

## Passing of Togo

by

*BaltoSeppala*

The Passing of Togo

By Earl J. Aversano

This story was inspired by the movies Balto (1995, © Universal Pictures and Amblimation/Amblin Entertainment), Balto II: Wolf Quest (2002, © Universal Cartoon Studios), and Balto III: Wings of Change (2004, © Universal Cartoon Studios), as well as the real history of the Serum Run of 1925.

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## NOTES

This story is fictional. Togo is presented here as a character in the cartoon universe of the Balto movies, in which he never officially appeared. In this setting, Balto still played a key role in the Serum Run, as he did in the movie. The difference being that there were TWO teams...Steele's (which became Balto's), and Togo's. Togo's team retrieved the anti-toxin from the train station at Nenana, and carried it about two-thirds the distance to Nome (after making the trek out of Nome to get to Nenana). Steele's team picked it up from them in relay, and carried it on. From there the events occur as they did in the first Balto cartoon.

The first event which occurs in Togo's dream sequence, in Chapter 2, is taken from an account of an actual event which occurred during Togo's lifetime (but, as it turns out, not during the real serum run, as I originally thought). For details, you can read the excellent book - "The Cruellest Miles", or go to this website: [http://digintodogs.com/reference/Togo\\_\(dog\).html](http://digintodogs.com/reference/Togo_(dog).html).

In this story, the character of Dingo is not a sled dog, but a constable's dog, who assists him in keeping the peace in Nome. I owe this interpretation of the character to my Balto Source friend, DingoHusky (who portrays Dingo as a character role-player on MySpace: [http://www.myspace.com/dingo\\_thedog](http://www.myspace.com/dingo_thedog)).

(The setting of this story is Nome, Alaska. It is 1929...four years since the Serum Run, and a year since the events portrayed in Balto 3: Wings of Change.)

## CHAPTER 1

Togo, one of the great heroes of the Serum Run four years earlier, lay reclining in the snow on the beach of Norton Sound, a short distance from town. It was early spring, and the sky was dark in the late hours of the night. There was still plenty of snow on the ground, and some ice in the sound...but it had broken up and was now free-floating.

Togo was old now, by dog standards - sixteen years old...and his age began to tell. Gray fur swept across his muzzle, and encircled his piercing, ice-blue eyes. He stared out into the darkness of Norton Sound.

With Togo were Dingo and Kodi, two sons of Balto, another great hero of the Serum Run. Also present was Belle, one of Dingo's young daughters. Kodi had made a name for himself as an up-and-coming sled dog, moving rapidly up the ranks of Mr. Simpson's mail team. He had already earned the co-lead position, just under the team's leader, Kirby. Dingo, on the other hand, had taken a different path. His human was the town constable, and so he had learned to be a police dog, assisting the constable with keeping the peace, and sniffing out all manner of troubles. And, unlike Kodi, he'd already found a mate, and sired some puppies.

Belle, as usual for any husky puppy, was excited and in the mood to play. While her father Dingo obliged her, Kodi lay next to Togo. Apart from the playful noises coming from Dingo and Belle, the whisper of the cold, sub-arctic breeze, and the soft lap of the sound on the beach, all was quiet. Kodi was the first to break the silence...

- "It's a peaceful night, isn't it, uncle Togo?"

Togo, of course, wasn't really the uncle of Balto and Jenna's sons and daughters. However, he had been one of Balto's mentors, and a friend. And so, as with Boris, they had come to view Togo as a sort of surrogate uncle, which pleased him immensely.

Togo, however, did not reply. Puzzled, Kodi continued.

- "Uncle Togo?"

Togo looked at Kodi through the corner of his eye, without turning his head.

- "Yes," he replied,

- "it is." His voice was gravelly with age, but there was still a strength and dignity to it.

Dingo walked up from behind, and plopped down on the other side of Togo.

- "I always like it when it's like this. There's less for me to worry about. I guess the humans here aren't much for causing trouble after a certain hour. Thank goodness!"

Togo chuckled, still staring out at the sound. It remained quiet for another few minutes...then he spoke.

- "Do you remember the old sled dog saying, Kodi? The one the old dogs always mutter when their time has come upon them?"

