



THE LION KING

a short story

"Ithabise: It is Time..."

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I was confronted with the greatest responsibility a lion could ever know.

A putrid aroma of sodden grass and burning flesh filled the inner-cavities of my snout as I contemplated words from a blue-feathered, banana-beaked hornbill servant that would ultimately and irrevocably seal my fate.

Your majesty.

Zazu bowed humbly out of dignity I knew, but I could not help but pause briefly at the power those words carried, and listen. The soil beneath my paws, still glowing with the remnants of flame, popped and sizzled as the deluge from the soot-darkened skies above continued to pour over the fire-stained earth of the Pridelands, an inferno set in motion by the Great Kings themselves.

Once, these lands had been holy, lush and fruitful; the lifeblood of herds, flocks and packs. But now the green grasses, tall trees and blue waters have been replaced with empty, dry beds, splintered stumps and brown bald patches. Even the soil cracked and withered, driving away those that had once called the Pridelands their home. But not everyone went astray. Some, like my family, were forced to stay behind and serve a fanatic in his madness to strip the lands of every last scrap of food, so he could continue to rule a land my father had once governed.

Unbeknownst to me, my devious Uncle wished to preside over the Pridelands well before I was born. It drove him mad, and it was madness that consumed him and all those who followed, but not before damage had been done - the lands devastated and the lionesses ill-treated.

I was to blame for it all. I let it happen. Me. Simba.

Yet it was the will of the Great Kings that I succeed the throne, to fight to reclaim that which Scar, my conniving Uncle, wrongfully possessed. As I stand the winner in battle between he and the hyena's, claimant of what was rightfully mine, I stay in doubt and uncertain. The call of the Great Kings worries and frightens me for what must logically come next is that I assume the throne and govern the Pridelands as my father and his father before him had done. I wonder though, am I ready to take on this responsibility they've laid before me? Am I ready to successfully carry on the lionesses' destinies, hopes and dreams? Can I return the Pridelands to its once former glory?

Watching them now, *my* lionesses, the rain dripping from my brow, I can only speculate if I am the mad one for returning to them. I do not know what to do, I am not the consummate leader and yet they stood watching me as I did them, waiting for... What? Their watchful eyes stared back and held a kind of pain and sorrow that they had felt for cycle upon cycle, and they stared back a truth I was not prepared for: the lionesses needed a leader and a lover.

How could I...

And yet, there was Rafiki, a creepy little monkey from the grasslands, waiting to usher in a new era, a new moment in time for he and the pride of lionesses that was once my home. He gestured up the precipice of Pride Rock, signaling that it was time for me to take the most sacred of walks.

Destiny called me to become the next king of the Pridelands, and I was ill prepared.

I came to rest in front of the mandrill, which moments ago fought for these lands right beside me, and reached out my paw to draw him in an embrace. I did not know what service the mandrill provided for my father in the past, but Mufasa had trusted him, perhaps with his life, and so I felt must I. He jumped ever so slightly at my touch, obviously not expecting the hug of a big bulky lion, but I felt I had to voice my appreciation for one of the only creatures who had thought enough to care about me when everyone else had given up.

Rafiki was the heart and soul of the Pridelands, the pulse of all life, and he understood what had to be done.

"It is time..."

Tears welled up profoundly as the mandrill released his grasp of me and mouthed the words that called forth my destiny. Yes, it was time to take on the greatest responsibility of my life, to face the fact that I had abandoned my homeland and put right what had gone terribly wrong. It was time for me to take my rightful place within the Circle of Life, where I knew I should be. Yes, it had become instantly clear what I must do...

SWALLOWING AS HARD AS I COULD, I TOOK THE FIRST STEP UNTO MY NEW LIFE

My life, in its twisted existence, has been nothing more than a lie. Everything I ever believed in, everything that I held sacred, was nothing more than a fairy tale conjured up by a fraud. It amazes me to think how ignorant I was then, how easily I was deceived by my own family member. Why couldn't I see past the lie?

