FADE IN.

EXT. KRUGER NATIONAL PARK - DAY

Sun glistens on the surface of a watering hole. Murky water laps against its banks. Bushes and small trees punctuate the dry surroundings.

A herd of buffalo amble along the waters edge. Dust kicks up amongst them.

Out in front, ALAKAI, a monster of a buffalo, guides the way. Between immense, curled horns his eyes move from side to side. Slow. Alert. He glances back to the herd, continues on.

MUMINAH, Alakai’s wife, follows behind. She looks up to the sun, sweat gleams on her forehead. She turns to the water, stares for a moment. She licks her lips.

DERFEL, their son, trudges forward. He’s tiny compared to his father. He breathes heavy, his dry lips smack together.

DERFEL
Why can’t we just drink here?!

MUMINAH
Because your father said so dear.

DERFEL
But I’m so thirsty! The water’s right there.

MUMINAH
I know hun. Just be patient.

DERFEL
But I’m dying here!!

ALAKAI
Derfel! One day you’ll understand. For now just keep your mouth shut.

DERFEL
This is so unfair!

ALAKAI
Until you’re in charge that’s the way it’s gonna be.

DERFEL
I hate you! I hate you!!

Alakai slows. He focuses ahead to a patch of dry grass.

ALAKAI
Derfel, go back to the herd.
DERFEL
Make me stupid head.

Concerned, Muminah approaches Alakai.

MUMINAH
What’s the matter dear?

In the grass ahead, crouched low is LEAH, a lioness, the hunt leader. Focused on the buffalo, she lays still.

TIANNA, second in command, stays low, crawls to her side.

TIANNA
Pride in position ma’am.

Leah nods once, keeps her eyes ahead.

Alakai stops in his tracks. He looks down at...

A LIONS PAW PRINT.

Leah extends her claws.

LEAH
On my mark.

Alakai turns to Muminah, fear in his eyes.

ALAKAI
Get Derfel back to the herd.

MUMINAH
What’s the mat...

ALAKAI
Now!

Leah leaps up from the grass.

LEAH
Charge!

Alakai kicks up dust as he turns.

ALAKAI
Run!!!

With a burst of speed Leah propels forward.

Tianna springs into action, follows in Leahas tracks. Two other lions, ZANE and POLO, burst out of the grass.

Alakai sprints as fast as he can, Muminah close by his side.

ALAKAI (CONT’D)
Move! Move! Move!
Derfel hesitates, his weak legs move as fast as they can but he struggles to keep pace with his parents.

ALAKAI (CONT’D)
This way!

Alakai changes direction, Muminah follows, they head for the cover of thick bushes.

Leah gains ground on Derfel.

LEAH
I’m coming little one.

Tears flow from his panic stricken eyes.

Leah catches up to Derfel, she pounces on his back.

Derfel whimpers.

They hit the ground together and roll forward.

Their momentum carries them through a bush and into the water with a splash.

Tianna leaps in after them.

Ripples flow across the surface of the water.

In deeper water, a FIGURE lurks at the bottom. A slender body. A long tail. It lays still.

A ripple passes above the FIGURE. It whips around, glides in the direction from where it came.

Tianna bites onto Derfel. Leah grabs on with her paws.

Derfel pulls away toward deeper water.

Leah tightens her grip, glares at Zane and Polo.

LEAH (CONT’D)
Don’t just stand there!

The two lions rush in, each bite onto Derfel who screams.

LEAH (CONT’D)
One, two, three, pull!

Derfel struggles, the lions overpower him. They drag him to the bank.

Alakai gains on the herd. Muminah trails just behind.

MUMINAH
Keep moving Derfel. Don’t look back.
Muminah glances to her side.

   MUMINAH (CONT’D)
   Derfel?

In an instant she stops. Panicked she looks from side to side. She turns back. Her eyes grow wide.

   MUMINAH (CONT’D)
   Derfel!!!

Alakai skids to a standstill. The herd grinds to a halt. The lions work together as they battle with Derfel.

   LEAH
   One, two, three, pull!

They drag him onto the bank, his back legs kick in the water. The FIGURE glides towards them, just a few feet away.

   DERFEL
   Please let me go! I’m so scared. I just want my mummy!

   TIANNA
   Look at this little cry baby. I’m afraid I’ve got bad news for you kid.

Tianna flicks out her claws, holds them in front of Derfel’s face.

Suddenly, a crocodile bursts from the water. Its powerful jaws aim for Tianna’s stomach.

Tianna leaps back just in time to avoid the bite. The croc slides back beneath the water.

   TIANNA (CONT’D)
   What the hell was that?! Did you see that?

