyes and said quietly, "I'm not a drug dealer, nor a murderer and definitely not a rapist."

"That's such bullshit, Heather." Gabrielle shook her head. "I saw a whole goddamn police record on your criminal history."

"Gabrielle, its not true."

"The Hell its not true." The small woman grabbed Xena by the shirt. "You used me."

"No-" The older woman was cut off by the punch to her face. She stumbled back and touched her upper lip where it was bleeding. She looked past Gabrielle and saw the police cars coming in. She wiped the blood away and her eyes focused on the small woman.

"Why?" whispered Gabrielle.

"You don't understand, Gabrielle."

"I fucken understand perfectly clear now." The writer stepped back as a few tears came down her cheeks. "They'll lock you away for life if not kill you."

Xena watched as the cops started swarming towards her house. "Gabrielle, listen to

me please."

"No, I'm through." Gabrielle backed down the steps and the cops came in.

Xena didn't resist as she was suddenly slammed against the doorway. She was hand cuffed while a police officer read her rights. She closed her eyes and tried controlling her emotions of anger.

Peter came up beside his girlfriend. "She didn't..."

"No." Gabrielle shook her head and watched the police bring Xena down the steps.

Suddenly, Xena tried jerking free towards Gabrielle. "Gabrielle, listen to me!" she yelled.

Peter pulled out his gun and cocked the hammer.

"No," order the writer to Peter.

Peter held back and watched the ten or so police pull Xena back under control.

"Gabrielle, find out my hidden background!" called Xena. "Please," she yelled. Her eyes locked on Gabrielle.

The writer couldn't turn away from the strong gaze. She saw the plea and desperation in Xena's eyes.

The ten officers restrained the tall woman.

Xena mouthed, I love you, before she was thrown into a cop car.

Gabrielle closed her eyes briefly and her heart sunk. She was about to cry on the spot but she held strong. With open eyes now, she watched the police cars drive off with Xena.

"Are you okay, Gabrielle?" asked Peter.

"Yeah, I'll be fine." Gabrielle shook where she stood.

"Go home and relax, huh?" The young man rubbed his girlfriend's back. "I gotta go back to the station and write this up." He put his gun away.

Gabrielle nodded. "Alright."

Peter leaned over and kissed the writer's temple. "That was real brave of you," he whispered, "thank you."

The small woman nodded. "Anytime." She chuckled.

History Time...

Megan rushed into the apartment and came around the kitchen counter into the living room. She spotted her friend curled up on the sofa with red eyes. "Gabrielle." She raced over and knelt down beside her. "What happened?"

The writer didn't say anything and just reached out to her friend.

Megan grabbed her friend and pulled her into her arms. "Its okay," she whispered and sat on the couch. She pulled her friend in closer.

Shannon came into the apartment and quietly closed the door. She made her way over to her girlfriend and Gabrielle. "Is she okay?" she whispered.

Megan shook her head and rocked Gabrielle in her arms.

Shannon knelt down beside the sofa and stroked Gabrielle's short blond hair. "What happened, Gabrielle?" she uttered.

The writer lifted her head off Megan's chest and tried sitting up. She shook her head and gazed down at Shannon. "She said she didn't do any of it."

Megan took her friend's hands and held it tightly.

"Gabrielle, Eph and I can tell you she's no good guy," stated Shannon. "Her name is huge on the drug market."

The small woman closed her eyes and dropped her head back. "She told me to check into her hidden background." She opened her eyes and glanced between her friends. "I've got to at least do that," she whispered.

Megan peered down at Shannon. "You won't find anything good." She turned her attention back to Gabrielle. "I can promise that."

"Why would she have begged me to find out about her background?" Gabrielle shook her head. "You said yourself she's a mysterious woman."

"And dangerous too," added Megan. "This game could get you killed, Gabrielle."

The small woman shook her head. "Please Megan... I need to find out." She paused then she whispered, "I'm in love with her."

Megan sighed and closed her eyes. "She's using you," she uttered.

"I think... I think that too." Gabrielle squeezed her friend's hand. "But I have to find out the truth here. I cannot be the cause of an innocent person getting sent on death row," she whispered. "God please Megan, I love her and I am feeling like she's been setup." She closed her eyes. "Please Megan."

"Okay, okay," whispered Megan. She pulled her friend in. "Shannon and I will help you."

When the friends separated, Shannon squeezed Gabrielle's knee. "But you gotta follow Eph and I's lead accordingly, we gotta be careful."

Gabrielle nodded her agreement.

The three women then left the apartment building. They decided on Gabrielle's car and headed to the west side of Philadelphia. Megan drove the way over, knowing where exactly to go.

Shannon glanced back at Gabrielle in the back seat. "We're going to see this man by the name of Ice." She paused before saying, "He's a dealer that knows the whose,

whose of any world drug ring." She shook her head. "If he doesn't know anything about Xena then nobody will."

Gabrielle breathed deeply and nodded.

"Make sure your wallet is stashed full of cash," mentioned Megan, "His information has a big price tag."

"I'm good with money," replied Gabrielle.

"Let's hope so," whispered Megan as she drove off the highway, into the suburbs of Philadelphia. She went into a quiet, dirty part of town and pulled off at the side. She parked the car and got out. "Let's go."

Shannon and Megan led their friend into a rundown townhouse. Once inside, they climbed a flight of stairs and came to an apartment door.

Shannon knocked and smiled when it opened. "What's up?!" She said happily.

"Well I be a fucking duck," said the man. "It's my girls." The African American man opened his door more. "How are you ladies?" He shook his head. "I haven't seen you in these parts in years." He was an older man.

"Well Ice, Meg and I have dropped the white ways." Shannon grinned.

"You two ladies were my best customers." He shook his head. "Such a pity."

"Rrright." Shannon held her hand out to Gabrielle. "We're still bringing you some business though, my man." She dropped her hand. "My friend Gabs here wants to know a little information."

Ice looked at Gabrielle and nodded. "You know, young lady, my information is very costly... depending on what you want to know."

"I think we can handle it, Ice," cut in Megan. "Old time sakes."

Ice nodded his head. "Alright, alright, come in." He closed the door once the women were in. "Sit down."

The three women all sat down on one sofa while Ice sat at the opposite one.

"So, what can I help you with?" his eyes locked on Gabrielle.

The small woman leaned forward with her elbow on her knees. "Do you know anything about a Xena Dusk?"

Ice nodded and sat back in his seat. He crossed one leg over the other. "The Wyoming Cow Girl huh?" He grinned and pulled out a cigarette from his sleeve pocket. "I heard she's here in these parts."

"Ice," warned Shannon. "You know she's here." She shook her head. "Don't do your beat around the bush bit."

Ice grinned and said, "You know me too well, Shan." He lit his cigarette and smoked on it. "What you wanna know about the Cow Girl?" He put his lighter on the table

between them.

"Who is she?" asked Gabrielle.

The drug dealer chuckled and responded, "The Cow Girl, who else?"

"Come on, Ice." Megan shook her head. "We don't have time for this."

"Look ladies," went on Ice, "why are you poking your noses into dangerous shit like this?" His eyes flickered over the woman. "Both you two." He pointed at Shannon and Megan. "Know how goddamn fucking dangerous Xena Dusk is." He paused. "We know her reputation." He sat back into his seat. "You three ladies, are getting nothing from me because I won't have your goddamn deaths on my hand."

"Ice," said Gabrielle. "I know Xena Dusk... and I also know she's in jail right now." She shook her head. "There's more going on than being said." She paused and added, "If somebody doesn't start giving the truth there will be no Xena Dusk anymore." She leaned towards the older man. "I also know damn well Xena Dusk isn't suppose to be in that jail cell." She narrowed her eyes. "Start helping her out of the cell or bury her deeper in it."

Ice grounded his teeth and took a long drag on his cigarette. "Alright." He leaned forward and smashed the cigarette into the ashtray on the table. "Xena Dusk is from Wyoming, true."

"Come on, Ice," rushed Shannon.

"Shan girl." Ice held his hand up and sat back in his seat. "Give this old man some space to talk."

Shannon sighed and kept silent.

"Thank you." The older man looked at Gabrielle. "Like I said, she is from Wyoming." He paused while he collected his thoughts. "Her father was from here as was her mother." He folded his arms. "Her father was an undercover cop." He licked his lips before continuing. "Her father, Steve, become quite involved in a huge drug bust." He corked an eyebrow. "So into it that he almost forgot his duty but luckily he did not."

"He was that cop mysteriously shot back in the late nine-teen sixties?" Shannon was bug eyed. "Oh my god, I heard about that drug bust that almost happened. It would have the been the biggest ever."

"Key word, almost," repeated Ice.

"What happened?" asked Gabrielle.

The African American man sighed and focused back on Gabrielle. "Steve got too involved, didn't watch his back and got shot in the back." He shook his head. "Nobody is sure who did it." He shrugged. "They say the old drug leader, Mr. Cross, did it but who knows." He folded his hands in his lap. "None the less, you reason enough to stay away," he warned.