"Run away Simba, and never return."

Naturally I did what I was told! I ran and never ever looked back. But once those words had been spoken my life was no longer mine, my path forever changed. My life was but a mere shell of what it was to be and to be so gullible as to think that it had been my fault for everything that had happened: The hyena's, my father's death, and the lionesses horrible nightmares. What I wouldn't give to be a cub again - naive and carefree - when life meant nothing more than running around all day, free to do it my way. Alas, look at what that carefree attitude has brought me: heartache, despair and a kingdom in ruins.

It wasn't all fun and games being a young prince mind you. I might have been fancy-free but I seldom got it my way, especially if my father had a say in it. Never a day went by that there wasn't a lesson about what it meant to be a king and, of course, the Circle of Life. It was all very interesting but all I wanted was to be with Nala. What I didn't know then was that he was preparing me for the rest of my days, training on the nuances to prepare me for the that time when I would be sovereign over the Pridelands. And I found I was grossly unprepared for that aspect.

"One of the most important aspects of being king is to know and respect the Circle of Life," he said to me. Something he was always saying.

"I know," I let out impatiently.

"You do?" he asked in mock surprise.

I didn't know, and for a moment I thought I would wither up and die.

My father, a massive hulk of fur and muscle, padded around me for just a moment, before sitting beside my right shoulder, he was waiting for more. He towered over me, but his shadow was not to be found.

"The Circle of Life is not just about life, my son. It's also about death, love and your everyday events. And it is imperative that you understand all that the Great Circle has to offer and how it all fits into the scheme of reality."

I wrinkled up my nose at the funny words he spoke, "How is that father?"

"Simba, The Circle is everything. It provides our food, our lives, and our home - everything. But these things come with pros and cons. The pros: life, a chance to flourish, and happiness. The cons: death, destruction, and despair. Yet, there must be a balance of both. Do you understand?"

"I-- I think so dad."

"Good. I think that's all for today my brave son. You're learning well and I daresay you'll make a fine king someday."

"You really think so?" I sprang up with a smile.

"I know so," said he and the two of us walked into the hillside.

I didn't know it then, but he was more right than I could ever know. The Circle of Life was not a concept to take lightly. It was a way of life that had to be completely understood or the delicate balance that existed between the hunters and the hunted could be tipped, or worse, collapse. If the worst case presented itself the Pridelands would suffer the greatest horror anyone could ever imagine. It was that reason my father made sure I was well versed in its knowledge - though limited as my cub mind could fathom.

Unfortunately my training in the Great Circle was never completed and once I had opted out on my own, the knowledge that I had learned about this way of life was all but forgotten and replaced with something new - *Hakuna Matata*.

LIGHTNING CROSSED THE SKY AS I CONTINUED TOWARD MY DESTINY

"Repeat after me..." the meerkat ordered... *"A-ah-hem. Hakuna Matata."*

All I could do was frown at the little guy because I didn't understand what he was trying to tell me, but over a short period of time, that understanding came and the meaning behind those words became crystal clear. A meerkat (named Timon) and a warthog (named Pumbaa) had taught me something new and it would be their philosophy of "no worries" that I would live. Through their philosophy I learned how to take care of myself and not worry about the past, present or future. I had become a new lion from that day forth and there was nobody to tell me any different for they taught me something that would forever change my outlook on life. With the introduction of two very simple little words, Timon not only provided the answers to my questions, but he also found a way to quell all my troubles.

From that first day forward I was no longer the Simba that everyone remembered, I was a new Simba, a Simba for me without a care in the world. I was free -- free from anger, free from hatred, and free from the monstrosity of all horrors - death.

Timon and Pumbaa were literally lifesavers though, sticking with me through thick and thin. "Whatever is important to you is important to us," Timon once said and he was right. It touched my young soul then and it did so now knowing they stood beside me to retake my kingdom. The lion that I am today would never have been able to survive without them. They helped me when I, myself, didn't want anyone's help. They were friends, tried and true and as friends they did not allow me to give up when I had just about given up on my life.

