

Excerpt: Catch A Dream

Elizabeth O'Malley was falling, gliding through mists, hurdling downward, the air getting darker until all was pitch. She reached for something to grab onto, but met only swirling vapors as she spiraled on. A speck of light dawned ahead, silhouetting the shape of a flame-haired woman dressed in white leather. The vision became engulfed in a web of blue and green strands as Elizabeth rushed forward. She put her hands out to brace herself and swept right through the mesh, landing with a solid thump onto a floor, bumping her head in the process.

“Ouch!” Rubbing her forehead, she slowly opened her eyes. She was lying face down in a pile of fresh hay. Her nose twitched. The smell of horses filled her senses. A stable? She must be dreaming, but this felt so real.

Behind her, a horse gently nickered and stamped a hoof. Elizabeth rolled over and sat up in front of a box stall. The dappled gray who looked at her had large intelligent eyes set in a broad forehead and well-placed small ears, cocked forward as he leaned over the half-door to nuzzle her.

Trembling, she stood and stroked his muzzle. The horse felt real, but she often dreamed of horses, or at least she had until sexy men began appearing in her night visions, and she always dreamed in vivid color.

She looked down. She was still wearing the Victoria's Secret black bra and thong with the chiffon wrap her traitorous fiancé would never see. She certainly did not need to relive finding Edward in bed with a Barbie look-alike. Not that she should have been surprised, she grimly reminded herself. Edward was drop-dead gorgeous and had enough Bad Boy attributes to make him alluring to any female. Better she had found out about his promiscuousness now than later.

Elizabeth fingered the leather strap on her wrist from which a Native American wood-carved fetish dangled. Her history students had given it to her yesterday, before the start of the Christmas holidays, along with a beautiful dream-catcher. The kids loved to tease her about her passion for the Old West, but they'd gotten caught up in the era after she'd brought in vintage John Wayne films and Clint Eastwood's spaghetti westerns. The fetish probably wasn't the right accessory for her black lace, but she

had not wanted to take it off. Just as she started to close the chiffon wrap, not that it covered much, she heard a sound. She whirled around and gasped.

A half-naked Indian teenager stood not two feet away, close enough for her to see a slight bead of sweat on his upper lip. It was uncanny how authentic this dream felt—probably the result of seeing too many of those western films. He wore a breechclout and leather leggings. Colored beads hung around his neck and his bare chest. A hawk feather was braided into his long hair and he had the blackest eyes she had ever seen. He looked like a hungry wolf stalking its prey. Instinctively, she took a step backward.

The Indian took a silent step forward. “I could have counted *coup*, you know,” he said. “Touched you without your knowing I was here. But I wanted you to know.”

Elizabeth drew another shaky breath and tried to cover herself more fully. Why in the world would she be nearly nude in her own dream? The Indian’s glance traveled from her face to her breasts and a small smile played on his mouth. A hard mouth, thin-lipped and straight-lined. She took another step backward and bumped against the wall of the stall. Trapped. The wall felt real, too. Some dream.