"Wait Ice," cut in Megan. "You're not giving the entire story. Fork the damn story over." She narrowed her eyes. "I drove all the way out here, I am not about to head

back empty handed."

"Chill babe." Ice sighed and went on. "Once Xena's father was killed, they went after her mother... Catherine." He paused as a grin formed on his lips. "But Steve had been a step ahead of them druggers then." He chuckled and explained. "Steve knew he was head over in shit but he was smart enough to send his wife off." He leaned towards the women. "He sent her across the country by train to Wyoming with a roll of cash he'd stolen from Mr. Cross."

"Oh damn, I bet that pissed the Hell off with Mr. Cross," muttered Shannon.

"Oh you bet," replied Ice. "He bitched a storm and wanted his drug money back. He sent some of his men to Wyoming after Catherine." He shook his head. "They couldn't find her at all, she'd just... disappeared." He chuckled while he recalled more of the story. "But you see... at the time Catherine was with a child."

"Let me guess, little Xena," stated Megan.

"Exactly." Ice nodded sternly. "Catherine had gone to a hospital to have Xena, she was out in the open."

"Oh no," whispered Gabrielle, "That's when they found them."

"Yes." The old man sighed sadly. "Mr. Cross's men showed up at the hospital, killed Xena's mother and found the her home. They took the money and returned back here to Philly."

"But they didn't know about Xena," whispered Shannon. "I smell a revenge."

"Sssh," ordered Ice. "Let me finish. Once Mr. Cross's men returned he asked them if they'd killed Catherine's child. They didn't know of any child and Mr. Cross blew his cap again." He laughed quietly. "So those same men went trudging back to Wyoming to finish the business. By the time they got there, the child was gone and put into an orphanage under another name." He shook his head. "There was no way for them to find out where the child was, so they gave up and came back to Philly."

"Hold on," cut in Megan. "They lied to Mr. Cross and said they'd killed Xena huh?"

"Yes."

"Wait." Gabrielle shook her head. "How did Xena Dusk managed this criminal record?"

Ice grinned and crossed one leg over the other. "She acquired it by her own means." He tilted his head. "The Cow Girl was born and raised on a ranch by her adopted parents." He pulled out his pack of cigarettes and begun turning them over and over in his hands. "One day she decided to research her family's past. She found out everything she didn't want to know." He shrugged. "She was pretty angry at the young age of twenty."

"Was her name Xena Dusk then?" asked Gabrielle.

"No, her name was Heather Smith at the time," answered Ice. "By her adopted parents. The name Xena Dusk was suppose to be given to her by her mother and father but for

obvious reason it was never placed on a birth certificate." He stopped turning his cigarette pack. "Now this is where the history is a little more blurry. Somehow, Xena managed to get her criminal record in a span of a day."

The three women gawked.

The man laughed deeply and explained more. "This a just a suspicion... nobody is sure if she has or hasn't done the crimes." He shrugged. "But this suspicion has led big time dealers to believe she has inside help." He shook his head. "Yet that would require her to have inside help that can create a criminal record for her within that span of a day." He laughed deeply. "So, nobody quite believes that tale and everybody thinks she's murdered people, dealt drugs, and has done some raping in her time."

Gabrielle narrowed her eyes. "What do you believe, Ice?"

Ice leaned forward and put the pack on the table. "I believe ladies, you're too far into this as it is."

"Then you'll tell us the rest," stated Gabrielle. "Please Ice, I know there's gotta be more."

"I'm an old man, Gabs." The drug dealer sighed deeply. "I've been here all my life."

Megan narrowed her eyes and whispered, "You knew Steve didn't you, Ice?"

The man stared at Megan then he slowly smiled while he spoke, "Steve and I grew up in the same ghetto school together." He chuckled. "Smoked the same goddamn drugs before he put on that badge." He sighed sadly. "He was one Hell of a nice man."

Gabrielle considered what had been said and realized just how much this man knew. "By any chance, do you happen to know Xena Dusk... personally?" She grinned at the African American.

Ice laughed deeply and gradually nodded. "I've known Xena Dusk since she was in her mother's womb."

"The piece are coming together," whispered Gabrielle. "She's back here to get revenge for her parents' deaths, isn't she?"

The older man studied the writer and noticed how she was desperate to know the truth. "Yes, she's here for revenge." He got a serious look suddenly. "And I recommend you stay away from her. She's on a mission that'll she do anything to accomplish."

"She's not going to get far being stuck in a jail cell and all," stated Shannon.

Ice chuckled. "I wouldn't hold your breath to that, Shan." He stood up. "However, I'd say you three should go duck for cover."

"Ice-" started Shannon

"No," cut off Ice. "Time for your three lovely ladies to leave, if I hear you three snooping around more." He narrowed his eyes. "I'll be setting my boys on your asses to keep you out of this shit." He walked over to the door. "I've said more than

enough." He opened it. "Time to leave."

The three women sighed and got up, each going out single file.

Gabrielle was outlast and turned back to Ice. "Ice, will she be alive by the end of this?"

The old man closed his eyes then opened them again. "I cannot promise she will be, Gabs." He shook his head. "She's following her father's footsteps," he whispered. He grasped the young woman's shoulder. "Stay away." He went into his apartment and closed the door silently.

The women went outside and quickly got into the car.

Megan started the car. She glanced at her girlfriend. "This place still gives me the creeps."

Shannon nodded in agreement.

"Eph?"

Megan drove off down the road. "Yeah, Gabrielle?"

"Head to the police station."

Shannon looked back. "Are you nuts? You heard Ice."

"I don't care," said Gabrielle hotly. "Xena is gonna need help, damn it."

Megan sighed and got on the south part of the beltway. The quickest way to the east side where Peter worked and Xena was being held.

Section Three

~*Part 4*~

Megan was in first, followed by Gabrielle then Shannon. Megan went up to the front desk. "Hi," she greeted the police officer.

"Hello," said the young man; Jonathan. He glanced over and saw Gabrielle.

"Gabrielle, I haven't seen you around here in a few."

The writer smiled faintly. "Been busy." She sighed then asked, "Can I see one of your prisoners here?"

Jonathan lifted an eyebrow. "Which prisoner?"

"Xena Dusk," replied Gabrielle. "I won't be long."

Jonathan shook his head. "I can't let anybody in to talk to her. Boss's orders, Gabrielle."

"Please, John." Gabrielle put her hands on the counter. "You know you can trust me."

The officer dropped his shoulders. "Alright," he said quietly. "Come with me." He came around the counter and marched towards a large metal door. He greeted the two guards there. "Just taking these ladies in."

The two guards nodded and watched Jonathan escort the three women into the small, white prison house. He went past a number of cells and came to a stop. He nodded at the tall women inside, lying down.

Gabrielle smiled and nodded back.

Jonathan walked back down the prison cell.

The writer watched him close the metal door behind, she sighed and glanced back at Xena on the bed. "Xena," she said quietly.

Xena opened her blue eyes and turned her head.

Gabrielle smiled but her eyes were sad. "I know the truth," she whispered. She grasped the white bars.

The tall woman smiled as her eyes softened. She got up from the cot and neared her lover. "You talked to Ice?" Her eyes flickered over to the other two women.

"We did," answered Megan. "You had a Hell of a life."

"Tell me about it." Xena gave them a grin but smiled at Gabrielle. "Thank you," she uttered. She lifted her hands up.

Gabrielle released the bars and took her lover's hands. "I'm sorry about this."

"It was bound to happen," stated Xena.

The small woman knitted her eyebrows. "Xena, what about your criminal record?" Her voice was quiet. "Ice didn't know anything about it."

"It's not real." Xena's voice was stern, making her words clear and truthfully. "I'll explain later." She lifted her eyes to the other women. "Right now, you three need to get out of here." She averted her focus to Gabrielle. "And stay away. Do you understand me?" She gave a tighter grip to her lover's hands.

"What's... going on, Xena?" Gabrielle shook her head. "This is mysterious enough as it is."

"I know and I'm sorry but that's the way it needs to be right now." The tall woman took a deep breath. "I'm about to leave here."

"What... how?"

"Sssh. I can't explain." Xena held tightly to Gabrielle's hands. "Just get out of here."

"Xena, I'm not going to let you end up like your father," stated Gabrielle harshly.

"I won't," countered the older woman. "Trust me." She released her lover's hand. "Get out of here, now."

"Wait, Xena-

"Come on, Gabrielle." Megan grabbed her friend's shoulders. "Xena has a point."

"Go." Xena took a step back. "I'll be fine."

The metal door unlocked and begun opening.

The dark woman peered down. "Shit." She glanced back at the women. "Change of plans." She looked back at the metal door opening. "Play along," she instructed in a whisper.

Coming through the door was a large old man, Mr. Cross and the commissioner along side him, followed by a few of Mr. Cross's men.

"Mr. Cross," greeted Xena.

Mr. Cross peered up finally and noticed the three women. "Have visitors, Xena?"