I went through a rough time for a while there, hoping beyond hope that everything that had happened really didn't. As if one day I would wake up and the terrors would be nothing but a dream and I would be able to see my father and mother again. But the knowledge that my father's death wasn't a dream only led me into despair. Luckily, I found Timon and Pumbaa or rather they found me!

You know, between the two of them they could wipe the entire savanna clean of bugs; they ate constantly! And though I did get used to eating grubs, worms, and beetles throughout my cub-hood, I knew I needed much, much more. I needed meat and I knew just where to get it. There was one day... just like any other really, the three of us panted out into the hot savanna, looking for grubs.

"Come on buddy, back me up! A weeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee..."

But I did not fall into line as Timon's insufferable singing lent another good opportunity for me to hunt for the meat I so desperately needed. It wasn't as if my friends didn't know I needed flesh to survive, but I think it was more that they were reassured I wouldn't eat them. I mean, how could I? Being outcasts they've learned how to be suspicious of just about everyone; it wasn't everyday a lion befriended it's food. And that was probably the strangest thing, I never once thought about Timon and Pumbaa as food. Not even when my stomach was rumbling for attention, but eating my friends was out of the question. Of course, I'd think about eating the meerkat if he didn't stop singing!

Timon's voice, thankfully, began dissipating into the background combining with the song of the jungle birds, allowing me to concentrate on the task at hand. I settled down within the sparse bushes, hoping to see a fleeting gazelle or antelope prance out onto the field beyond me. The field was a perfect place for me to hunt; the grasses were almost as tall as I was high, but not enough to hide away the prey I sought. Before long everything around me became still and I pressed forward just slightly, hoping to catch a glimpse of what might be stirring. And just when I was about to pounce a thunderous

growl resonated throughout the jungle and into my finely tuned ears. My senses jumped into overdrive as the roar, whomever it belonged to, was not familiar to me and I tensed straight away - danger was on the winds and it was near by. I listened... for the smallest sound... my ears twitching to and fro hoping to catch something.

"SHE'S GONNA EAT ME!!"

And then it was apparent that Pumbaa, my flatulent friend, was in deep trouble. The blood in my veins pulsed as I returned to the spot where I had left the duo in their bit of song and saw the warthog stuck under a log that was covered in a strange green fungus. He was wiggling frantically hoping to jar himself loose - eyes wide as sunflowers. A roar escaped me as I leapt over him and into the fray. What awaited me was unknown, but nothing was more shocking than what I found on the other side of the overgrown root - a fully-grown lioness!

A million questions quelled my thoughts - who was she and what was she doing here - but regardless of whom she belonged the lioness invaded our territory and hungry or no, she had no business hunting on our land!

Immediately taking to Pumbaa's defense, I unsheathed my claws and struck the lioness head on, the two of us rearing up on our hind legs, with a hideous snarl on both our faces. She growled and I returned, she howled in frustration hoping to sink her claws into my friend, and I fighting to make sure that did not happen. I knew I was no great fighter but it didn't take long to find out that neither was she. A paw to the face, another, and another - aha!

"Go for the jugular! The jugular!"

But that was the last thing I heard before being thrown over and pinned about by back. There was something about that, the force and stance, which drew up a memory of the past. A memory that I thought I had long forgotten. I looked up suddenly, my eyes wide in surprise. Could it be?

"Nala?"

MY MANE BECAME SODDEN AS I PUSHED ON WITH THOUGHTS OF MY LOVE, NALA

"Pinned ya!" Nala said, resting upon my shoulders.

Oh, what a lovely memory. We had just wrestled down a nearby hill on our way to an Elephant's Graveyard, this really cool place I heard about from my Uncle Scar. It was supposed to be a show of my strength and bravery, but it ended up being nothing but an embarrassment. For one thing, she pinned me on the way there!

"Hey, lemmie up!" I whined.

