
Awake

by Amanda Kear

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Dark. Dark and bone-chill and weightlessness. A scream and push up from black, grasping sleep, and then—
Light!

Light and colour and warmth, all so jumbled together in a morass of physical sensation that Dunia gasped with wonder and relief at finding herself within it. Dazzling colour, movements, shapes. Enveloping sounds washing over her from every direction. Warmth, texture and weight upon her limbs. The awful numbing blackness receded back into nightmare.

And Nioranth was there – a solid, comforting core at her centre and simultaneously a brassy roar smashing through the sea of jumbled sound that Dunia floated in, and giving direction to this chaotic but blissful light, warm world. The dazzle and jumble in her eyes began to take on recognisable shape and texture. A room – not her own, and people she did not recognise.

You are awake! Nioranth's happiness rushed over her. **You have slept for such a long time.**

Slept? She'd dreamed, hadn't she? Dreamed of *between* unending, dreamed of slowly dying. It must have been a dream. Was she ill? Was she a-fever with firehead? Was that why she was lying abed in a room she did not recognise and a balding, bearded man with healer's knots was bending over her, smiling reassuringly. A thin, dark skinned woman with goldrider's rank cords stood just behind him. Dunia had no idea who either of them might be.

Yes, you slept, said Nioranth. **But now you are awake.** The gold sounded smugly pleased by this, as if it was a tricky feat that she had managed to pull off all on her own.

"What? Where...?" The words came out rasping and hoarse from a parched mouth.

"Here, dear." The healer helped her to sit upright and held a cup of juice to her lips and let her sip at it to refresh moisture starved tissues. The unfamiliar goldrider settled herself into a chair by the bedside.

"Where am I?" Dunia looked from the man to the woman.

"I am Healer Reilen, this is Weyrwoman Genna." The man gestured towards his companion, who inclined her head politely. "You are in one of the junior goldrider weycots at Southern Weyr."

"Southern...?" Dunia stifled a giggle at the ridiculousness of that notion. The smashed ruins of Southern Weyr had rotted back into the jungle centuries before Kadanzer had been built upon its site. "But that's..." She trailed off and stared at the goldrider. Genna? Which Weyr had a Weyrwoman or even Weyrwoman-second called Genna? None that she could recall.

This Genna leaned forward. "We believe you've come *between* times. At least there is no Weyr here that recognises you or your queen. We need to know where – when – you've come from and why."

"*Between* times?" Even as she uttered it, a vision of unrelenting, appalling blackness surged up from her memory. Dunia gasped and desperately clutched mentally at Nioranth.

I am here! I am here! What frightens you, my rider? The queen's angry bugle rolled across the room.

Dunia felt an echo of physical pain in the gold's mental communication. *Your wing! Triameth fell and we caught him and your wing... Oh shards, we jumped and – and between just went on and on...*

We are not between – we are here, Nioranth said stubbornly. **You cannot go between without ME.**

That – despite the gold's pedantic tone – was reassuring. Dunia could most assuredly not fall back into that awful blackness unless she was on a dragon. *But your wing?*

It does not hurt much, the gold reassured her. **They do things to it and it does not hurt much. I am happy that you are awake.**

Nioranth, where are we?

We are at Southern Weyr.

Not Kadanzer? The question was asked without much hope of receiving an answer she would like.

Kadanzer...? The gold's tone was mildly puzzled, as it usually was on events that were starting to slip from her draconic memory. **No, this is Southern Weyr. There are many fine, large bronzes here.**

Dunia broke off her mental conversation with Nioranth and turned her attention back to the pair at her bedside, both patiently waiting. A pair of blue firelizards had appeared in the room while she was distracted. Weyrwoman Genna glanced at them in irritation as they swooped over the bed and then blinked *between* in tandem.

She took a deep breath. "I'm sorry, I... I am Dunia, gold Nioranth's rider. Where – I mean *when* is this?"

Genna's irritation at the firelizards was replaced by a patient smile. "This is Turn 2431 – the thirtieth turn of the Ninth Pass."

"Ninth Pass? But that's – I... oh. Oh dear." Southern Weyr. Dunia dropped her gaze to the blankets that covered her. She'd come *between* times to Southern Weyr? The staggering distance in time appalled her. The crashing realisation that she and Nioranth had escaped death by some fluke made the blood drain from her face.

"Dunia..." Weyrwoman Genna's voice was soft. "I know you haven't fully recovered yet, but we need to know when you came from."