Xena suddenly had an evil grin. "I do." She folded her arms and glanced at the women. "You may want to... invite them to lunch." She coked an eyebrow in suggestion.

The commissioner recognized one of them. "Gabrielle, what are you doing here?"

"I... I came by here to see Sargeant Peter, commissioner."

Mr. Cross folded his arms. "Well, little lady, I'd say you're in the wrong part of the station. Don't you?"

Megan and Shannon stepped closer to their friend.

Mr. Cross's men removed their guns and pointed them at the women.

"Come, come," said Mr. Cross gently. "No need for violence... yet." He glanced at Xena. "Is this the woman you spoke of?"

Xena folded her arms. "Yes."

Mr. Cross smiled falsely at Gabrielle. "You are to join us."

"Wait," cut in the commissioner. "This is not apart of our agreement, Mr. Cross."

The old man reached into his suit jacket and removed a roll of twenties. With his freehand, he lifted the commissioner's hand and put the roll of twenties in it. "It is now. Right, commissioner?"

"Yes, of course." The commissioner tucked the roll of money away. He dug into his pants pockets. A jangle filled the air when the commissioner pulled out his keys. He inserted the key into Xena's cell- he unlocked it.

Xena pushed the door opened, and came out. She came to stand behind the three women. "Matt?"

One of Mr. Cross's men smiled, Matt, and stepped forward. He reached into his

leather jacket and removed a revolver. He tossed it.

Xena caught it and slipped it partially down her pants. She covered it back up with her shirt. "Mr. Cross, I'd like to pick up some of my things at my place."

"Of course." Mr. Cross folded his arms. "I have a new place picked out for you already." His eyes went to slits. "Let's not have this screw up again."

"It'll be under control now that we have her." Xena signaled Gabrielle.

"I hope so," stated Mr. Cross coldly. "Time to go." He turned to his men. "Bring the women along."

"Yes, Mr. Cross," replied Matt. He opened his jacket and revealed a gun. "Please no problems, ladies. Cool, calm, and collective. Follow me." He turned and made his way down the prison house. The other two men accompanied him.

"Move," growled Xena.

Megan glared up at the tall woman but pushed Gabrielle lightly.

The writer started walking with her friends.

The large group left the small prison house and went into the police department.

The commissioner stopped at the front desk. "Our apologies again, Miss Dusk."

"Be more careful next time please, commissioner," replied Xena. She turned to the front desk as her eyes rested on a glaring Jonathan. He placed a paper on the counter then held a pen out.

Xena took it, bent forward, and signed the document.

Gabrielle glanced around the station, looking for Peter. But she couldn't find him anywhere in sight. *He must be on patrol.* She actually felt relief in knowing that.

Xena dropped the pen and gazed up as she received back some of her items. She took the clear bag and removed her watch, necklace, and small pocketknife. She put them all back in their proper places then turned to Mr. Cross. She nodded.

Mr. Cross nodded back and turned to the commissioner. "Thank you again, commissioner." He held his hand out.

The commissioner was hesitant but took the older man's hand. "Sorry again for the mix up."

"Quite alright." Mr. Cross nodded then released the hand. "Have a lovely afternoon." He snapped his fingers for his men to follow. He left the building, as did the rest of his party.

Arrival at Xena's Place...

"Make this speedy," ordered Mr. Cross. He glanced back at the tall woman, whom sat beside Gabrielle. "We have our drop off this afternoon as planned." He eyes flickered to the three women in the middle of the limousine. "Not to mention extra business."

Xena nodded. "Be back." She opened the car door, got out, and closed it behind herself. She jogged into her small home. Upstairs, she'd gone to her nightstand. She grabbed her cordless phone and turned it on. Quickly, she dialed a number while she shifted to her closet. "Yeah, its me." She opened the closet door with her freehand. "Yes, in 'bout hour or less at the port." She lifted her right shoulder to hold the phone against her ear.

"Make sure you're there." Xena reached in and pulled out her leather trench coat, bullet belt, two revolvers, and her hat. "This is our only chance." She tossed the coat onto the bed and reached under her bed. She pulled out a pair of black Doc Martens boots. "Trust me, he's gonna want you there anyway. It won't look odd."

Xena took off her sneakers. "Good, good." She slipped into the boots, tied them, then she pulled her jean pants back down. "Perfect, I'll see you then." She grabbed her belt. "Alright, bye." She grabbed the phone, turned it off, and tossed it on her bed.

She hastily put on her belt, hooked the black buckle. She grabbed her revolvers and slipped them into their holsters on the sides. Xena grabbed her coat and slung it on. She adjusted the jacket by jerking on the collar at the top. Reaching down, she took her hat and dropped her head forward as she put it on.

The Cow Girl turned around and left her room. She quickly made her way down the steps then out of the house. Once outside, she made her way to the limousine. After she opened the car, Gabrielle was moving, preparing to jump out.

Xena instantly pulled out a gun and aim it at Gabrielle. "Get back in," she growled.

The writer stared at the barrel then she heard a click as Xena pulled back on the hammer in warning. *Well, she said play along.* Gabrielle moved back to her seat while she studied apologetic blue eyes.

Xena got into the car and slammed the door hard. With a release of the hammer, Xena put the gun back in its holster. "You may want to tie these ladies up, Mr. Cross."

Mr. Cross glanced back at the three women huddled in the middle of the limousine. "I believe you're quite right." He signaled the driver, beside him, to go.

The limousine backed out of the driveway and went back on the road.

"What the Hell are you gonna do with us?" asked Shannon.

Mr. Cross peered up through the review mirror. "Dispose of you," he said coolly. "We don't need any loose ends, ladies."

"Mr. Cross, you don't wanna do this," warned Megan. "Gabrielle's boyfri-"

"Is Sargeant Peter Jessup," cut off Mr. Cross. He glanced back at Megan. "I could care less." He smirked and sat back in his seat. "Meg and Shan, I'd be more included to keep you both alive since you both were some of my best customers." He reached up and adjusted his tie. "But you're no longer customers so I have no use for you both."

Shannon corked an eyebrow at her girlfriend across the limousine. "See what happens when we leave the white ways," she joked coldly.

"Quite true, Shan," agreed Mr. Cross. He glimpsed up in the review mirror again at Xena. "I will have the boys tomorrow pick up your things. Have them taken to your new place."

Xena nodded. "Thank you, Mr. Cross." She tilted her head before she inquired, "We have our pick up at Port Clinton still?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Cross. "Rather important shipment."

"Of course," agreed Xena.

And that's where the car was headed for, Port Clinton along the Schuylkill River.

Twenty Minutes Later at Port Clinton During the Afternoon...

"Take care of the ladies, boys," ordered Xena.

The three men drug the women out of the car and led them across the open parking lot.

"Right this way," informed Mr. Cross. He opened the large door to a warehouse and held it open. His men pushed the three women into the warehouse.

"Xena."

The Cow Girl nodded at Mr. Cross and went into the warehouse.

Mr. Cross followed in and closed the door. "Our sellers will be here soon."

Xena moved her head in understanding.

Mr. Cross turned to his men. "Take the ladies upstairs to the office." He grinned. "And make sure they're comfortable."

"Let's go," commanded Matt to the women.

Megan and Shannon started quietly moving towards the metal steps.

Gabrielle, on the other hand, didn't move.

Matt came up in front of her. "Move," he snarled.

The writer shot a smug look then suddenly kicked him between the legs.

Matt bent forward, breathing hard, and his eyes closed.

"Get her!" yelled Mr. Cross.

The man at the bottom of the metal steps raced over, after Gabrielle.

Shannon was about to move but the third man pulled out his gun and stopped her along with Megan.

Gabrielle saw the other man coming, without thought, she grabbed Matt's gun from his hands. She backed up pointing it at the man coming towards her.

Matt, by now, had recovered and straightened up with a red face. "You can't get out of here."

Mr. Cross peered up at Xena.

Xena sighed and quietly made her way up behind Gabrielle.

"It's sure worth a Hell of a shot," stated Gabrielle. She glimpsed over at Mr. Cross briefly but didn't catch sight of Xena. Suddenly a large arm came up across her chest and locked her arms.

Xena pulled her lover in close and plucked the gun from her small hand. She pulled the hammer back and pressed the barrel against Gabrielle's temple. "Let's not make this hard," she said deeply.

The writer faintly felt herself shook, she wasn't sure which from, the gun or Xena. But she gave a small struggle and snarled, "You goddamn, bitch."

"I know," whispered Xena. She lowered her head closer to Gabrielle's. She grinned. "We have no problem killing you three now but we just don't want a mess on this clean ground." She lifted up an eyebrow. "So hard way or easy way?"

"Easy way," whispered Gabrielle quietly.

The Cow Girl released the hammer, removed the gun but kept it out. She released Gabrielle and pushed her towards the steps. "Let's go."

The writer glared at her lover yet went towards the steps.

Matt took his gun back from Xena then directed the women up to the office.

One man held open the office door while the women came in.

"Sit down," ordered Xena coldly when she came in last.