Kodi turned to Togo with a start, his eyes wide.

- "Uncle...!"

Togo chuckled again.

- "Well?"

Kodi sighed, and concentrated a moment.

- "Yeah, let's see...I think it goes something like 'it's been a good run.'"

- "That's right." Togo replied.

- "And for me, it certainly has been."

There was a long silence after that. Belle came up beside Dingo, and placed her forelegs up over her father's back, joining the three adult dogs in their repose. The cold breeze played in and across their fur. Belle giggled softly, thinking how much it tickled.

Togo finally decided to rise. Grunting under the pressure and pain of arthritis in his joints, and the old injury he suffered during the Serum Run, he struggled to get to his feet. Kodi, for his part, knew better than to try and offer the old sledding and racing veteran any help, as Togo would only have bluntly refused. He never liked being perceived as a burden. However, Dingo was not a sled dog, and wasn't aware of Togo's stubbornness about such things. He felt sympathy for the dog that all his brothers and sisters had come to admire and love so much. He rose up as Togo did.

- "Let me help you, uncle Togo."

Togo pulled back, and firmly blurted

- "No!!" Then, with a softer tone, he continued.

- "No...I can manage." He grunted again, and continued to slowly rise. And, from underneath Dingo, Belle came running up and jumped up on Togo, grabbing playfully at his nicked ear and tugging with a growl...sending Togo sliding abruptly back down into the snow with another grunt.

- "BELLE!" Dingo shouted, his face contorted in frustration.

- "Get off of him NOW!" Belle loosened her grip on Togo's ear and hunkered down, a guilty look in her eyes.

Togo and Kodi both laughed.

- "It's alright, Dingo", Togo replied,

- "she's a pup." He grunted again.

- "She reminds me a lot of myself when I was her age!" Togo rose again as Belle slid underneath him, looking up at Dingo, who shot back a glance which said, for all intents and purposes,

- "just wait 'til I get you home!"

Togo stretched out, his old joints cracking as he did. With a yawn, he stepped around and looked back at town, and then up at Anvil Mountain in the distance. And then up at the sky, and the northern lights dancing across it. He sighed.

- "I've got a busy day tomorrow..."

Belle took a look at the northern lights as well, and became excited again. Hopping up and down between her father and her uncle Kodi, she could barely contain herself.

- "Ooooh! The northern lights! I love them! They're so pretty! Uncle Kodi, do you think grandma and grampa are up on the mountain again tonight, watching them? Huh? Huh?"

Kodi laughed softly.

- "Oh, I'm pretty sure they are, Belle. They go up there a lot! You know what? When your father and I, and our brother and our sisters were just pups, grandpa Balto used to tell us a story about the northern lights. He said that the dogs who live with the human tribes here and across the water always believed that the lights are the spirits of our ancestors. That they dance like that because their spirits are running and playing together in the beautiful fields that await us all when we leave this world for the next. And that, someday, we'll all be together forever."

Belle looked at Kodi with wonderment, and then up again at the lights in the sky.

- "Wooooow!"

Togo looked up too and, with a sigh, started off towards the town. He turned back towards them momentarily.

- "Good night you three. Sleep well." And with that, he continued on into town towards his master's home.

- "Goodnight" they each replied. Dingo and Belle headed back into town as well, and Kodi set off for the boiler room, hoping to catch up with his team members.

## CHAPTER 2

Later, in the pre-dawn hours of the morning, Togo was wracked in the throes of a restless sleep. He tossed and turned, and kicked his legs. As his subconscious weaved its way through a dream state, Togo heard a voice call to him. It was a beautiful voice...ethereal and soft, like the sound of a breeze whispering through pine trees. He became calm.

- "Togo..." the voice called. And then, his dreams carried him back in time.

Togo was back in his harness, at the front of the team he led during the Serum Run. He was standing on a rocking and swaying ice floe, which had broken off and drifted away from the rest of the ice covering the waters of Norton Sound. All around them, a terrible blizzard howled and blew, and the members of the team had a tough time keeping to their paws. Behind them, the sled, upon which their musher, Leonhard Seppala, stood, slid back and forth across the pitching, icy floe.