She was only happy to oblige and stood leaving me sulking for my wounded pride. She was quite proud of herself too, I could see, a small smirk on her face. I wanted to pounce that sneer right off her too for showing me up and decided to -- growling up playfully with a rush to tackle.

"Ha! Pinned ya again."

And much to my surprise I ended up in the exact same position.

You know, without Nala I was empty, and I felt myself succumbing to the emptiness more and more each day. The disappointments in my life only served to fuel it.

I mean, *I was going to rule it all* and yet became a lonely lion doomed to the simple existence of Hakuna Matata. Many a night would pass and I'd be looking up at the starlit skies wondering if my destiny lied without a kingdom to maintain, doomed to roam the plains with a meerkat and a warthog, or, whether my destiny lied elsewhere.

Don't get me wrong, Timon and Pumbaa were great friends, but nothing matched a warm female body and I found that I wanted the company of a female, more than ever; I found that my thoughts would turn quite frequently to Nala, my cub-hood playmate. Oh how proud Nala would be of me, fully-grown, fit and trim, with a full mane and everything! I was dignified now, not a scruffy cub. I was fully of pride and quite possibly could have made a fine king.

I sometimes let my thoughts wonder about the what-ifs, picturing myself at Pride Rock looking down over its promontory and proclaiming to all those who would listen. Or, cuddling up with Nala, my mate, as we talked about our pride and the direction it would take in the new day. Alas, only in my dreams would I be able to take part in these things.

Never again would I see my mother, my mate, or my kingdom again. The thoughts and memories of her entangled within my soul to the point where depression had a firm grip. I'd awake everyday knowing it had all been a bad dream and Nala would be right by my side to comfort me, but when I'd open my eyes they were filled with views of the jungle instead of her lovely green eyes.

Time passed, but as if by some miracle, or some long forgotten prayer that had been spoken about long ago and answered, she was returned to me. Appearing out of the depths of the forest, Nala had wandered away from Pride Rock and somehow found me out here. I was shocked beyond belief and it wasn't from the shoulder slam she gave me either, it was a face and body I thought I'd never see again - oh, what to do, what to say?

"It's me... Simba!"

It took a moment for my confession to register but when it did a whirlwind of emotion flushed to the surface, and I became lost in it all. That realization opened a new world for me, a world without loneliness and grief. For the first time I had hope. There was someone who understood me, who knew me. Someone I could count on, to love.

"I've missed you so much," her feminine voice called to me.

In that moment we were lost within each other, our nuzzling quickening and our purrs growing louder and louder. There, in that very moment, my life was complete, the missing link connected, and our love became one in unison with our hearts. Nala was in my paws now and I knew that my best friend had become something else to me - I loved her, wanted her, and there wasn't going to be anything to stop me from taking her.

"I can't marry her, it would be so weird!"

Amazing how an outlook changes, how a careless thought can turn against you. I chided myself for thinking such a thing. How could I ever? The thought ran through me as we cuddled... her, here, now, with me, fur against fur and temperatures rising; there was no doubt about my love for Nala, then, now, or ever. And clearly she felt the same about me. Romping, laughing and playing as we were, I immediately came to the conclusion that I never wanted this day to end - EVER! Minute by minute we were getting farther and farther away from Timon and Pumbaa and for the first time, I did not

care. We tumbled down a hillside and fell into each other's paws. I found myself on top of her, getting the best of my cub-hood playmate for the very first time.

"Pinned ya..."

The roar of a nearby waterfall filled the air, but there was something else there too: an excitement, a need, a want, and a desire.

MY HEART RACED AS I LOWERED ANOTHER PAW TOWARD MY FUTURE

I glanced into her eyes, my chest heaved to the strength of my beating heart, finding them as she stole a look through my capturing paws. With every passing breath, her pupils dilated, her chest rising and falling with anticipation. She looked up at me with a passion I've never before seen; a passion of a warm-blooded female in heat ready to take the wanton love of her mate. And then she did something else I didn't expect, she lifted herself from my embrace and ever so gently and wafted a kiss across my cheek.