Megan and Shannon sat down in two metal chairs.

The Cow Girl narrowed her eyes at Gabrielle. "Now," she growled lowly.

This is a lot of fun, thought the writer as she tried to give her best glare. She spotted a wood chair and sat in it.

Xena glanced at Matt. "Go watch the door outside, things will be fine here."

Matt nodded and left the small office. He went to the entrance of the warehouse and stood guard.

"Let's hurry it up," yelled Mr. Cross from downstairs.

"We'll be right with you," called back Xena. She walked behind her lover and grabbed some rope from the desk near her. After she knelt down, she grabbed Gabrielle's arms and brought them behind the chair.

The small woman sensed her wrists being tied together. She glanced over and saw Shannon and Megan getting tied to her chairs.

The two men finished first while Xena was still tying.

"Go back down," told Xena. "I'll finish up here."

The men left the office after they nodded.

Everybody was dead silent as Xena finished tying Gabrielle's bound hands.

The dark woman reached into her jean pocket and removed her pocketknife, she grasped Gabrielle's hands. "Stay in here, it'll be safe," she whispered. "But if something goes wrong..." She slipped the pocketknife into her lover's hands. "Then get out of here."

"Xena, what are you going to do?" whispered Gabrielle.

"Later, just stay put." The Cow Girl rose up and walked over to the door.

"Xena," growled Gabrielle. "There may not be a later."

Xena was hesitant about leaving but yet she gave a reassuring smile. "There's always a later with me." She winked before she left.

"Shit," grumbled the writer.

Shannon dropped her head back. "This is ssso wonderful." She sighed dramatically. "If Xena screws up, we're all dead."

Megan glimpsed over at her girlfriend then at Gabrielle. "What'd she slip you?"

"Her pocketknife," answered shorthaired blond.

"Well, lets make use of it." Megan creased her lips with a grin. "I'm not about to let Xena have all the fun."

A small click filled the room when the pocketknife was opened.

Meanwhile...

"John," greeted the middle-aged man. "Good to see you again."

The limousine driver smiled falsely and lifted himself off the car. He held his hand out to the drug seller. "Good to see you again, Mr. Vincen."

Mr. Vincen shook the driver's hand before holding that hand towards the warehouse. "They're inside?"

"Yes, sir."

"Been waiting long?" asked Mr. Vincen.

"No, sir." John, the limousine driver, glanced at Matt at the door. "Mr. Cross will want to see Mr. Vincen."

"Of course." Matt smiled at the drug seller. "I assume you brought the goods, Mr. Vincen?"

Mr. Vincen nodded, he half turned to his Cadillac behind him. He gave a small wave in signal.

Three large men got out of the car, each with a briefcase.

"Right this way, Mr. Vincen." Matt held open the door.

Mr. Vincen and his men strolled into the warehouse.

Matt glanced at John and nodded.

John nodded back and watched Matt go back inside. He leaned back against the car once more. Within a minute or so, footsteps echoing off the warehouses came to him. He scanned around and noted an older man coming towards him. He smiled. "Ice, good to see you made it."

Ice strolled up with his hands in his pockets. "I'm not too late, am I?"

"Nope, hurry in. Mr. Cross was starting to get angry that you weren't around."

"Better late than never," joked Ice before he went into the warehouse.

Mr. Cross gave a friendly smile to Ice. "Wonderful to see you've decided to join us, Ice."

The African American joined Mr. Cross. "My apologies, Mr. Cross... had problems getting a taxi over here."

Mr. Cross nodded and turned to Mr. Vincen. "This is Mr. Vincen, Ice."

Ice smiled at Mr. Vincen and held a hand out.

Mr. Vincen grasped the hand and gave a strong shake. "Nice to meet the man behind Mr. Cross's success."

Mr. Cross clung to Ice's shoulder. "Yes, Ice has been my right hand man."

Ice smiled proudly after Mr. Cross's hand left his shoulder.

Mr. Cross then held that same hand out to Xena. "New to my family is Xena Dusk."

Mr. Vincen was momentarily shocked but nodded at Xena. "The Cow Girl from Wyoming."

Xena faintly tipped her hat. "Some call me that." She grinned under the brim of her black hat.

"Welcome to Philadelphia, Miss Dusk.," said Mr. Vincen then he turned his focus back to Mr. Cross. "Now then, the exchange."

"Of course." Mr. Cross glanced at Matt. "Please bring in the cases with John."

Matt nodded and left the warehouse.

"May I see the products?" inquired Mr. Cross.

Mr. Vincen snapped his fingers and his three men all lifted their cases onto the table near by. They unlocked them, flipped out the locks, then opened the tops. They backed away.

Mr. Cross, Xena, and Ice all peered into the briefcases.

Mr. Cross lifted up a clear bag of white powder and hefted it some. He handed it to Ice.

Ice unzipped the top and smelled it faintly. As he handed it back, he gave a nod.

Mr. Cross reached up and closed the suitcase in front of him.

Xena and Ice closed the other two.

"As agreed, a briefcase for a briefcase," stated Mr. Cross as he turned around.

Mr. Vincen glanced over to the warehouse door as John and Matt entered with three briefcases.

"Check them," ordered Mr. Vincen.

The seller's three men took the briefcases from Matt and John. They put them on top of the other ones, popped them open. The men glanced over the money with nods.

"All here, Mr. Vincen," said one man.

"Wonderful."

The three men locked the cases back up, took them, and stood behind Mr. Vincen.

Xena peered down at Ice.

Ice's eyes flickered up to the tall woman briefly then back at the sellers.

The Cow Girl tilted her head and looked over at the warehouse door. Her eyes focused on the small opening between the door and the wall to the outside world. She suddenly saw something rush by outside. A bit of a grin twitched at the corner of her lips.

Matt followed Xena's gaze and looked through the tiny opening. He saw, what he thought, was a person running by. His eyes widened and instantly he pulled out his gun. He pointed it at Xena. "She set us up!" he yelled.

Everybody reached for their guns, except for Mr. Vincen and Mr. Cross.

"What's going on?" asked Mr. Cross.

"We're being swarmed by cops," replied Matt. "I just saw somebody run past the outside... she saw them too." He nodded his gun at Xena.

Xena corked an eyebrow. "Matt, I saw nobody." She grinned evilly at him. "Who do you think Mr. Cross will believe?" Her eyebrow lifted higher. "Somebody that uses drugs like you.... or me that's been in this business for years?"

"Somebody that's been loyal to me for years," answered Mr. Cross. He pulled out his

gun, pulled the hammer back, and aimed it at Xena.

Xena kept a cool expression. "Mr. Cross, I wouldn't." Her grin spread far across her lips.

"Oooh, I would," countered Mr. Cross. "Heather Smith." His eyes narrowed as his finger started moving towards the trigger.

"No!" came the loud scream from upstairs.

Mr. Cross, instinctively, raised his aim up and shot at the person that yelled. He clearly missed as the shot pinging off metal.

Everybody else quickly looked back at Xena but she had... disappeared.

"Where the Hell did she go?" yelled Matt. He looked around at all the craters with his gun up. "She's gone."

"No matter," cut in Mr. Cross. "Bring the women down, they're our way out."

Mr. Vincen's eyes shifted into slits as he focused his attention on Mr. Cross. "You said there will be no problems."

"I said there shouldn't be," retorted Mr. Cross. "No promises." He saw his men bringing the women down from the upstairs catwalk. The entire way down, the women struggled. Mr. Cross glanced over at Mr. Vincen. "By now, the entire warehouse is surrounded."

Xena kept her back hard against the crate. She kept the small radio close to her lips. "Not yet," she whispered into the microphone. She lifted it up to her ear and heard, "We're ready whenever, Xena." She raised it back to her mouth. "On my word," she whispered. Her reply from the small radio was, "On your sign, out." She pushed the small antenna down and slipped the radio back into her jacket pocket.

"Now then, we'll calmly walk out of here," said Mr. Cross. "I believe hostages are in line." He snapped his fingers. Three of his men put their guns behind the women's back.

Mr. Vincen signaled his men to be ready while keeping the cases of money.

"John, Ice." Mr. Cross gave them each a briefcase while he kept one himself. He slipped his gun away.

The Cow Girl knelt down, tipped her hat up with the barrel of her revolver. She closed her eyes and tried to come up with a plan. "Please be with me," she whispered under her breath. She pulled back the hammer, took a steady breath as her pulse raced, and she quickly stood up. She came around the crate, and she pointed her gun at the group. "Don't leave yet, the party has just started," she taunted.

"Stop her!" yelled Mr. Cross.

Two men instantly started shooting at Xena.

Xena gave a few shots and knocked out one man. Shots suddenly bombarded her and she leapt behind another set of crates. She peered across and saw a much lower set of

crates but they raised up to almost touch the metal catwalk above. She grinned, ran, and jumped onto the crates. She then grasped the catwalk and hauled herself up onto it.

"Find her," ordered Mr. Cross.

Mr. Vincen signaled his men to watch the women.

