

## **Balto: Hero**

Nov 4, 2008

This story takes place directly after the events in Balto.  
All characters belong to Universal Pictures.

*All my life I have waited  
For the chance to give the love  
Only you demand of me*

Balto walked slowly back to his boat, head down, his ears still ringing from the celebration in town. He could barely hear the snow crunching beneath his paws, and he was having trouble keeping his eyes open.

After he'd brought the medicine back and saved the children of the town from the Diphtheria epidemic, the townspeople of Nome wouldn't let him leave the porch of the hospital. They cheered and applauded and pet him and hugged him for over an hour, and while he enjoyed the attention and his newfound sense of belonging, he was exhausted.

Bringing that anti-toxin back to Nome had been a difficult ordeal, and he had braved avalanches, unstable ice caves, snowstorms and had run flat out for days to get it there. He loved Rosy, because Rosy was the only human in town to ever give him a fair shot. He desperately needed to save her, and would, and did, do

whatever it took to get her that medicine.

*"Of course, there was another reason you did it too, wasn't there Balto?"* his inner voice intoned.

Balto smiled to himself. "Yeah." He thought back to when he was nuzzling Rosy in the hospital earlier that night. She was hugging him when he heard a small cough behind him. He turned around and – "Jenna!" He ran to Jenna, a gorgeous red and white purebred husky who was looking at him with admiration in her pretty brown eyes. They danced around each other in excitement to see each other again. Balto had kept his promise to her and brought the life saving elixir back to Nome, against impossible odds.

Jenna was happier than she ever thought she would be again. She was so grateful to Balto for saving her owner Rosy, she was so amazed by his determination and intelligence, and as they danced around each other she realized... she was in love with him. They stopped dancing, and Jenna became serious for a moment and looked deeply into Balto's eyes, drawn to him like a moth to flame. Balto would never forget that moment as Jenna's deep, warm eyes pierced him to his very soul.

She leaned forward and nuzzled him earnestly, closing her eyes and pressing against his head and neck. Then she pulled away and looked at him shyly, a hint of blush appearing on her cheeks. Then the crowd erupted with applause and cheers, and the two of them sat on the porch and took in the celebration. Balto was a hero, and everybody loved him.

"And I love Jenna", he thought to himself. "I love her! I just hope she loves me too. Maybe..." he began to hope beyond hope. "The way she looked at me... oh, Jenna."

Balto finally arrived at his home, an old landlocked boat beached

there long before Balto was born. He crawled into the boat and under his blanket and finally, mercifully fell into a deep sleep. His last dwindling thoughts lingered on Jenna, and the feel of her muzzle pressed against his neck, her scent overpowering his nostrils...

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Balto woke up many hours later, and the sun was high in the sky. He was a little bleary and his legs and paws were sore, but he felt refreshed. "I must have been out for the whole night and half the day," he thought. He yawned and stretched, wincing as his leg muscles protested. "Ow. I suppose I should be thankful I can walk at all," he said gruffly. He gingerly walked to his water bowl and drank deeply, quenching his thirst.

"Balto! How is my hero today? Sleep well?" Boris flapped in and gave Balto a big hug.

"Thanks for letting me sleep, Boris. I really needed it," he said as he sat down and yawned again.

"Of course!" Boris said. "A hero needs his rest after saving the entire town!"

Balto rolled his eyes. "Boris, please stop calling me that. I'm the same Balto I always was."

"No!" Boris exclaimed, folding his wings. "You're a hero now! The whole town loves you! And one, I suspect, loves you more than all the rest." He winked at Balto with a big grin on his face.

"Jenna," Balto said quietly as his eyes lost focus and he envisioned her beautiful eyes looking at him with admiration. "Do you really think she loves me?" He sat up straighter and perked up his ears, excited at the thought that Jenna might really love him the way he loved her.

"I know love when I see it," Boris told him. "And I see it. I see it in you and in Jenna. Trust me boychik, it's love."

"I have to go see her," Balto said with a new sense of urgency. "I have to... I have to tell her how I feel, even if she rejects me. She has to know that I love her."

Boris walked over to Balto and put a wing around his shoulders. "Balto, you are a kind and generous soul. You risked your own life to save those kids, and now..." Boris said softly. "Now it is your turn to be saved. Go to her Balto, she will be waiting for you."

"Thanks Boris," Balto replied. "I needed to hear that."

Boris nodded at Balto. "Now go, hero. Shoo!" Boris flicked his wings at Balto in mock annoyance.

"All right, I'm going! Sheesh." Balto rolled his eyes at Boris again, and leapt off the side of the boat.

He headed toward the hospital where he knew Rosy was being held for observation until she completely recovered. "Jenna's got to be there with Rosy," he thought as he ran across the snowy fields on the way into town. He suddenly felt like he did when he ran the last stretch into Nome with the medicine, and without thinking he raised his head to the sky and howled in excitement.