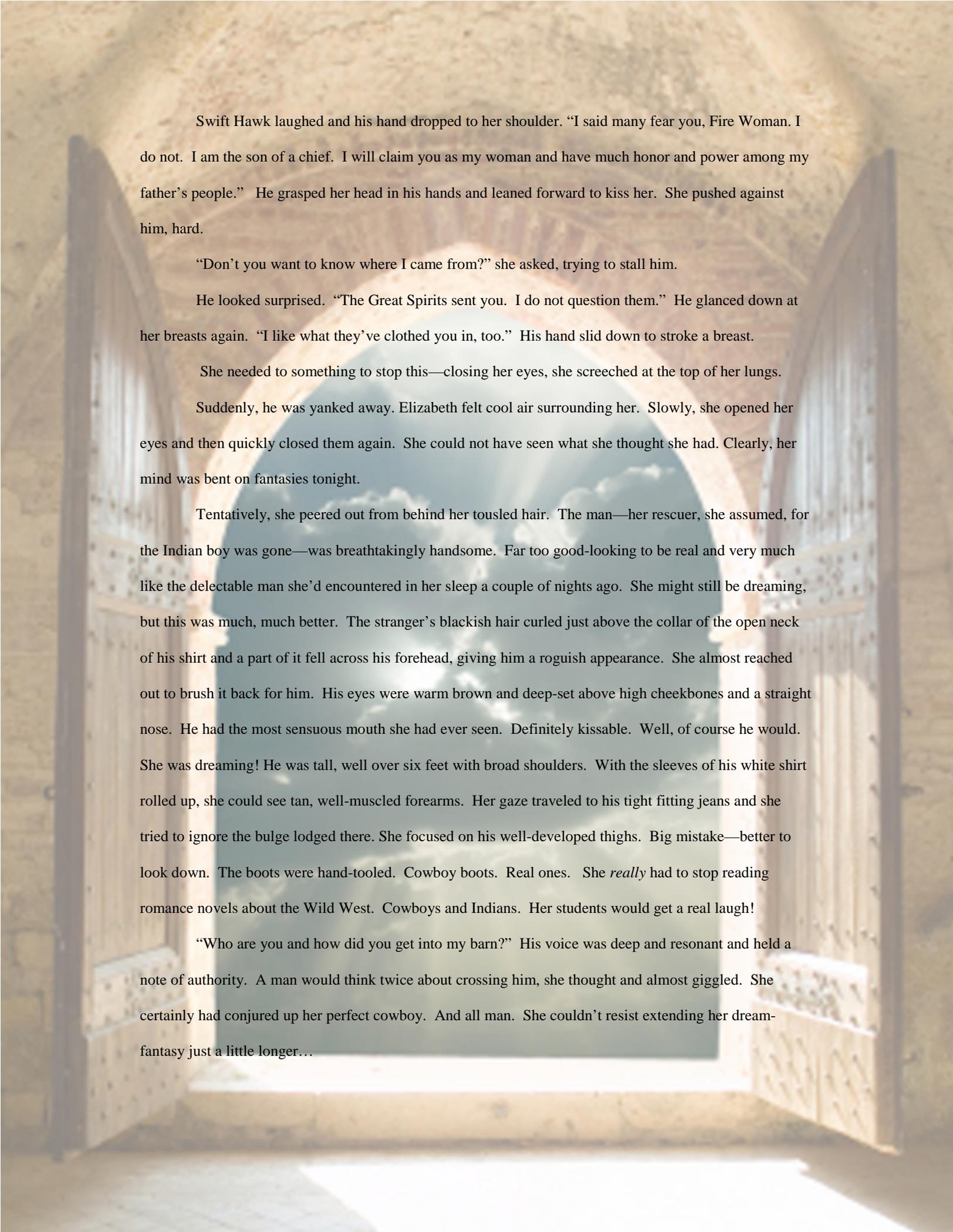
He came closer and reached over to touch her copper hair. “Fire Woman. You must have much magic. Your eyes are the color of our forests—a blessing from the Earth Mother.” He touched the diamond solitaire at her throat with a finger. “A shining star from the heavens. Yes, you have much magic.”

Elizabeth held herself still, hardly breathing. This would be a really, really good time to wake up. “I don’t have magic. Where am I? Who are you?”

Drawing himself up, he said proudly. “I am called Swift Hawk. My father is a Comanche chief.” He twisted a strand of her hair around his finger. “To my people, a woman with flaming hair has much power. Many even fear her.”

She smiled weakly. Good Lord, a Comanche? She had conjured someone from the fiercest of all the Plains Indians to dream of? The finest light cavalry in North America, some said, and the most dangerous fighters. They loved to fight and feared nothing. Well, except maybe a woman with red hair. Feeling ridiculous to be so deep into the dream, she raised her chin.

“Take your hand off me if you don’t want to feel my wrath.”



Swift Hawk laughed and his hand dropped to her shoulder. “I said many fear you, Fire Woman. I do not. I am the son of a chief. I will claim you as my woman and have much honor and power among my father’s people.” He grasped her head in his hands and leaned forward to kiss her. She pushed against him, hard.

“Don’t you want to know where I came from?” she asked, trying to stall him.