Two of Mr. Cross's men, which were left out of the three, begun searching through the warehouse for Xena.

Xena stood in the darkness of the warehouse, she quickly stepped out into the light and shot at one of the men. She hit him directly between the eyes.

The other man left shot back at Xena.

The Cow Girl disappeared back into the dark space of the catwalk. She opened the barrel of her gun and reloaded it with the bullets from around her belt.

Mr. Vincen nodded to two of his men.

They nodded back, cocked their guns and made their way towards stairs for the catwalk.

"Xena, they're coming up on the catwalk!" yelled Gabrielle.

Xena caught them out of the corner of her eye.

Mr. Cross instantly moved and pressed his gun into Gabrielle's neck. "Shut up or die," he whispered coldly.

Xena narrowed her eyes at hearing that, she saw that one man was on the catwalk while the other was on the steps. Also in her view was a chain dangling in midair attached to a track along the ceiling. She grinned, pulled back the hammer on her gun.

The Cow Girl sprinted a little ways down the catwalk and leaped. She flew over the rail, into the air, then she grasped the chain.

The chain, from the momentum, went rolling across the track at a fast speed.

Xena hung on with her one arm while with her gun, she shot at the man on the ground. Her bullet got him in the top of the head.

Mr. Cross, John, and Mr. Vincen all shot at Xena when she flew overhead but missed each time.

Xena swung herself forward once she neared the other side of the catwalk. She jumped and landed on the catwalk, now she was closer to the other men on the catwalk. She knelt down, aimed at the one on the catwalk, and immediately fired.

He took the bullet in the chest and collapsed.

Xena ducked as few bullets missed her from the man on the step. She quickly fired back at him and got the man in the stomach. So he fell down the steps a little way with a hard thud.

"That's it," growled Mr. Cross. He grabbed Gabrielle and dragged her a little in the open. He held his gun to her head. "Xena, if you do not end this, she will have a hole in her head."

Megan tried rushing forward but Mr. Vincen stopped her.

John restrained Shannon from doing anything.

Ice, on the other hand, still held one briefcase. He peered down at it then he glimpsed at Mr. Cross. His grip on the briefcase's handle tightened.

The Cow Girl came closer to the rail. "I'm coming down," she stated.

"Throw your guns down," ordered Mr. Cross.

Xena nodded and threw the one she had down to the ground. Gradually opening her trench coat, she pulled out her other gun from the holster. She tossed it to the ground. At a very slow pace, she walked towards the stairwell, her boots echoing the entire way.

Ice saw his friend come to the top of the stairs- he narrowed his eyes. He watched her come down the steps gradually. He glanced at Mr. Cross and noted his attention only on Xena. After a shaky breath, he rapidly lifted the case and threw it hard towards the back of Mr. Cross.

The suitcase of cocaine flew and slammed into the back of Mr. Cross's head. At once, it knocked Mr. Cross unconscious.

John reacted by dropping his suitcase and fired at Ice.

Ice was hit in his side, he fell to the ground, grasping his pleading side. "Oh shit, that bitch hurts," he muttered.

Xena jumped down two steps, she grabbed the dead man's gun. She rose up while she aimed as she heard Gabrielle yell, "Watch out, Xena!"

Mr. Vincen was only left, he quickly raised his gun at Xena. He fired.

The Cow Girl fired in the same instant.

Mr. Vincen whaled in pain as the bullet sunk into his leg.

Shannon spun around and slugged the drug dealer. She'd managed to knock Mr. Vincen out.

Gabrielle caught sight of her lover crashing onto the steps, she knew Xena had been shot. "Xena!" She ran towards the steps then up them.

Megan and Shannon raced to Ice's side and bent down.

"Ice," uttered Shannon.

"Is everybody okay?" asked Ice in a whisper.

"Everybody but you, Ice," said Megan quietly. She quickly took her jacket off and

pressed it into his side.

Gabrielle came next to her lover as she bent down on the steps. She touched Xena's face at seeing her eyes closed. "Xena?" she whispered in plea. Gradually, warm blue eyes greeted her.

"Howdy," whispered Xena with a grin.

"Oh shit, you scared me," mumbled the writer. "Where'd you get it?"

The tall woman pushed back the trench coat's flap at the top. At the shoulder, blood was soaking through the black top. "Nothing bad." She chuckled faintly.

The younger woman shook her head with a grin. "Come on, Cow Girl."

Xena hauled herself up onto her feet with her lover's help. She glanced across at Megan and Shannon then back at her lover whom was standing on the step below her. "Are you okay?" she whispered.

"Yeah."

The dark woman raised an eyebrow. "I thought I had told you to stay up in that office."

Gabrielle grinned devilishly. "You'd be dead right now if I hadn't gotten out."

The tall woman smirked but nodded. "True," she admitted.

"Don't celebrate quite yet," snarled Mr. Cross. He was up on his feet, gun out, and aimed at the couple on the steps.

Megan and Shannon shifted quickly.

Mr. Cross pointed the gun at the two women. "Don't," he stated hotly. "I see you both." He aimed his gun back at the lovers.

Gabrielle was breathing heavily but she tried to relax.

"Mr. Cross, you won't make it out of here," stated Xena, "This place is surrounded by cops."

"That may be so," replied Mr. Cross, "but I'll be sent to prison happily knowing I killed you."

Xena wrapped her left arm around Gabrielle and faintly pulled her in close. "May I ask one thing?" She arched an eyebrow. She faintly slipped her right hand between her body and Gabrielle's.

Mr. Cross smirked. "About your father?"

"That and how you knew who I was," responded the Cow Girl. She pressed Gabrielle hard into her body briefly.

The writer felt something hard against Xena's stomach press into her upper chest. *The gun from the prison.* She understood what her lover meant and slowly reached up towards Xena's stomach. Her hand slipped under the black shirt. She was thanking

god that the black trench coat hid the scene of her hand under Xena's shirt from Mr. Cross.

"My men who returned to Wyoming to... take care of you finally confessed to me that they hadn't killed you." Mr. Cross laughed deeply. "I thought nothing of it, thinking no orphan would care about their family history."

"But then you suddenly heard about a famed drug dealer in Wyoming," cut in Xena. She felt the gun leave from its hiding spot. She knew her lover was about to cock the gun, so she started talking again to hide the noise. "So you did a little checking into things."

Gabrielle sighed after she readied the hammer. She slowly lowered the gun towards her lover's right hand between their bodies.

"Not right away," informed Mr. Cross. "I kept tabs on you, so to speak." He shrugged. "I know your entire supposed criminal records, right down to the name of the drug dealers you've spoken with."

Xena finally took the gun from her lover's hand but kept it hidden between their bodies. "Then you finally did some major digging before you hired me." She grinned.

"Naturally," replied Mr. Cross. "I check everybody's backgrounds before I hire them... even the hidden ones." He smirked. "Especially your fathers."

The Cow Girl narrowed her eyes as the anger fired back up inside. Her grip on the gun tightened exceedingly. "My father has not died in vein," she whispered hotly

Gabrielle dropped her head onto her lover's stomach again. "Don't kill him." Her voice was barely audible but she said it because she could feel how tense Xena had become from Mr. Cross's words. Then she shivered at knowing her lover could die any moment. She closed her eyes while she prayed for a miracle.

"Oh, I think he has," retorted Mr. Cross. "Now his little girl will join his fate." He shook his head and reaimed so that his line of sight was the back of Gabrielle's head and Xena's stomach. "Tell Steve I said, 'hi'."

"Not today," growled Xena. She revealed her gun and fired at Mr. Cross.

Mr. Cross was surprised but pulled his trigger simultaneously.

Xena quickly whirled off to one side of the steps and pressed Gabrielle into the rail.

The bullet just skimmed past Xena's back and bounced off the metal of the steps.

Shannon saw Mr. Cross hunch over from the bullet in his thigh. She bounced up and sprinted towards him. She jumped then her body smashed into the older man. He fell to the ground, Shannon was on top and she faintly rose up but punched him hard in the face.

Mr. Cross's head fell on the ground as he groaned and went unconscious.

Shannon sighed in relief. "Damn, I hope that's the end of everything." She got off him and turned towards the pair on the steps. She chuckled.

Megan peered up at them as well now, wondering what was funny.

Xena smiled softly while she lifted her head up from the warm kiss.

Gabrielle chuckled. "Thanks... partner," she whispered as a grin creased her lips.

"Anytime, partner." The Cow Girl straightened up and helped her lover down the steps.

The tall woman flashed a smile to Shannon. "Thanks, Shannon."

"Don't I get a thanks," huffed Megan.

"Thank you, Megan," said Gabrielle.

"No, I want one from the Cow Girl," teased Megan.

Xena chuckled. "Thank you, Eph." She went serious and walked over to Mr. Cross. She tapped his side and he didn't respond.

The writer neared her lover and peered up at her. "What now?"

"Time to arrest them," replied the tall woman. She reached into her trench coat pocket with her freehand. She extracted her small walky-talky and pulled up the antenna. She lifted it up while she hit the small button on the side. "Alright, commissioner, bring in your men."