The people in the town heard him and began to shout. "Balto! He's coming back! Balto's coming!" The people began to gather at the edge of the town to get another chance to thank their hero,

and Balto arrived to open arms and a crowd of grateful humans thanking him, petting him and offering him treats. He nuzzled as many hands as he could, and ate the meat they gave him after smelling it and realizing how hungry he was. Some of the children wrapped their small arms around his neck and said "Thank you Balto! We love you!" He licked their cheeks in response, which made them giggle.

Balto was happy for the food and the loving attention he was receiving, but all he really wanted was to see Jenna. He didn't expect the whole town to come out to greet him, and he was a bit overwhelmed by it all. He was eventually able to get away as the crowd dispersed, and he broke into a run towards the hospital.

Jenna was sleeping on the floor next to Rosy's bed when she heard the howl. She jolted herself awake as she realized it was Balto, and she ran to a window to see if she could spot him. She could see a crowd of people at the edge of town, and she heard people yelling about Balto and she smiled. "*My hero,*" she thought to herself. She sat at the window and watched her townspeople shower Balto with affection and gratitude, and waited to see where he would go.

She saw him running towards the hospital, and she turned and ran out the doggy door in the back. Balto got to the hospital and scratched at the door. "Uh, Jenna? Are - are you in there?" he asked timidly. He moved to one of the windows next to the door and looked inside, but he couldn't see her.

"I'm here, Balto," Jenna said softly from right behind him. Balto jumped and fell over onto his side, scrambling to get back on his feet again. "J - Jenna! I - how did you —"

Jenna laughed softly and walked over to him. She smiled and pressed her muzzle against his, nuzzling him. She heard him sigh

and his body relaxed as he returned the affection. "I'm sorry I startled you," she said.

"It was worth it," he said with a grin, and got back on his feet. "Jenna, I—" He stopped, captivated by her beauty. She was beautiful, this red and white husky. And the way she looked at him... it was like she was looking into his soul. *"I can't believe she's even interested in me at all,"* he thought. *"Me, a ragged mutt half breed. What do I say to her that won't turn her away?"*

"Jenna, would - would you like to, um, go for a walk on the beach with me, maybe?" he managed to stammer out, looking down at the floor. "I mean that is if you're not busy, I mean you probably have things to do, I don't want to waste your time or anything, you're probably busy, I shouldn't have asked, never mind I'll just —"

"I'd love to," Jenna interrupted with a smile.

"You - you would?" Balto asked with surprise and relief.

"Mmm-hmm," Jenna nodded at him, her eyes sparkling. "Rosy is recovering and she's just sleeping now. Thanks to you."

Balto grinned sheepishly. "I, uh... I'm glad she's okay. I really like her."

"She likes you too," Jenna replied. "And so do I." She leaned forward and kissed his nose.

Balto sat there with his mouth open, and Jenna giggled at him. "I believe you promised me a walk on the beach?" she asked, still smiling at him.

Balto snapped out of his trance. "Oh! Yeah, the beach! It's uh, this way" he said, turning around to start walking out of town. "After

you," he said; lifting a paw to show her down the stairs.

They walked together out of town and back towards Balto's boat, as the afternoon sun reflected off the snow fields, giving everything a radiant glow. Balto tried not to stare, but kept sneaking quick glances at Jenna while they walked. She carried herself with such confidence, and she was so beautiful. Jenna caught him admiring her, and she turned to smile at him. Balto returned her smile and moved closer, pushing gently against her body as they walked together. She leaned in and nuzzled his cheek as they walked, and Balto didn't want to do or say anything to ruin that moment. He closed his eyes and took in her scent, felt her muzzle against his face and was happy.

They arrived at the beach near Balto's boat house, and Jenna got a mischievous twinkle in her eye. "Catch me if you can!" she yelled to Balto, and ran off down the beach. "*Nothing I'd like better,*" Balto thought as he took off after her. Jenna laughed and sprinted down the beach while Balto chased her. "I'm catching up, Jenna!" Balto shouted. Jenna looked around and spotted something in the distance that she recognized. She took a sharp left up a sand dune and ran away from the beach and toward the foothills.

"Jenna"? Balto yelled. He ran up and over the sand dune and spotted her running through the snow towards the hills. "You can't lose me that easily!" he grinned and gave chase again. Balto was a faster runner than she was, with his half wolf heritage he was built to run long distances at a fast pace. He caught up to her just as she was entering a cave in the hills.

"Got you!" he said, and came to a stop right in front of her.

"You sure did," she replied breathlessly, and kissed him on the mouth. Balto returned her kiss, not even believing what was

happening. They parted, and looked into each other's eyes.

"Jenna," he whispered.

"Yes, Balto?" she answered, nuzzling his face.

"I... I want to tell you something, but please don't be upset. I just - I have to tell you."

"What is it?" Jenna asked, with a puzzled look on her face.

"Jenna... I love you. I love you so much. I hoped you would feel the same about me, but I don't know how you could ever love a scruffy half breed like me," he said, and lowered his head.