I quivered at her warm caressing tongue, gooseflesh creeping up my spine. I could feel my heart beat faster and faster as it became aroused to the rush of adrenaline flow. I became flushed with excitement and my thoughts clouded with images of wild abandonment. Nala was truly breathtaking and I wanted her. I wanted her for all to see, I wanted her right in the patch of leaves, and I wanted her amongst the Great Kings themselves. Oh, with all that I was, I *needed* her.

Nala sensed my wants, needs and carnal desires; gently returning to her silhouette amongst the foliage allowing her own lust to take over, passion blazing brightly in her eyes, flesh teasing. I bent down to take her then, a burning within me that was so overpowering I could do nothing else. There was no better life I could think of, no better place I would rather have been. And I was completely lost to it.

"Oh... I love you Simba," she said, her words carrying on the cool breezes of the forest.

"I've missed you so," said I, only able to must a whisper, as my attention was elsewhere: my tail had meandered around hers.

Pushing it aside, I penetrated the depths of her passion and found myself completely surrounded by warmth, love, and contentedness. I gasped audibly -- the first, entirely overwhelming thrust, shuttered a cry of joy and pleasure from her. We were one now, truly; I held perfectly still relishing the feeling of our union, cherishing the moment for the future.

Nala began to tremble slightly, as the sensations no doubt washing over me were also cascading within her. Her body began to respond to our coupling, tugging at me from within. There was no stopping the energy between us now... we were so close. With each internal massage I became bathed in her love, our hearts cried out for release.

I found that moments later I could no longer hold back the passion that quelled deep within me. The sensation sprang upon me so quickly that I almost withdrew from her in fright, but an Ingram of knowledge buried deep within prevented that withdrawal. And so, with one last powerful thrust ever deeper, my heart bled for her and a thunderous roar joined the quietness of the forest.

Then two.

Together, they became the guttural cries of two souls lost in a sea of passion, a song of sowing seeds, a melody of life planted firmly within the fertile valley of the future.

And then it was quiet.

Nala and I continued to stay within each other's grasp, as we cuddled away the torrent of passion. My body tingled with excitement from the individual hairs on my mane to the tiniest on the tuft of my tail. The roar of that waterfall in the backdrop was the only other sound, besides our beating hearts and heaving breasts. It was such a wonderful time that I wished could live on forever. Warmth emanated from Nala's soft furry body and soon a slight purr joined the rush of water. My blood began to boil with pleasure as I found her touch even more arousing.

Unbelievable.

"That was wonderful Simba," she purred to me. "Oh so wonderful. Who could ever imagine?"

"Was I your first?"

"Uh-huh..." she whispered. "Was I yours?"

"Yes," I allowed. I licked her on the top of her head then, her ears twitching at the subtle stimulation, and slowly allowing my tongue to skip down her beautiful nose. I didn't speak again for a long time, how long I do not know, but it seemed like an eternity.

"To have found you," I said to her. "I couldn't be happier."

"I'm so glad we found each other," she began. "But, I don't understand how you got out here in the first place."

It was a long story. And our blissful event soon began to turn to a new direction, one that was not as easy to face. Nala had a lot of questions for me, about my past, my present and about my future. Questions I was not prepared to answer. There was too much pain inside and I wasn't ready to let it all out yet, not to her.

Relentless she was in her inquiry, telling me all about Scar and how he let the hyenas roam the Pridelands, how he destroyed everything, and how much the lionesses needed help. But I refused to hear it. It wasn't for *me* to worry about. It wasn't *my* kingdom after all. Hey! She left! I didn't force her to leave! She wasn't forced to leave like I was! How dare she tell me what to do!

"But you have a responsibility Simba, to me, to the other lionesses... to your mother!"

Oh, but she didn't know. I had no more responsibilities. I was relieved of those problems by Scar, the moment my father died, the moment he killed my father, the moment he took control over the destinies of all those on the Pridelands.

"I'm not the Simba you remember," I said sternly.