"Glad the you decided to invite us in, Xena," came the commissioner's voice from the radio.

"Sorry, had a little trouble," she joked.

"Right, commissioner out."

The Cow Girl turned off her radio and put it away.

Gabrielle folded her arms against her body and shook her head. "Who are you?" She chuckled. "You're so damn mysterious."

Xena winked, gazed up as police officers came storming into the warehouse. "Just a Cow Girl, Gabrielle." She still held the gun from earlier, so she gave it a twirl on her finger then opened her trench coat. She slipped it into a holster.

"Sure, you better explain," declared the small woman.

"I will, promise," replied Xena. She went serious as the commissioner strolled up. "Sorry again, commissioner."

"Just as long as you got them." The commissioner peered down at Mr. Cross. "Still alive, I hope."

"He is, as is Mr. Vincen."

The commissioner nodded and looked at his officers. "Cuff up Mr. Vincen and Mr. Cross, get them to the station."

The officers nodded and quickly handcuffed Mr. Cross and Mr. Vincen. Then a few ambulance medical personal came in with stretchers. They put the two drug dealers in the litters and carried them out.

The officers then begun inspecting the rest of the warehouse out and the dead bodies.

Another pair of medical personal came in with a stretcher and took Ice away. Megan and Shannon went out with him.

"Well, that was quite the mission, Xena." The commissioner held his hand out.

Xena smiled and took the man's hand. "Was worth it."

"Thank you for all the help," added the commissioner as he released the woman's hand

"Anytime." Xena tipped her brim.

The commissioner nodded with a respectful smile then he turned to his men. He had a long report to write up.

One officer came over to Xena, carrying her guns. "I believe these are yours."

"Yup, thank you." The Cow Girl took her guns and put one in a holster while the other went into her jacket.

"Xena, we need to get that wound taken care of."

The tall woman sighed. "Yup." She put her hand behind her lover's back and directed her towards the door. "Let's go see if there's an ambulance outside still."

The writer followed along side and found one, she pointed at it.

Xena chuckled and made a beeline for it. "Hey, I need a wound checked out."

One of the medical personal peered up with a smile. "Of course, Xena." She patted the edge of the ambulance. "Hop in."

The small woman shook her head in amazement. *Does everybody know her name?* She tightened her arms around her body from the chill. "God, its nippy," she muttered.

Xena turned to her lover after hearing the quiet comment. "Come here." She took her long trench coat off.

"Xena, I'll drown in that thing."

The dark woman grinned evilly. "Don't argue," she warned. She put the coat on the small woman then lifted her up into her arms.

"Woooo, I can walk."

The Cow Girl chuckled and carried her friend to a small crate. She set her down on it. "Wait here, this won't take long."

Gabrielle nodded.

Xena went back to the ambulance and got in.

"Take the shirt off, Xena," said the female nurse after she noticed the shoulder wound.

Xena sighed but took her shirt off then sat down.

The nurse neared and studied the wound.

The small woman pulled the leather jacket close to her body, she felt herself warm back up. Her head turned to the left.

Peter came rushing over. "Gabrielle, are you alright?"

The writer smiled. "Yeah, I'm fine, Peter."

Peter pulled his girlfriend in for a hug then kissed her softly on the lips. "Are you sure?"

"Positive," replied the shorthaired blond. "Thankfully, Xena saved Eph, Shannon, and I."

Peter smiled softly. "I kinda thought so."

Gabrielle knitted her eyebrows. "What you mean?"

The young officer chuckled and explained. "When I did that background check on Xena, I later received a call from the government." He paused. "I can only say so much, but Xena works for a secret service agency."

Gabrielle's expression suddenly went into realization. "Oh god, it all makes sense now." She laughed- completely dumbfounded.

"Good to hear, I'll only have to explain less," stated Xena. She stood tall in front of her lover with her arms crossed.

The small woman chuckled and shook her head; still amazed.

Peter faced the Cow Girl. "Beautiful job, Xena." He held his hand out. "My apologies for the bad go of things."

"No problem." Xena took the man's hand and shook it. She released it, yet she lost her smile. Her eyes flickered over to Gabrielle.

The writer knew what her lover wanted to discuss; she sighed. "Peter?"

The officer turned to her.

"Um..." The small woman flustered, not quite good with speaking verbal words right. "Peter, Xena and I need to talk to you about something."

Xena rubbed the back of her neck, because this wasn't her department either. "Basically..." She turned to Peter and dropped her arm. "Gabrielle and I are... in love."

Peter blinked, licked his lips while his head moved up and down. He glanced at Gabrielle. "How long?" he whispered quietly.

"Since we've met," replied the writer. She sighed and looked at her hands, she peered

back up. "Peter, I didn't mean for this to happen." She begun speaking hastily. "You know I've loved you since our childhood but..."

"But?" He waited.

"But..." Gabrielle sighed and finally said, "More like a brother."

The officer swallowed, he stepped closer, and took Gabrielle's hands. "Trust me, I understand." He paused then quietly said, "I've kinda had to wonder." He squeezed the soft hands. "You're following your heart?"

Gabrielle nodded and smiled sadly. "Thank you," she whispered.

Peter smiled softly, he leaned in and kissed the small woman on the cheek. "I'm always here for you."

The writer squeezed his hands before he released them.

The young man faced Xena once more. "Make damn sure you take care of her."

Xena folded her arms and corked her eyebrow.

The officer slowly showed a grin. "Because she's precious."

"I know," responded Xena with a smile. "Thank you, Peter."

Peter nodded. He sighed and glanced between the women. "I need to help out around here." He gave a smile. "I'm glad you're both are okay... and alive."

The women chuckled and watched him stroll off to his duties.

Gabrielle looked up at her lover. "I can't believe he... he just..."

"Went with it," finished Xena.

"Yeah." The younger woman shook her head. "He's a real sweetie."

The Cow Girl nodded in agreement. "I thought I was gonna have to fight for you."

Gabrielle laughed and grinned. "You already did that."

The tall woman sighed dramatically. "Tell me about it." She gave a smug look.

The writer smiled softly back as she sighed. She propped her elbows on her knees and rested her chin in her hands.

Xena studied her lover's smiling face then she asked, "What?"

Gabrielle chuckled but countered, "Can't I stare at my girlfriend?"

"Oooh, is that what you think I am now?" growled Xena with a teasing grin.

The younger woman shot an evil grin back. "Would you prefer my Cow Girl?"

"I just may," retorted the tall woman.

The writer laughed quietly.

"Come on, let's get out of here."

Gabrielle hopped off the crate and took the coat off. "Yes, wear it huh?"

Xena sighed but took the coat from her lover. She slipped it on and straightened her hat out.

"Did they take care of your wound?"

"Yup," answered Xena. She pushed the small woman in front of her. "Removed the bullet, cleaned it, and patched it up."

"Oh damn, that had to hurt."

"Nah." The tall woman lowered her head. "Ready to go?"

"Where we going?"

"My place sound good?"

"Sure." Gabrielle started walking but stopped suddenly.

"What now?" taunted the older woman.

"How we getting back?"

Xena sighed with a smile. "By bus or taxi, come on."

The writer laughed faintly then she started walking again. "I'm glad that's over with."

"Hmmm," agreed the older woman while she continued following her friend out of the port. They weaved through all the police cars and people.

"So, tell me about this agency you work for."

The Cow Girl chuckled. "Its called the Governmental Secret Service Agency... or GSSA."

Gabrielle nodded then asked, "Let me guess, I can't tell anybody you're an agent?"

"Yup," replied Xena dryly.

The writer laughed and shook her head. "Seriously?"

The tall woman shrugged. "Depends on if you want people after you or not." She grinned.

"Neva mind," whispered the young woman. She came out of the port and onto a sidewalk. "Which way?"

"Why you asking me?" teased Xena. "I haven't lived here but more than a week."

Gabrielle laughed hard and peered up at her lover as she came alongside. "You got a point." She looked to her right. "This a waya looks good." She started trekking that way.

Xena followed along side. "Just look for a bus stop."

"Sounds good." The short blond put her hands in her jean pockets. "How long have you been working on that mission?"

"That was my first one," stated Xena but she answered, "Eight years."

"Good lord." Gabrielle shook her head. "Why that long?" She gave a skeptic look.

The Cow Girl grinned down at her friend. "Because it's not easy getting into the drug ring in under a month like most try." She paused then quietly added, "That was what my father did wrong." She slipped her hands into her leather jacket's pockets.

The young woman slowly nodded then she sighed. "Megan and Shannon mentioned Mr. Cross is a pretty big name on the market."

"On the Eastern Shore, yeah," agreed the tall woman. "Just in general, he's big but not the biggest fish."

"What's your next assignment?"

"Vacation." Xena grinned. "Eight years and finally a vacation."

The writer laughed but nodded. "Not my forte." Gabrielle spotted a sign ahead for a bus stop. She came up to it and stood beside the sign. "You know, there were all those damn police cars there and we had to take the bus?"