"Oh, Balto," Jenna said softly. "My brave, wonderful Balto." She put her muzzle under his chin to lift his head and look into his eyes. "You're not just the town hero, you're my hero. You saved my girl, you saved the town. You're kind, intelligent and my girl loves you. How could I not love you too?" She nuzzled the side of his face and whispered into his ear. "I love you Balto. I love you with all my heart."

Balto could only sit and listen, his heart pounding so hard he thought it would burst out of his chest. He looked at Jenna, and she kissed him again. He closed his eyes and returned her kiss, hoping it would never end, and that this wasn't all a dream.

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The inside of the cave was lit up in reds and oranges as the sun began to sink behind the ocean. Jenna and Balto lay near the front of the cave together, watching the sun set and occasionally

nuzzling and licking each other.

"I didn't think I could ever be this happy," Balto said quietly as he nuzzled Jenna's neck, ruffling her red bandanna. "Tell me again it's not a dream."

Jenna giggled. "It's not a dream, Balto. I love you," she said and laid her head down on his front paws. Balto lay his head down on her head, not knowing what else to say.

"Balto..." Jenna began. "I don't want to leave, but I have to get back to the hospital. Rosy is probably wondering where I am." She sat up next to Balto and looked deeply into his big brown eyes. "I have to be there for her while she gets better."

Balto looked away for a moment. "Do you think she would mind if I came along?"

"Of course not, Rosy would love to see you again," Jenna said, and licked his face.

Balto kissed her muzzle. "All right then, let's go."

The two canids left the cave and started back to the town. "I don't think I'll howl to announce my arrival this time," Balto said with a grin.

The light from the sinking sun struck Jenna's coat, making it glow even redder than usual. She smiled at Balto. "You don't want to be the town hero any more?"

"It's not that. I guess I'm still not comfortable around most of these humans. You know most of them hated or feared me before yesterday."

"That's true, but they love you now," Jenna assured him. "It's not what you are, but what you do in life that matters. And what you

did went far beyond the expectations of anyone in this town or any other town for that matter. They cheer for you like that because you saved their children's lives, Balto. You gave them the greatest gift they could ask for, and you did it selflessly, asking nothing in return and thinking nothing about risking your life to save theirs."

Balto lowered his head. "They were dying Jenna. Rosy was dying. I only did what anybody would do."

"But it wasn't anybody that did it, Balto my love. It was you." She stopped in front of him and looked into his eyes. "It was you." She lifted her head up and kissed him, and nuzzled his neck fur. Balto closed his eyes and nuzzled her, at a loss for words. He took in her scent and breathed deeply, making sure he would know that scent anywhere.

They arrived in Nome just as the sun disappeared below the sea, and they reached the hospital. "Come around the back with me, Balto." said Jenna, motioning Balto to follow her. "Here's our very own entrance." She went in the doggy door and Balto followed.

"Jenna!" Rosy cried, as Jenna approached her bed. "Hi girl, I missed you! Where did you go?" Jenna put her front paws on the bed and licked Rosy's face. "Ha ha! Jenna, stop it! Ha ha! Stop!" Jenna stopped licking and dropped back down to the floor as Rosy giggled and wiped her face off. Rosy looked down at Jenna and saw the rougher looking brown and tan dog standing next to her, looking expectedly at Rosy and wagging his tail.

"Balto!" she yelled, and threw her arms out toward him. Balto barked happily and threw his front paws up on the bed, and Rosy grabbed him and hugged him. "Balto, you saved my life! I was going to die here if it wasn't for you!" She began to cry. "Balto... I love you Balto. I love you so much." She buried her face in his fur

and wept. Balto licked the tears off her face and nuzzled her, trying to comfort her. "I didn't want to die, Balto. I was so scared," she sniffled.

After a few moments, she looked at Balto's face and held his head in her hands. "I'm alive because of you, Balto. I promise I will never forget that, ever." She gave his head one more hug and let him go. Balto gave Rosy's face one last lick and dropped down to the floor.

"You see, Balto?" Jenna asked. "It was your heart, your courage and your inner wolf that saved Rosy, and the town." She leaned against him and nuzzled his chin. "You're not weaker for being half wolf, you're stronger. Nobody else could have done what you did alone."

Balto looked down at Jenna and smiled. "Have I mentioned how beautiful you are lately?" he asked.

Jenna looked away shyly. "Not recently..."

Balto leaned against her and whispered into her ear. "Jenna, you're as beautiful as the Northern Lights. When I look at you I'm stunned by your beauty. I'm the luckiest dog or wolf in the world to have you. I love you."

Jenna looked up at him, a tear beginning to form in her eye. "Balto, you're the kindest, gentlest dog in Nome, as well as the bravest, strongest and most handsome," she added with a smile. "I love you, and I always will."

Darkness settled on the town like a blanket, and as people began to put candles in their windows, the light streamed in to the hospital room and bathed Balto and Jenna in a patchwork of flickering, dancing beams of light as they kissed and nuzzled each other.

Jenna sighed and laid her head down on Balto's shoulder. "My hero."

*I want my tears to bear your reflection  
'Cause my heart has a hunger  
And only you can feed it*

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-Xaqtly