Seppala leaned hard on the brake, trying to keep the team steady. The situation seemed pretty desperate...the sea surging around them and the floe pitching and swaying, threatening to dump them into the icy waters. And the blizzard winds howled around them, pelting them with snow and salty spray. Then came a change of fortune. The winds had shifted, and the floe was now drifting back towards the remaining pack ice! Within minutes, it was drifting closer to the ice.

Seppala called to Togo, shouting over the howling winds.

- "Jump, Togo! Jump boy! You can make it!"

Fritz, Togo's co-leader and half-brother, turned to Togo with a befuddled look on his face, shouting  
- "Is he nuts?!" That's gotta be five feet!"

Togo momentarily assessed the situation, and then turned back to Fritz, and shouted  
- "Maybe! But can you think of a better way out of this? It doesn't look like we're gonna get any closer to the ice!"

There was a snap of the lead, and Seppala called again  
- "Come on, boy! You can do it! Jump!"

Togo looked back out at the ice, now a short distance away, and at the roiling water, and then hunkered down to make his jump. Launching himself into the air, he sailed towards the approaching ice, and then felt a sharp tug as the lead went taut. Togo was yanked back, and landed hard on the edge of the ice, his back legs dangling in the frigid water.

- "Togo! Are you alright?!" Fritz yelled from the floe, watching him with great concern.

- "Y-yes, I'm fine." Togo started to paw at the ice, trying to climb up. He had noticed, however, that the lead had snapped off of his harness, which was now floating a few feet away, in the turbulent

water. As the rest of the team watched, Togo dove in and swam over to the lead. The water was icy cold, and felt like a vise against his chest. Gasping for air, he grabbed hold of the lead, turned, and starting paddling back to the ice.

- "Togo!" Fritz shouted.

- "Hurry up, the gap is closing!"

Togo put his forelegs up on the ice, and turned back to see the floe rapidly closing in on him. With seconds left, he began struggling to climb up. Then a surge of water, from the approach of the floe, dumped him unceremoniously up onto the ice onto his belly. As he struggled to regain his footing, the lead strap still in his mouth, he looked up to find a large, beautiful white wolf standing before him. Caught completely off-guard, he dropped the lead, and looked into her eyes. Then, everything around them seemed to slow to a crawl. Even the howl of the blizzard softened to a whisper.

Togo looked into her mysterious eyes, and wondered why he was seeing her. He didn't remember any of this from the Serum Run.

- "Wh...who are you?"

- "A guide" she replied. Her voice...it was the same he had initially heard. Ethereal...beautiful.

Togo looked back at the team. He could see Fritz yelling something...and Seppala also. But he

could not hear them. And they seemed locked in slow motion. Turning back to the white wolf, he asked

- "What do you want?"

The wolf turned her muzzle upward and howled. It was powerful...more so than any other Togo had ever heard in all his years.

Instantly, he found himself standing in a field of tall grass and wildflowers of many colors...swaying in a gentle, warm breeze. Meandering through the middle of the field was a small babbling brook, filled with crystal clear water. In the distance, beyond the brook, were great gray mountains, capped with snow. Closer by was a great forest of trees. The sky was a brilliant blue, dotted and brushed with pure white clouds, which yet did not conceal the purest, most golden sunlight he'd ever witnessed. Over the brook, some short distance away from them, spanned a golden footbridge, which cast off a rainbow prism of light when the sunlight played across it. Near the bridge was a huge oak tree, casting a welcoming shade under its great boughs.

In the field, many dogs romped, played and laughed. To Togo's great surprise, there were also wolves, foxes and other wild dogs mingled in the fray. Along the stream, some bent down to drink. Still others rested under the shade of the great oak tree. It was a magical, peaceful scene. And it felt very inviting to Togo.

He then noticed that, from behind them, came a human, walking in the direction of the bridge. As the human approached, one dog, which had been resting under the oak tree, rose enthusiastically to greet him. The human spotted the dog, and then they both ran to greet each other. As they met, the human knelt down to embrace the dog, and the dog kissed the human happily on the face. Then, to Togo's surprise, they seemed to converse together, and understand each other! After a

moment of this, the human stood and, together with the dog, walked over the bridge and disappeared into the forest.