Xena flashed a grin. "This is more fun." She saw the small goosebumps on her lover's neck. She moved in a fluent motion and stood behind her friend. "Lean into me," she whispered.

Gabrielle took a step back then leaned in. Her back touched a warm body.

The tall woman brought her arms around with the jacket flaps covering the small woman. "Better?"

"Uh huh." The writer sighed softly and relaxed her head on Xena's chest.

"Sure is quiet 'round here," mentioned Xena.

"Yeah, really is." Gabrielle released her breath gradually and she let the serene feeling take her. "So..." She dropped her head back.

Xena peered down with her sky whisked eyes.

"Are we officially... girlfriends?" Gabrielle faintly blushed but was smiling.

"I'd like to think so," replied Xena.

"Me too," agreed the younger woman. She chuckled. "I guess we are."

"You guess?" teased Xena.

"I mean... we are girlfriends."

The tall woman smiled softly then lifted her head. She glanced down the one way road

and saw a car pass by followed by another in a few seconds. "That's odd..." she muttered.

"What?"

The older woman chuckled. "Having a girlfriend."

"Wait... hold on..." Gabrielle breathed deeply then said, "You were the one that knew all about that... stuff." She chuckled. "I'm the one that said I'm straight."

Xena laughed deeply and nodded. "Alright, you win." She went serious when she saw the bus finally coming. "Hmmm, time to act straight again," she joked with a grin.

"Rrrright." Gabrielle moved out of her lover's coat and made herself more visible to the bus.

The bus came up to them and stopped.

The pair boarded the bus slowly.

"We'll head to the station to get your car," mentioned Xena.

"Good idea." Gabrielle reached into her back pocket and pulled out her wallet. "Got you covered."

"Thanks." The tall woman went down the aisle and caught a few odd looks from people on already. She completely grinned at them and found a seat.

The small woman finished paying the driver and came down as she slipped her wallet back in its home. She sat on the inside of the seat with her lover.

Xena leaned towards her friend. "See what happens when you leave your state?"

Gabrielle evilly grinned while her body jerked with the motion of the bus moving. "You look like a nut?" she teased.

The older woman instantly glared.

The writer giggled and leaned against the older woman for a moment.

The Cow Girl sighed at her girlfriend but smiled to herself.

Gabrielle sighed then asked, "After we get my car, should we go check on Eph, Shannon and Ice?"

Xena nodded. "Yeah, I'm sure they're at the hospital."

"You think Ice is okay?"

The dark woman nodded. "He can handle a lot."

Gabrielle breathed calmly and sat back up. "What were you planning for a vacation?"

Xena grinned at the other woman. "I was thinking about going to see my folks for Thanksgiving."

The writer tilted her head, she knew Xena meant her adopted parents. "In Wyoming?"

"In Wyoming."

"By plane?"

Xena nodded. "By plane."

Gabrielle shifted a grin on her lips. "Then off to another adventure?"

The Cow Girl nodded and pulled her hat over her head as she slumped down in her seat. "Then off to another adventure," she muttered.

The writer chuckled and leaned into her lover. She slipped an arm behind Xena's back.

Xena brought an arm around her girlfriend's waist and pulled her in closer. "Off to another adventure," she repeated with a huge sigh but smiled happily as her girlfriend.

The End

I watch Xena close the book, her hand glides over the cover, and I peer up at her with a grin; waiting for judgement.

Slowly, Xena's eyes turn to me. "Very nice, Gabrielle. It was perfect," she says quietly.

The warmest smile creases my lips. "It was fun to write," I mention. My eyes lower back to my second published book in Xena's hands. I read the title to myself, 'How I met a Cow Girl', it is my pride and joy.

"Thinking of writing a sequel?" my lover teases.

I chuckle faintly and shrug. "Give me another to write," I taunt back.

The Cow Girl chuckles at my words. "I can do that." She smiles softly at me. Xena then looks up as the other person in our row arrives in the aisle. She simply stands up and gets out of her seat.

I, on the other hand, press back into my seat and let the man through.

He sits down in his seat beside me.

I peek back up at my girlfriend, she's busy putting the book back in her leather case for safe keeping. "Xena, how much longer will the flight be you think?"

Xena closes the cabinet's cover and peers down at me. "I'd say we'll be in Wyoming in an hour and half." She shrugs. "Not much more."

I sigh dramatically. "I can't stand flights," I mutter under my breath but I know Xena heard me.

The Cow Girl corks an eyebrow, telling me she'd heard me.

I just ease a grin on my lips back at her.

Xena chuckles but glances down at the end of the plane then back at me. "I'm gonna

go use the head, be back."

"Don't get sucked down the thing," I joke.

My girlfriend rolls her eyes and says, "Tell me about it." She grins. "Some mean suction."

I just groan and close my eyes at her words. I hear her snicker then she leaves, so I sit back in my seat with a sigh. I give a quick glance at the large man beside me.

He coughs again but keeps his eyes closed. He's sick with something, I wasn't in the mood to catch on vacation but knowing my luck...

Instead, I peer over the top of the seat in front of me. I stare at the television monitor a few seats ahead, it is some comedy movie. I can't remember the title but I know it has Helen Hunt in it with Mel Gibson, I haven't really been watching it.

Personally, I am tenser about meeting Xena's folks. I am past worried that they won't like me yet Xena wouldn't stop reassuring me that they would. But from the sounds of things, I can tell Xena's adopted parents are important to her, real important. So I have the nervous feeling of needing to impress them for Xena. I know if I mention that to my lover, she'd get real worried about me. So I try not to say anything even though, I think, Xena knows I'm nervous.

One thing I am not sure about, is whether Xena wants to tell her parents that we're together. Well, she seems to think if things look okay then we can tell them, I had to agree. But I told her we could not tell my family. I'd jokingly said that my parents would disown me, that was even a mistake to joke about in front of Xena. But Xena's reaction still makes me chuckle now.

Suddenly, Xena reappears with a glass of water. She hands it to me and I shake my head- wondering how she knew I am thirsty.

"I figured you wanted something to drink." Xena sits back down next to me.

"Yeah, you're good," I respond before drinking some of the water. I hand the rest back, knowing she wants some as well.

My girlfriend carefully takes it back and finishes the rest. She then places the empty plastic cup in the net of the seat in front of her. She sits back and glances at me.

"Gabrielle..." She stops and sighs, I know she's putting her thoughts together. "My folks will love you."

That's when I have to question if she'd heard my thoughts earlier. I blink- not sure what to say back.

Xena sighs again then smiles softly. "Let me put it this way, they love me to death." A grin took her lips. "I'm not an easy person to get along with so if they love me, they're certainly going to love you." She shifts her grin into that warm smile. "I promise." She searches my eyes and quietly asks, "Believe me huh, partner?"

My lover's words seem to just touch me in the perfect spot and make everything okay. "Yeah," I utter, "thank you."

Xena combs my short hair back; she's resisting from kissing me in public.

The yearning for her warm lips takes me but I hold myself back too.

The sleeping man, beside me, coughs with the sound of mucus in his throat.

I close my eyes, as the moment between Xena and me is broken.

My girlfriend chuckles a little and rubs my upper back. "Let's switch seats," she utters, "I don't want you catching what he's got and I know you will."

"I'm fine," I whisper back while opening my eyes. "I know you hate being sick and I can at least deal with it."

"Gabrielle-

"I'll be fine," I cut her off but give her a look of reassurance. I definitely don't want her getting sick, when it is her vacation.

Xena sighs and gives me a look for being stubborn so I just gave her a grin back.

"Come here," she orders and pushes up the armchair between us. She grasps me and pulls me closer.

I scoot over a little then lay my head in her lap.

"Go to sleep," she whispers in a warm voice.

I nod and close my eyes. I release my breath slowly and relax. I feel my girlfriend's left arm just casually drape over my side. I smile at that, she would do anything and everything to feel me near her, as would I. Then I sense somebody coming near our aisle.

"Excuse me Miss, she can't lay down like that." It was one of the stewardess.

I keep my eyes closed, keep any expression off my face, and wait for my lover's response.

"I'm not about to wake her up," Xena responds. "She needs her sleep," she adds quietly.

I heard a sigh from the stewardess. "Ma'am, I can't let her stay like that, it's not safe."

There's a bit of silence and I know my girlfriend is giving one of her looks. I clamp my jaw down tightly, as I try controlling my giggles.

"She'll be fine, I can take care of her," says the Cow Girl in a deep almost commanding tone.

"Very well," replies the stewardess in a small voice.

I hear her leave, I wait a minute, then let my giggles out.

"Ssssh," hushes my lover. "Trying to get me in trouble?" she teases.

"Get yourself in trouble," I tease back. I stop my giggles then relax again. I shift a

little in Xena's lap and settle back in with a long sigh. "Thanks."

"Mmm anytime." Xena gives her own long sigh. "Stupid rules," she mutters. "Think I can't take care of my own girlfriend," she mumbles under her breath.