   LEAH
   Get your head in the game dammit!

Nervous, Tianna stares at the water. She shakes her head. The croc breaks the surface, snaps its jaws around Derfel’s leg, drags him into the water.

   POLO
   Crocodile!!

   LEAH
   Pull, pull, pull!!
The lions tighten their grip, dig their paws into the ground and pull as one.

The croc pulls in the opposite direction.

Derfel wails, the rope in a nightmarish tug of war.

Away from the herd, a dejected Alakai faces Muminah.

MUMINAH
But he’s our son!

ALAKAI
I’m sorry. There’s nothing I can do.

MUMINAH
Nothing you can do?! Your own flesh and blood. How can you just leave him like this? We can still save him!

ALAKAI
I swore an oath to protect the herd. No matter what. I can’t break that oath.

MUMINAH
Fine! I’ll go alone.

Defiant Muminah turns. She fights back the tears, moves on.

ALAKAI
Muminah. Muminah wait!

Muminah looks back.

MUMINAH
You swore an oath to protect me once. It was the happiest day of my life. Goodbye, Alakai.

On the bank the tug of war goes on.

Derfel cries out in pain.

LEAH
If any of you let go I’ll kill you myself.

The lions pull together with all their might.

Derfel is ripped from the croc’s jaws, razor sharp teeth leave their mark on his leg. No energy left to fight he gives up the struggle. His eyes close.

The croc stares for a moment. He cracks an evil smile, slides back into the water.
The lions crowd around Derfel. They share triumphant smiles.

TIANNA
I’m so hungry I could eat an elephant. But I guess this will have to do.

The lions roar with laughter.

Zane raises his head. He can’t hide his surprise.

ZANE
Hey, check this out!

The lions turn their attention to...

Muminah. She stands alone. Determined. Without fear.

POLO
She looks pretty mad.

LEAH
This is her son.

TIANNA
Who cares, it’s just one buffalo.

Leah, Tianna and Polo turn back to Derfel.

Zane’s mouth falls open. He stares in shock.

Tianna looks at him.

TIANNA (CONT’D)
Relax, one buffalo can’t hurt us.

ZANE
What if it’s not just one?

Alakai pulls up alongside Muminah.

The herd fall in behind, ready for war.

ALAKAI
I swore to protect all buffalo. I will keep that promise. I’ll get him back. Just do one thing for me.

MUMINAH
Anything.

ALAKAI
Stay in the herd.

Alakai stomps forward, five male buffalo break free to join him. Muminah is swallowed into the herd.

Alakai and the five rush the lions.
LEAH

Nobody move.

Alakai and the five pull up short, the lions hold firm. Alakai stares into Leah’s eyes.

ALAKAI

We’ll be taking my son back now.

Leah smiles.

LEAH

There’s a fine line between bravery and stupidity. Which are you?

ALAKAI

You sure you wanna find out?

Derfel stirs, opens his eyes.

DERFEL

Dad?

ALAKAI

Hold on son. I’m here now.

DERFEL

I’m so sorry dad.

TIANNA

Screw this.

Tianna opens her mouth, plunges her teeth into Derfel’s side. Derfel screams.

ALAKAI

No!!!

Alakai charges. Fearless, he lowers his huge head, he rams his horns into Tianna’s ribs, flips her high up into the air.

Tianna lands with a thud. A small pack of buffalo break from the herd, they form a line and chase Tianna away.

Alakai turns to Zane and Polo, his nostrils flare.

Zane and Polo make a break for it, Alakai charges after them. They don’t look back, don’t stop running.

Alakai stops, turns his attention back to Leah.

ALAKAI (CONT’D)

So, you brave, or stupid?

Alakai nods to the five buffalo. They advance on Leah and Derfel. As they get closer they lower their horns.
Leah backs away.

Derfel pushes himself up, staggers into the herd.

Muminah appears before him.

MUMINAH
Oh baby!

DERFEL
Mum! I never thought I’d see you again.

MUMINAH
It’s OK baby, we’re here now. You’re safe.

DERFEL
I promise I’ll listen from now on. I promise.

Alakai squares off with Leah.

ALAKAI
I commend your bravery, but you’d be stupid to stick around.

Leah questions with sceptical eyes.

ALAKAI (CONT’D)
Nobody needs to die here today. But, they still could.

Leah nods, turns and skulks away.

Alakai watches a moment, rejoins his herd.

Leah turns back.

LEAH
Brave warrior!

Alakai turns.

LEAH (CONT’D)
I shall tell others of your compassion. Tell me your name.

ALAKAI
My name is Alakai. King of the buffalo.

THE END.