Togo turned to the wolf, who was standing beside him.

- "What does this all mean? Why are you showing me this?"

The wolf looked into his eyes.

- "The circle of life is nearly complete, Togo."

He was confused by her response. Tilting his head, he replied

- "I don't understand."

Togo then found himself standing back on the ice, with the lead strap in his mouth. Everything still moved in slow motion. He looked around, and saw the wolf standing a short distance away, on the shore. She howled again, and disappeared.

Then he found himself immersed again in the howling winds of the blizzard, and hearing Seppala's voice, and the urgency in it.

- "PULL, Togo! Pull!"

Togo shook his head to clear his thoughts, and found the entire team staring at him worriedly from across the ice. The floe was now butted up against the pack ice. He pulled determinedly against the lead, and the other dogs responded in kind, jumping the now very narrow gap and pulling the sled to safety.

### CHAPTER 3

Togo awoke with a start, panting heavily. Shaking it off, he rose stiffly from his bedding, and went to his water bowl for a drink.

After slaking his thirst, he took a walk around his master's house, visiting each room in turn, and ending with the bedroom. Gently pushing the door open with his muzzle, he stepped quietly into the room. There, asleep on the bed, was his master, Leonhard Seppala, snoring loudly.

Togo approached the bed, and licked Seppala's hand, which was hanging down off the side. Seppala groaned and turned in his sleep, and then continued snoring away.

- "Goodbye, old friend," Togo said softly.

- "Thank you for believing in me." He wagged his tail as he thought of the good times they had had together. Of the work they shared. Of the old Alaska Sweepstakes races. And of that fateful few

days back in 1925, where so many lives hung in the balance, and were dependent upon his speed and experience.

Togo laid his head upon the bed, next to his master's head.

- "I'll see you again, someday."

He turned to go, stopping momentarily at the door. Looking back one more time, Togo sighed, turned again and walked out of the bedroom.

Soon he had worked his way outside. It was still very early, and the sun was still a few hours from rising. All was quiet. There was a gentle, cold breeze, and a pale moonlight cast upon the snow.

Togo realized it would take some time to traverse the distance from town to Anvil Mountain. He looked up at the dark slope looming in the distance, and thought how nice it would be to see one more sunrise from Anvil Rock, atop the mountain. The place where, in years past, he had taken his young protégé, Balto, to enjoy the surrounding scenery, and to talk. He remembered how Boris, the Russian snow goose, had realized that Balto would need the guidance of another sled dog in order to learn what it meant to be a dog. And Togo was a legend...a hero. In the years which unfolded, Togo became more than a mentor to Balto, he became a friend. And, when Balto and Jenna's pups were born, he became - like Boris - an uncle of sorts.

Togo's one regret was that he would not have the chance to say goodbye to his old friend. He sighed again, and set out for the mountain.

## CHAPTER 4

The first rays of the sun poured into the upper windows of the boiler room, and played across Dusty's eyelids. She clamped them tight and, with a groan, rolled over to clear the shaft of sunlight. Yawning, she then groggily rose to her feet. With a long stretch, she walked over to her water bowl, and took a long drink.

Dusty paused and lifted her head as she caught the sound of someone sighing. Looking around, she saw Kirby, Ralph, and most of the others of the team were still asleep. However, Kodi was laying by the door of the boiler room, which was slightly ajar. His head was down against his forelegs, and he was seemingly lost in thought.

Dusty jumped down off of her shelf onto the floor, and walked over to Kodi.

- "What's wrong? You look worried."

Without raising his head or looking up at her, he replied softly,

- "It's Togo...last night, he said some things to Dingo and I that really have got me worried."

Dusty sat down next to him.

- "Kodi, have you been up all night?"

- "Yeah..." he replied.

She shook her head in disappointment.

- "You know better than to do that! We've got a big supply run to White Mountain! We've known about that for days. Mel's been working us like an army drill sergeant, trying to get us ready for this heavy load!"

Kodi did not answer. He continued staring out of the door. Dusty paused for a moment, sighed, and continued.

- "What did he say?"

Kodi raised his head and looked up at her, with deep concern in his eyes.