I let out a tiny chuckle but taunt, "You can't."

"I can take care of you... but I can't control you," jokes my lover.

I have to laugh, she was right... for the most part. She could control me if she wants to, it works both ways for us. "Yeah, yeah," I grumble and tuck my hands under the side of my head but I'm smiling completely.

My girlfriend sighs and rocks my lower body with her arm a little. "Go to sleep," she whispers.

"Yeah," I say quietly and feel myself already slipping. I shift into my dreams, which are centered on Xena and me. Those are the dreams I hate waking up from unless I'm waking up in Xena's arms, because reality is always better than my dreams these days.

Within an hour or more, I feel Xena shaking me gently. I grumble faintly and peered up. "Are we there?"

"Almost," replies Xena. I could tell she'd been sleeping by her half-awake look.

"You need to sit up and buckle yourself in for the landing."

"Right," I say quietly and slowly sit up. I run my hand through my hair while I try waking up. I search for my seatbelt. After a lot of strained searching I find the ends and buckle in.

My lover reaches over and grabs the tail of the seatbelt; she tightens it. Then her eyes lift to me and her lips curl into a grin.

I chuckle and relax back in my seat. I notice the man beside me is still asleep and snoring but he had himself buckled in. I look out the window, seeing Cheyenne far below. "God, I hate landings."

Xena covers my hand on my knee.

I flash her a warm smile for the comfort and she winks back at me.

I gaze back out the small window and start seeing the airport coming into view. "Here we go," I grumble. I turn my hand up and cling to my girlfriend's hand.

The Cow Girl rubs her thumb against my hand as she stares out the window.

The plane had lowered her wheels and is closing in on the runway. I clamp my jaw down when the wheels connect with the ground. There's that small jounce, the plane starts to slow down at an incredible rate. And well, my grip on Xena's hand is a death lock.

After the plane lands and gets connected with the air terminal, all the people stand up.

I glimpse back at that man- he is still sleeping. I shake me head- wondering how the

Hell he could sleep through that.

Xena gets up and opens the hatch cover above us.

I just sit, waiting for her to say it is time to move.

Xena pulls out her leather trench coat, puts it on, then she pulls out her leather brief case and puts the strap across her chest. She smiles at me. "Ready?"

I grin. "Are you ready?"

"Yup." She holds her hand out.

I take the larger hand and she helps me out. I gaze over at the man and notice he'd finally awoken.

My girlfriend shrugs at me.

I shrug back and nod up the aisle.

Xena grins and starts heading down with me tailing behind.

We finally get out of the jet plane and make our way to the luggage depot. We quickly find which belt brings in our flight so we head there.

"I'll stand on the other side," mentions Xena.

"Gotcha," I reply as I watch her stroll over to the other side of the luggage belt. I reach up and zip my fleece up the rest of the way. I slip my hands into the pockets of my fleece pullover. I tap my foot on the floor, waiting. I study some of the people around me from my flight. Then I look across the luggage belt.

Xena smiles to me.

I grin back.

Xena shifts her smile into an evil grin.

I chuckle and quickly stick my tongue out at her.

My girlfriend looks behind herself as if I didn't mean it to her. She then looks back at me with a silly grin and raised eyebrow.

I laughed quietly and shake me head. I gaze across at her again.

This time, Xena gives me this hilarious seductive look and mouths, 'Hey you, sexy.' I can't help my natural reaction to blush and so I try to look away. Even from here, I can hear my lover laughing at my reaction. I cough and tap my chest. The guy next to me gives me an odd look. I flash him a sheepish smile.

Gazing back at my lover, I shoot her a glare.

Xena just gives me a smug look back but winks and then gives a warm smile.

The guy next to me musta seen all of it, he peers down at me.

"Is she yours?" he asks quietly.

I stare up at him briefly, not sure what to say. Then I smile and reply, "Yeah... she's my crazy sister." I lift my right hand and do that circle at the side of head. "She's real nuts." I drop my arm.

The man laughs a little and nods. "I see." He nods again and looks back up, still holding his briefcase in front of himself with both hands.

I sigh and peer across to my girlfriend.

Xena furrows her eyebrows and nods at the guy beside me.

I roll my eyes and shrug my shoulders.

My lover shrugs back but chuckles. She glances to the left when the belt started moving, the luggage is coming out. She watches the luggage go by, her head turning each way to make sure one isn't ours.

I just chuckle at the scene, finding it rather cute of her but I'd never say that to her.

Xena suddenly leans down and picks up her bag. She sees something, points at it while looking up to me. She gives me a questioning look as she drops her arm.

I nod, knowing it is my bag coming around. I see it come around the bend then come down my side of the belt.

My girlfriend just stands across, watching intently.

I see my bag closing in but suddenly feel myself about to sneeze. I close my eyes, back up, and sneeze a few times. Oooh no, I couldn't have caught that man's flue. I know, once I open my eyes, Xena will have that corked eyebrow and her look of, 'I told you so.' I slowly open my eyes and damned if I am not right when I gaze at my lover.

Xena lowers her eyebrow when she sees my bag came back around on her side. She reaches down and grabs it for me. She comes around, carrying both bags.

I see her coming over but I only sneeze again. I shake my head faintly as I drop my shoulders.

"You okay?" questions Xena once she's by my side.

I hold my hand up briefly, lower my head, close my eyes and sneeze in my cupped hands. I hear Xena drop a bag and then she rubs my back. I shake my head once more and lift my head up again. I sniff and feel a faint amount of mucus go down my throat. "You gotta be kidding me," I mutter.

Xena sighs and whispers, "You caught what he had."

"I didn't," I cut in. I peer up at her.

The Cow Girl just grins.

I sigh and chuckle. "I hope," I add on and sniff again.

"Let's get out of here and get you some fresh air."

I turn and say, "Here, I got my bag." She hands me my bag from her shoulder and I easily take it.

Xena picks up her bag then leads me out of the airport terminal. She reaches into her coat's pocket and pulls out the two bus tickets. "Let's see..." She glances down at them checking the pickup area. She looks back up and weaves through the people.

We get into the cool weather and stroll down to the bus pickup. We both put her bags back down and Xena takes her soft briefcase off as well.

"How long is the bus ride?" I inquire.

My girlfriend shrugs and replies, "It's 'bout an hour to Laramie through the Rocky Mountains." She pauses then finally answers, "Probably about an hour and half. The ranch is outside of Laramie."

I nod and drop my head on my lover's arm. "I'm going back to sleep then."

Xena laughs quietly at my words. "Is that all you do?" she taunts.

"That, write, eat and do your laundry," I tease.

"Mmm, and cook the meals," she tags on.

I laugh then wrap my hands around her arm. "Feels good out here." I sniff again faintly because I can feel a bit of a runny nose coming on. "Oh Hell," I growl.

"Hell is right, you're getting sick, partner." Xena runs her fingers through my hair.

"I neva get sick," I brush off.

"Right." I hear her pause then state, "I'm going to go back in and get you some medicine."

"Oh damn it," I grumble.

"You don't need to get sick on our vacation."

"I'm not." However, I quickly turn my head away and sneeze. "Maybe I am." I release her arm and gaze up at her. "Just don't get my that crap stuff."

Xena raises an eyebrow. "Robatusin?"

I cringe right away. "Don't," I state, "I'd rather be sick." I cork a grin. "Get me like the kid's Dimatap."

My girlfriend laughs a little and grins. "Just for my little girlfriend," she mokes.

"Otherwise, I am not taking anything," I declare and look away with a grin.

Xena chuckles and leans over. She kisses my temple. "I'll be back." She disappears back in the airport.

I sigh and sit down on my bag, not feeling much for standing. I catch sight of Xena's

briefcase near me. I reach over and open it; I remove my book. I place it in my lap and stare at the cover of a cowgirl with a gun up touching her brim. I grin, because it even looks a little like Xena.

With a happy sigh, I brush my fingertips over the novella's title then my name below. I carefully open the book as if it were made of glass, I flip through a couple of pages. I stop at one and smile at the few words printed on the page. It reads, 'This novel is dedicated to my Cow Girl. Love Forever, Gabrielle,' and it made me sigh happily. I carefully close up my novel, 'How I met a Cow Girl,' and stare at the cover once more.

My body warms, so I lift my head up and see my lover coming towards me. In one hand, Xena carries a can of fruit juice for vitamin C- I chuckle. And in the other hand, she has a white, purple striped box of Dimatap.

Xena smiles at me as she keeps strolling towards me with her black, leather trench coat flowing behind.

I shake my head, prop my elbow on my knee and rest my chin in my hand. I watch her come to me in all of her glory. I slowly smile with all the love inside of my soul.

Xena mirrors that smile right back at me.

Yes, she's my best friend, my girlfriend, my lover, and my soul mate. My hand brushes the book cover once she comes up to me. I peer up into her twinkling, warm blue eyes and see all that I am missing in my heart and soul, in her eyes.

Yes, she's even *my* Cow Girl.

The End