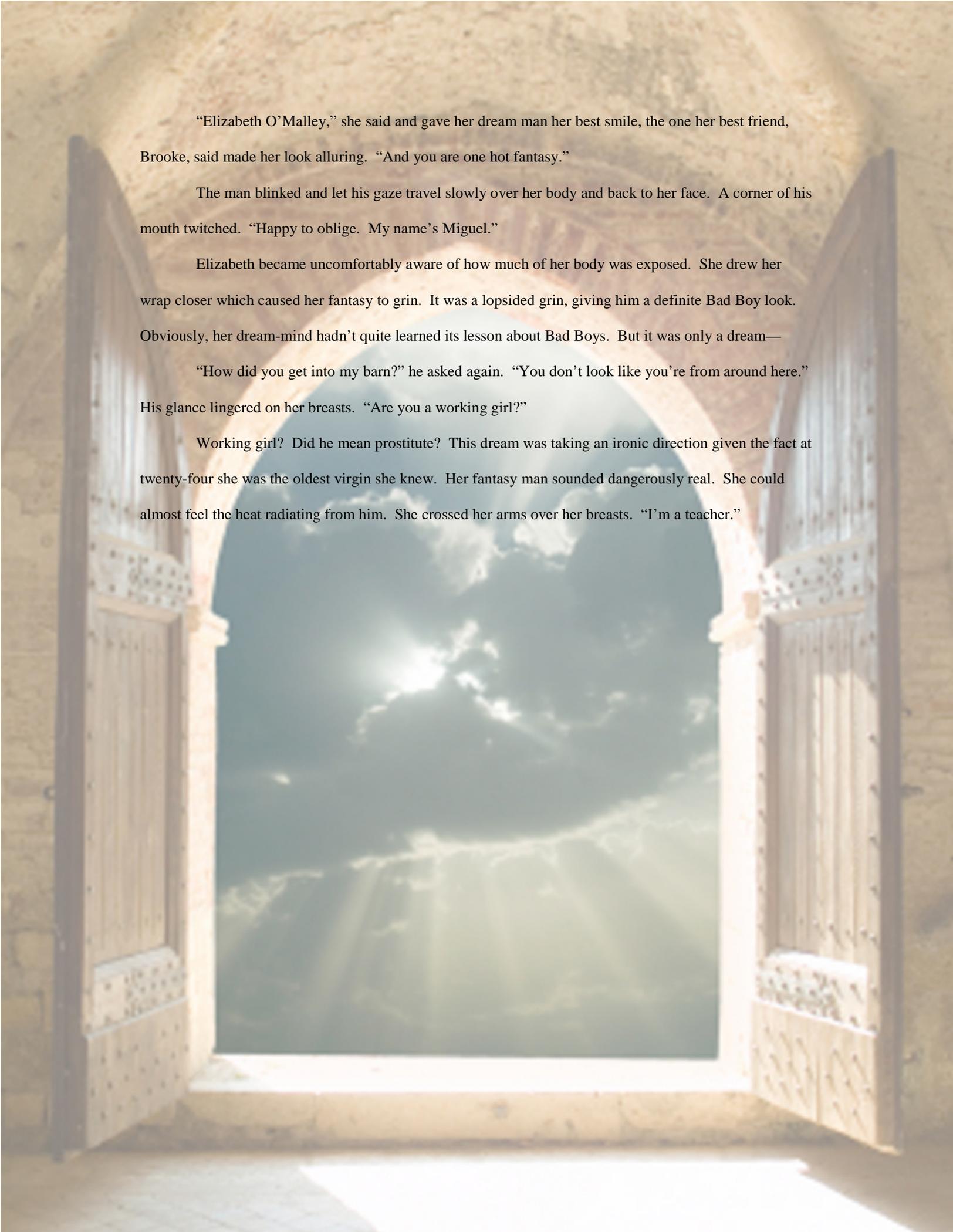
He looked surprised. “The Great Spirits sent you. I do not question them.” He glanced down at her breasts again. “I like what they’ve clothed you in, too.” His hand slid down to stroke a breast.

She needed to something to stop this—closing her eyes, she screeched at the top of her lungs.

Suddenly, he was yanked away. Elizabeth felt cool air surrounding her. Slowly, she opened her eyes and then quickly closed them again. She could not have seen what she thought she had. Clearly, her mind was bent on fantasies tonight.

Tentatively, she peered out from behind her tousled hair. The man—her rescuer, she assumed, for the Indian boy was gone—was breathtakingly handsome. Far too good-looking to be real and very much like the delectable man she’d encountered in her sleep a couple of nights ago. She might still be dreaming, but this was much, much better. The stranger’s blackish hair curled just above the collar of the open neck of his shirt and a part of it fell across his forehead, giving him a roguish appearance. She almost reached out to brush it back for him. His eyes were warm brown and deep-set above high cheekbones and a straight nose. He had the most sensuous mouth she had ever seen. Definitely kissable. Well, of course he would. She was dreaming! He was tall, well over six feet with broad shoulders. With the sleeves of his white shirt rolled up, she could see tan, well-muscled forearms. Her gaze traveled to his tight fitting jeans and she tried to ignore the bulge lodged there. She focused on his well-developed thighs. Big mistake—better to look down. The boots were hand-tooled. Cowboy boots. Real ones. She *really* had to stop reading romance novels about the Wild West. Cowboys and Indians. Her students would get a real laugh!

“Who are you and how did you get into my barn?” His voice was deep and resonant and held a note of authority. A man would think twice about crossing him, she thought and almost giggled. She certainly had conjured up her perfect cowboy. And all man. She couldn’t resist extending her dream-fantasy just a little longer...

A stone archway with two wooden doors leading to a bright, cloudy sky. The archway is made of light-colored stone and has a decorative pattern. The wooden doors are dark and have a decorative pattern. The sky is bright blue with white clouds and a bright sun in the center. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

“Elizabeth O’Malley,” she said and gave her dream man her best smile, the one her best friend, Brooke, said made her look alluring. “And you are one hot fantasy.”

The man blinked and let his gaze travel slowly over her body and back to her face. A corner of his mouth twitched. “Happy to oblige. My name’s Miguel.”

Elizabeth became uncomfortably aware of how much of her body was exposed. She drew her wrap closer which caused her fantasy to grin. It was a lopsided grin, giving him a definite Bad Boy look. Obviously, her dream-mind hadn’t quite learned its lesson about Bad Boys. But it was only a dream—

“How did you get into my barn?” he asked again. “You don’t look like you’re from around here.” His glance lingered on her breasts. “Are you a working girl?”

Working girl? Did he mean prostitute? This dream was taking an ironic direction given the fact at twenty-four she was the oldest virgin she knew. Her fantasy man sounded dangerously real. She could almost feel the heat radiating from him. She crossed her arms over her breasts. “I’m a teacher.”