I've changed.

Just go away! Leave me alone! I don't want you here, can't you see that! Go back where you came from and leave me here in my hell! I don't need you!

"You don't need me..."

"Simba, we *need* you!" Nala exclaimed.

"Stop - now you're starting to sound like my father..."

"Good, at least one of us does..."

AN ANGRY THUNDEROS DRONE OF A THUNDERCLAP SNAPPED

Oh, my father. The mere mention of his name brings death, despair, life and happiness to my thoughts. As my dad, he was my pal - my friend. We were the best of friends, always to be there for each other, only fate decided that was not to be.

"Simba!" Mufasa sternly called of his son, the sound of his voice echoing in the night air.

Hearing my name thundering through the night sky, I looked up from below the grasses in which I had hidden and began a slow walk towards my father.

I had done a terrible thing. Nala and I went out to the Elephant Graveyard and were attacked by hyenas. We mightn't have been killed if it weren't for his rescue. To say he was beyond angry would have been an understatement. I was about to be punished. I knew that.

"Simba, I'm very disappointed in you," he said, turning to me.

"I know," I responded sadly, not able to meet my father's gaze.

"You could have been killed!" Mufasa exclaimed. "You deliberately disobeyed me. And what's worse, you put Nala in danger!"

"I was just trying to be brave like you."

"I'm only brave when I have to be," the lion turned. "Simba, being brave doesn't mean you go looking for trouble."

"But you're not scared of anything!"

"I was today," Mufasa let out.

I asked disbelievingly, "You were?"

"Yes," said he, bending down to reach the gaze of his young, and very frightened son - me. "I thought I might lose you."

"Oh," I breathed. "I guess even kings get scared, huh?"

"Mm-hmm."

Even the best of Lion Kings become frightened at the prospect of losing their offspring, I gathered.

"Dad?" I asked of my father, as I wallowed about his thick and full mane.

"Hmm?" Mufasa uttered as though his train of thought was broken.

His gaze was unbearable, especially in the light of what I had just done. Unable to avoid his glance, I continued. "We're pals right?"

"Right," the lion said with a gentle chuckle.

"And we'll always be together, right?"

"WRONG!" flashed an evil image of Zazu.

For a father and son so in tune with one another, we were destined to be torn apart. We couldn't be together always, as Mufasa had proclaimed, all because of my actions.

Gods! Why did I go into the gorge, why!?

I knew I shouldn't have gone there alone -- at all -- but I trusted uncle Scar. I trusted him and I knew I shouldn't! There was nothing for me there and to go off with my uncle was dense! I should have seen right through his "marvelous surprise" routine... but I didn't. And look at the consequences of that stupidity -- my whole life taken from me.

Watching the small pebbles shake on the floor of the big gorge was cool; did my little roar cause all those stones to move like that? Little did I know that it wasn't my pathetic little mew, but a stampeding herd of wildebeest falling over the crest of the canyon walls that caused them to jump to and fro.

I stood fast, the blood draining from my face as I was overpowered by the image of a waterfall of huge beasts racing right toward me. I was so stricken with stillness that I couldn't even think of what to do. Should I stay? Should I go? Should I run?

Yes, RUN!

I just knew I wouldn't be able to wrestle away from this doom. I knew I would never see my father again, or anyone for that matter.

Death by entrapment - I would die.

Yet, out of the ashes of darkness came the one who could save me - my hero, my father. He gobbled me up into his outstretched mouth and carried me to the safety of an outcropping. He braved the onslaught of the herd, the pain of hooves crashing around him, and his own misgivings just to rescue me - Me, Simba, his son, his progeny.

Mufasa set me down ever so gently, and I smiled up at him as he done so, relieved and safe. Once again I had cheated death and my father was there, once again, to save me. As I heaved in and out, I began to realize that what my father had been telling me all along was right -- I couldn't go off looking for danger, I couldn't go off expecting that everything will be all right. I didn't understand this as I stepped into his shadow, his overbearing paw, during our nightfall conversation, but I did now. My mind opened to a whole new wavelength of thought.