- "He was talking like he thinks that it's his time, Dusty."

Dusty gasped, and pulled back in surprise. She was about to reply, when the back door to the boiler room opened, and Mr. Simpson appeared.

- "Up and at 'em, everyone! Time to get ready for our run! How's my team doing today?" He began gathering up the harness, and then preparing some breakfast for the dogs.

Kirby awoke with a lazy, lip-smacking yawn, and stretched out, his joints cracking.

- "Ooh! What a night!"

Ralph rolled right over and off his own shelf, and fell to the floor with a loud thud.

- "Ouch! I think." He looked at his left foreleg, and shook it a few times.

- "I guess I must have slept on it or something."

Dusty giggled, and walked over to join the other dogs. She stopped and turned back to Kodi, who was still lying by the door, staring out.

- "Come on, Kodi."

With a sigh, Kodi rose up and walked over to join them.

## CHAPTER 5

Belle was busy enjoying her breakfast, when she caught sight of Kirby's team rushing off on their run to White Mountain. Unlike her father, she was eager to be a sled dog, and often spent time with

her grandfather, Balto, learning the moves, and the routine. As the team sped off, she jumped up and down at the fence to her kennel, barking repeatedly. She so wanted to join them! But the fence, that darned fence - it held her back! She ran back and forth along the fence line, barking as she watched them disappear into the distance.

- "Belle, please stop that." Dingo stepped up behind her, observing her with a fatherly glance.

- "But papa, I hate being cooped up like this! I want to run with a team, like uncle Kodi! Like grampa!"

Dingo laughed softly at her enthusiasm.

- "Well, your chance will come sooner than you know it. You just have to try and be a little patient, kiddo! Take the time to be a puppy!"

Belle plopped down.

- "Hmph!"

Dingo rolled his eyes and sighed.

- "Aww, don't worry about it, Belle. Uncle Kodi's team will be back tomorrow morning. You know that. We'll go out and meet them when they return, okay?"

Belle just huffed in frustration, and turned her back on him. Hanging his head, Dingo walked off. He had plans of his own for the morning. He leapt the fence of the kennel, and headed off for his father's old fishing boat outside of town.

After watching him go, Belle thought hard of how to get herself outside of the fence. Then she had an idea! She'd just dig under the fence, and then she'd be free! And so she commenced to digging.

Dingo walked along the path which he and his brothers and sisters, and his mother, had taken on many occasions in the past. There, fronting the beach of Norton Sound, was the old ramshackle fishing boat, leaning rakishly to one side. There was, however, no sign that Balto had yet risen.

Dingo walked over to the boat, and ascended the long plank which connected with the deck. He sniffed and looked around, but all was quiet. Walking over to the wheel house, he poked his head inside, and found Balto stretched out underneath his blanket. Stepping up to his father, Dingo nudged him with his muzzle.

- "Wh-what? Oh, Dingo! What's up?" Balto yawned and started to get up.

- "Mornin' dad." Dingo wandered aimlessly about the wheel house.

Balto watched him for a second, and said

- "Come on, Dingo. I know that routine. What's going on?"

Dingo stopped, sighed, and looked sadly at his father.

- "Something's wrong, dad. With Uncle Togo."

Balto walked out of the wheel house onto the deck, and towards his water bowl. Dingo followed. After drinking for a second, Balto looked up at him.

- "What do you mean?"

Dingo sighed again.

- "Well, he and Kodi were talking last night, and they mentioned something about Togo's 'race being run'. Do you know what that means?"

A shadow of sadness swept over Balto's face. He walked over to Dingo.

- "He's old, Dingo - much older than any of us. Eventually, everyone reaches that point. He's probably just tired."

Dingo looked up at his father sadly.

- "I guess. But, as he was leaving, he also mentioned something about having a busy day today..."

Balto's eyes widened.

- "Are you sure about that?" His voice wavered.

Dingo was caught off-guard by Balto's reaction.

- "I think so. Why?"

Balto started for the plank which ran from the boat's deck to the ground.

- "Come on!" He jumped onto the plank, and ran down to the beach. Dingo followed behind.