"I... the Tenth Pass." It came out as a whisper. "I'm from the Tenth Pass, from—" She almost added 'Kadanzer Weyr', but stopped at the last moment. That was their future, wasn't it? What Turn had the woman said it was – 2431? Kadanzer hadn't even been founded yet, and wouldn't go by the name Kadanzer when it did. And Southern Weyr – Southern was destroyed by a tsunami a few Turns from now. These people would likely all be dead in a decade. If she told them about that fate... Oh shards, what could she mess up just by being here?

Fortunately neither of her two onlookers noticed the almost slip. They exchanged a worried glance. "Tenth Pass...?" said Reilen. "But..."

Genna had that unfocused look of someone who is communicating to her dragon. Healer Reilen sat forward on his chair, an anxious expression creasing his brow. "Dunia, there will be no Tenth Pass. The Starcraft has calculated—"

"Hah! She rides a Threadscored dragon, or I'll eat my Lorth for breakfast! The Starcraft must have got it wrong." The last was uttered by a stocky, middle-aged man with Weyrleader's cords as he strode in the door. A pretty young red-headed woman, a slightly out-of-breath tall, curly-haired man in harper blue and a veritable sea of firelizards accompanied them. Three blues settled themselves on the foot of Dunia's bed, and a green and a bronze draped themselves over the young woman. Another pair of greens squabbled briefly over a perch on the windowsill. The room suddenly felt crowded and oppressive.

Genna stood to make hurried introductions. "Dunia, gold Nioranth's rider, this is Weyrleader K'med, bronze Lorth's rider, Weyrwoman-third Vivia, gold Zyath's rider, and Weyrsinger Enril. It seems that Dunia," she added for the benefit of the harper who obviously had no dragon to receive the news from, "has timed it from the *Tenth Pass*."

The Weyrleader nodded courteously to Dunia, and Vivia flashed her an excited smile. The tall Weyrsinger's expression was also one of intense interest. Dunia mumbled back an appropriate greeting, thoughts whirling frantically in her head. It seemed that she had already messed up and changed things – no-one was supposed to know that Thread would come back! Oh what had she and Nioranth done!

"So lass," said Weyrleader K'med. "Thread still falls and dragonriders still rise to meet it, eh?"

Dunia nodded.

"And you need us to help!" squeaked Vivia in a girlish voice. One of the firelizards on the bed echoed her excitement with an exuberant chirp.

Oh sweet Faranth – they thought she was some kind of

Lessa, come to take the Weyrs forward to save Pern. Dunia shook her head frantically. "No, no, no – it's not like that! It was an accident. I didn't mean to come here at all!"

Vivia's face fell in an almost comic manner. Genna and K'med adopted thoughtful frowns. "An accident?" Genna repeated, her tone making the question more for confirmation than because she had any doubt of the truth of Dunia's statement.

She nodded. "We were flying 'Fall over Barrier Hold. There was a collision. Triameth – one of the bronzes – fell. Nioranth and I tried to catch him. We... There was... Nioranth's wing broke and Triameth panicked and flamed. We went *between*..."

Dunia halted as memories of the impenetrable blackness shoved themselves to the fore. No! The world was full of warmth and light now. *Between* was no longer able to claim her.

"Barrier Hold?" The Weyrleader's voice helped her centre herself back in the present. "I don't recognise that name – so you are not from Southern Weyr after all?"

"No – yes!" Dunia put her hands up to cover her face. "It's... it may not have been built yet. There were – will be... But I can't!"

"K'med, the girl is tired and confused," put in Healer Reilen. "I'm no expert on timing accidents, but perhaps we should—"

"No, it's not that – it's that I can't tell you!" Dunia's cry had a tinge of desperation to it. "There's so much I can't tell you in case it changes things!"

Reilen frowned. "Changes things?"

Genna nodded in sudden understanding. "Oh flames and ashes, but that's a heavy one to bear, girl."

"I don't understand—" the healer began.

K'med snorted. "Hah, Reilen, what if Dunia were to tell you that she knows that tomorrow you will go swimming and drown? What would you do?"

"Well I would most assuredly not go swimming – ah. Ah, I see."

Dunia took a deep breath. "There was a long interval. Thread returned. The Weyrs met it and Pern survives and prospers. More I cannot tell you."

"Not even your Weyr?" asked the Weyrsinger. His expression indicated that he was bursting with other questions.

"Southern." The lie came easily, perhaps because it was only half a lie. "Nioranth and I jumped home."



Kadanzer Weyr

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