The deliver of such knowledge would be my father, and I would now allow him the chance to do so.

But then...

"Daaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaad," I screamed in horror, as his massive body fell backwards, becoming entangled with the marching wildebeest.

I stood fast upon the rock-ledge; the shock of the roaring beats overpowering me into stillness. My father was nowhere to be found, as he was pulled under their hooves and below my line of sight. Dust kicked up everywhere -- he was completely engulfed in the chaos on the canyon floor and there wasn't a thing I could do about it.

I searched for him, to and fro, hoping beyond hope that I would catch a glimpse of him through the reds, greens, yellows and browns of the smoky cinders that the stampede left behind. Panic was an emotion of luxury, which I had quite a bit of, as second after second slipped by with no sight of him.

I'm never going to see him again and there was so much I wanted to say.

But then, alike a shot of a flame, something launched out from the devilish swirl below, punctuating the air with a loud, purposeful roar. It was Mufasa, my father, and he hadn't yet given up the fight!

The relief I felt was sudden and powerful, and I welcomed it. My father had risen from the ashes and fastened himself firmly to the nearby cliff-face. A moment later, he began to climb up the walls with great gusto, struggling with all his might to return to safety. I turned from him in order to reach the outcropping he was reaching for, but as I turned back around to see him he was gone.

"Noooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo," I roared violently, unable to do anything else.

And then I watched helplessly as my father plummeted from the tops of the gorge walls, back down to the rocky and hard ground of the Pridelands Gorge. I sat petrified I watched my father and friend ripped from my side and become swallowed by death.

After that moment I never found comfort in the stars again. My father said he'd always be there for me, waiting in the stars, watching over me. But he wasn't... wasn't meant to be. A miserable fool, one who could not understand the meaning of what it meant to be king, took him. I didn't know it then, but I do now. It meant you could not be self-centered, but that you were all working toward a greater goal, a greater good. A concept Scar could not fathom. Instead of facing up to that concept he had me run - run far away, and never return. I heeded his words, and ran, believing I took my father's life. That it was my fault Mufasa was dead. I believed him... and so I ran away from the sadness and responsibility.

I ran away from what I should have done -- stood and fought for my father and what was rightfully mine.

I ran. Yes, I ran away like a cowardly lion, whimpering into the desert to places unknown. I ran right into the arms of Timon and Pumbaa, two totally different, but wanting creatures -- Outcasts, like me. They showed me there was more to life, but could they truly understand my past and what I had done? We didn't talk about it, which was the rule for outcasts; yet, there were times when a piece of my past would make itself known.

"Someone once told me that the great kings of the past are up there... watching over us."

It was a glorious evening. The three of us had just come from a very successful hunt, Timon and Pumbaa on Grubs, and myself a lost and fleeting gazelle.

The stars were out that night, and Pumbaa and Timon were enamored with their shininess. Pumbaa had called them balls of gas burning brightly billions of miles away, but Timon rebuffed that excuse. He offered one of his own, of course, saying the sparkling dots were nothing more than every-day fireflies that got stuck up in 'that big-bluish black thing'.

He didn't approve of my reasoning either.

"You mean there are a bunch of royal dead guys watching us?"

I told him just that, but he snubbed me just as he did Pumbaa, and burst out into a hysterical fit of laughter. The laughter wounded me, and only served to crush my faith and the sacred memory of my father. It also proved one other thing: they couldn't be trusted with the secrets of my past. But what was more, I was really hurt by the outburst, who wouldn't be? Everything I held sacred was being poked fun at -- laughed at -- as if it didn't matter at all. I was wounded with feelings I couldn't express to them, or to anyone. Timon could not understand and now they would never know who I really was and what I walked away from.

And who was I really?

"You said you'd always be there for me!" I mustered up a yell to the heavenly bodies above, but no one was listening. And it was my fault once again. Relieving frustrations helped, but the problem was staring me right in the face - I had lost sight of my father's star. It was there, surely, but where? My father was an idol to everyone under his dominion. Surely he was to be remembered. If his son did not, did anyone?

