Not Our Father's Children

Chapter One: Jezreel

               Jezreel froze, then jolted upon seeing the heat ring in the snow. He shivered looking at the round circle, the size of a large bowl. He pulled his cloak tighter and wondered what a magic user was doing outside the small shack he shared with his parents and two siblings.

         Ruhamah, his sister, stood outside, her foot drawing its own, smaller circle a few feet away from the melted snow where the magic had been used. "What happened here?" Jezreel asked, sending up a quick, silent prayer that someone had just been nearby randomly rather than seeking them out specifically.

         "A Sewo is inside," Ruhamah said, "so Father sent me out."

*Of course he did,* Jezreel thought. *Send the woman away from the heat of the fire and into the snow nearing night time rather than take the conversation outside*. At least as a man himself it was understood that Jezreel could attend to the conversation.

         "Tell me what happens," Ruhamah said as he walked past. He nodded without ever really looking back. He walked into the house, trying not to hate himself for being another person who left Ruhamah out. The father and visitor continued talking without acknowledging Jezreel; in fact, they didn’t seem to notice he was there. His younger brother, five-year-old Ammi, looked at him with wide, wet eyes.

The horns peeking over the visitor’s hair were clean and smooth, like he paid a lot of money for them to be taken care of. Though he was talking to Hosea, he was looking at Ammi. Something about the way he was looking made Jezreel's blood freeze.

         "Children need to be with their Sewo," the man said. "Their *real* Sewo." It took Jezreel a moment to realize he meant ancestors and not simply the Sewo people who had started to live and even mix with the Yont. The family knew that Ammi's father must have been a Sewo. It was clear in the boy’s slowly growing horns. But Jezreel mostly tried to ignore it. Ammi had grown up being taught about Frenta from birth, and besides, his mother was Yont. Wasn't that what really mattered? It was how Yont lineage was decided after all.

But never before had a Sewo tried to say that they shouldn't have Ammi. After all, Ammi was their brother. He had been raised by him and Ruhamah, practically, though Hosea was more involved in his life than he had been in either of the others. At his age, he was beginning to read, and that made him much too old to be switching houses.

"He's with his Moses," Hosea said. "Which is much better than Sewo ever could be. Do you truly want him with the father of slaves?"

"My name means Frenta of life, as in Frenta of his life. And I don't think your ancestors only made positive decisions either." When the man said what his name meant, Jezreel realized for the first time, feeling quite stupid, that the man must not have simply been here because he was Sewo, but because he thought he was actually personally related to Ammi. Jezreel didn't know what to make of that. It was true that they sort of had the same nose.

"What *is* your name?" Hosea asked, and though he looked fairly calm and talked level-headedly, he put stress on a word, something he only ever did when he was upset.

"Aliyan," he answered. "But feel free to call me Lo-Ammi's Sewo."

"Just Ammi will do," Hosea said. "He doesn't like being called Lo-Ammi." Jezreel thought he might've been saying that out of reflex, because that was what Hosea always said when people called Ammi by the name he didn't prefer. It was true that Lo-Ammi was his full name, and that had the meaning Israel needed to hear. When Hosea was prophesying about Frenta's wrath, he mentioned Lo-Ammi. When just walking around the house, holding him in his lap, and cuddling him every night, the Lo fell away, as if Hosea was embarrassed by the meaning of the name Frenta had given his son.

"I can allow you to pack some things for him if that will be necessary," Aliyan said, "but I promise I have the money to provide him with all he needs."

"He needs a lot more than just money," Hosea said. "He needs his father and mother."

"From what I understand, here he has neither, and with me he will have one."

"Don't try to tell me that I am not his father," Hosea snapped. Normally Hosea was resigned, a quiet man who let many people walk all over him. He was strict with Ruhamah, but not with Jezreel, Ammi, or Gomer, his wife. The council knew they could practically command him to do whatever they wanted, except disobey Frenta's exact words to him, and his whole job was pretty much just doing whatever Frenta said to him.

Not that Jezreel didn't believe in Frenta. He completely believed. And every once in a while, Jezreel was sad that Frenta spoke to Hosea literally, in words Hosea could hear, a way he would most likely never speak to Jezreel. But Jezreel also tried to follow the Torah, where he felt like Hosea only did exactly what Frenta told him to do, which was mostly work related, and ignored some of the Torah's commands on how to raise and love his family.

"Blood is the tie that binds," Aliyan said, and Jezreel wondered if that was a Sewo phrase. He didn't think it rolled off the tongue well in Yont.

"You have no proof you are his blood," Hosea said.

"But I have proof you are not. He's much closer in blood to me than you," Aliyan said, and Jezreel realized that though Hosea would not let him talk down to him, he was not taking the necessary action either. Hosea rarely took action unless directly commanded to do so by Frenta.

"You can leave," Jezreel said, walking forward.

"Excuse me, boy?" Aliyan asked, and Jezreel hated being called boy. He was a man, at seventeen, and he lived in his father's household out of his own free will, and not because he still needed him.

"If you come back with the council we will discuss it. Until then, you are trespassing, and you are not invited here. You may leave."

"Or what?" Aliyan asked with a laugh. "Are you going to beat me up? You and your kid brother? Because your so-called father certainly isn't going to do anything."

"Or I will have my sister go run and get the council and say you will not leave when asked. How are you supposed to convince them you are able to raise a child while also breaking the law?"

"Fine," Aliyan said cooly, standing up, and Jezreel wished he could punch him. But he knew this could be serious, very serious, and if he didn't keep his emotions under control it would only get worse.

For the first time Jezreel looked at Ammi, feeling guilty for ignoring him in a moment that was all about him, and probably very hard for him to understand. His eyes were wide, but clear. No tears. Jezreel was proud, but realized he was probably more confused than stoic. Aliyan walked out, and Ruhamah walked in.

"Who was that man?" she asked. Hosea said nothing, and Jezreel remembered nodding that he'd tell her, but he didn't want to do it in front of Ammi. He didn't know what words to use which wouldn't make the situation clear to Ammi, and he wasn't sure Ammi was ready to hear it.

"Nothing you need to concern yourself with," Hosea said. "He was selling something."

"You left him in for a long time when we have no money," Ruhamah said, and Jezreel didn't think she believed Hosea.

"I'll tell you soon," Jezreel said, and Hosea sent him a look, but Jezreel ignored it. Ruhamah was only a year younger than him at sixteen, and already planning for marriage. She was ready to know what was happening here, and Jezreel didn't think it was right to keep it from her. He just had a bit of stuff he needed to work out first. Mainly getting Ammi to a place where he couldn't hear what would surely be the most devastating news of his life. He knew he looked different, he commented on it every once in a while, but he had no idea why, and Jezreel wanted to keep it that way for as long as possible.