I remember the night he came to me like a storm in the sky. There I kneeled, broken down in tears never getting the chance to make right what I made wrong. He knew I had failed... and I had certainly failed him. The disappointment was thick in the air, and yet I could do nothing. No one knew who I was anymore... no one cared.

"Well, I know who you are. You're Mufasa's boy!"

That voice! That shrill of a voice -- where had I heard it before?

I looked up, drawing in a breath, hoping against hope it would be someone from my past, someone I could cling onto, someone real. But, whomever it was had vanished. That creepy little monkey vanished! Where did he go? Or, more importantly, how did this strange creature know me? And yet there was something strangely familiar about him as well; the memory burned like a ranging fire. Thus I ran off in hopes to find this creature, to ask him the questions that burned in my soul -- who am I now?

When I finally caught up with the mandrill, his words of wisdom gave me more to think about. He spoke of united, of prides and kingdoms. There was a kingdom waiting for me, he stressed, one that needed me very badly. I listened to his words of thought with limited interested, caring for naught. He thought he knew me, but what he knew was the past. But did he know my future? I didn't think so... but he hammered his point. Literally.

Could I return? Would I be able to save my family, my pride? Would it hurt to at least try? It was amazing that I had to talk myself into it. What if Scar really was the horrible ruler as Nala suggested? If that were so, wouldn't I be responsible if I didn't do anything about it? Through all my reservations this mandrill never once gave up. He pushed his wisdom upon me whether I wanted to hear it or not. He, through Nala's persistence, helped me realize exactly who I was and who I could be.

I will never forget Rafiki for that service. Ever.

"Remember who you are... You are my son and the one true king. Remember who you are... Remember who you are..."

I AM READY TO TAKE MY PLACE AS ANOTHER PAW IS SET

The tip is so near and yet I still do not know if I can go through with taking my place amongst the Great Kings of the past, to become sovereign of the Pridelands. What if I failed? What if I caused more misery and destruction than Scar? Oh, I don't think I could bear it.

Would Nala be disappointed if I back down? *And my mother, what would she think?*

What must she think of me now, having come back after all this time. To have her know that it was I who was responsible for father's death. How it was I who let Scar get the best of me. It'll take her some time to get over his death, especially now. The lies, the betrayal, everything has been cast into doubt.

I shouldn't have come back.

My mother, though not entirely happy, seemed to put her losses behind her, so she alone could continue on. That is the will of a strong lioness, and a Queen. My mother is the true hero here, not I, not Nala, nor anyone. Sarabi withstood the test of horrors that Scar brought before her. She even outlasted him, the most demented of torturers, and yet I still feel sadness and sorrow from her.

My mother, the fighter -- the survivor.

Even the other young lionesses looked up at me with a sense of pride. How could I back down from them? How could I refuse to lead them into a new prosperous future? The answer is I cannot. They've suffered enough and now it is my turn to do right by them, to put away my self-interests for the sake of the pride.

My pride.

You know, I hadn't realized that until just now. I'm not going to be under the shadow of anyone else, nor be able to rely on anyone else. These lionesses are depending upon me, Simba, rightful king of the Pridelands.

Yes I can do this. I will do this!

"Remember..."

Yes father, I will!

A gasp escaped from me as the clouds above began to part for a sacred message from above. *I do remember!* I am the rightful king of the Pridelands, not Scar. No longer will your name be cursed and blown off across the winds, Mufasa. No longer will your memory be banished from all who loved you.

I remember!

No, from this day hence I will carry on the traditions you set down. I will be the king you were never able to be! I will be there for my Pride and family, no matter what comes between us. These lands will be made holy again and be returned to their once luscious splendor. You will see! You will see! I must do this! I will do this! I will it to be!

RROOOOOOAAAAAAAAARRRRRRRR!

And thy be done.

{fin}



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