Back in Nome, Belle managed to dig enough of a hole to just squeeze underneath the fence. She pushed herself through, but found herself stuck...for a moment or two. And then, with one final pull, she tumbled out onto the tundra and into a snow drift.

Popping her head up out of the drift and shaking off the snow, Belle hopped up and out to free herself, and began running off towards Anvil Mountain. She remembered once how Balto had shown her that, from Anvil Rock, she could spy the return of teams coming from the east. That, she determined, was where she'd go to spot the return of Kirby's team. Then, as they got closer, she could descend and intercept them, and join them as they finished their run into Nome. Tongue hanging out, and flapping in the breeze, she galloped hard for the mountain.

## CHAPTER 6

Up the mountain, Togo was struggling against gravity, and his own arthritis, to reach the heights. As he climbed over rocks and ice, occasionally checking his footing to avoid slipping, a gust of wind would threaten to sweep him off of his paws. Then everything around him seemed to slow to a crawl. He stopped, confused by the occurrence. Taking a moment to observe the surroundings, he then thought he could just hear a new sound echoing on the wind. Cocking his ear to listen, he caught the sounds of the voice he had heard the night before.

- "Togo..."

Perplexed by what was happening to him, Togo's brow furrowed in confusion.

- "I'm sure I'm not asleep," he said to himself. Shaking his head, he tried to ignore what was occurring around him, and he continued to struggle up towards the summit, step-by-step. After a short distance, the voice came to him again.

- "Togo..."

Togo stopped to catch his breath. Looking around, he shouted in frustration  
- "Where are you?!"

He glanced upward; there, standing at the summit, on Anvil Rock itself, was the white wolf, looking down at him.

- "The circle of life is nearly complete." Despite the fact that she was still some distance from him, he heard her voice as clearly as if she were standing beside him.

Togo grit his teeth and squeezed his eyes shut. Shaking his head, he paused for a moment. When he relaxed, and opened his eyes, the wolf was gone, and everything was moving normally. However, feeling a sudden wave of exhaustion, he decided to lay down for a few minutes' worth of rest. Placing his head down on his forelegs, he nodded off into a light snooze.

## CHAPTER 7

Togo was lost in the throes of another dream. He slept lightly, but was still dreaming. Now he found himself back on the beach of Norton Sound. It was seven years ago, and he was standing next to Boris. Running around and hopping at their feet was a small brown-gray puppy.

- "Come on, Togo! Let's run! I wanna run!"

Boris clapped his wings over his ears.

- "Vill you take dis kid for a run, already? He is driving me crazy!"

Togo was momentarily surprised to be immersed in this situation from his past, but he shook it off quickly.

Boris was staring at him.

- "VELL?! What are you waiting for? Personal invitation?"

Togo shook his head and laughed.

- "Alright, Boris...alright! We're going!"

Boris crossed his wings in front of him out of frustration, and began grumbling in Russian.

Togo shot him a glance out of the corner of his eye, and then turned to the excitable puppy.

- "Come on, Balto! Today I'm going to show you how to use your stride to increase the distance you can travel!" Togo started off running down the beach.

- "Hey", Balto called,

- "wait for me!" He took off running, kicking up sand right into Boris' beak.

It wasn't long before the young puppy caught up with him. Togo caught sight of Boris' old fishing boat, and was about to begin explaining to Balto the details of breathing while running, when he heard the voice again.

- "Togo..."

Togo came to an abrupt, sliding halt, digging his paws into the sand. Looking up at the deck of the boat, he saw the white wolf, staring down at him. He stared back up at her.

From behind him came Balto's youthful voice.

- "Togo? Why did you stop?"

Togo turned to look back, but found himself standing on the boat, looking down at the deck where he had just seconds before expected to see Balto standing. He drew back, and then turned to find the white wolf standing next to him. Turning his attention then down to the beach, he saw Balto looking up and calling to him...in slow motion. But he could no longer hear the puppy.

- "He loves you almost like a father, Togo", said the white wolf solemnly.

- "You have been good to him...a good teacher."

- "Togo!" It was Balto, down on the beach. He was jumping up and down, calling to Togo.

- "Togo!"

Togo shook his head, and then looked down at the puppy. He started to descend the plank, when he felt a sudden gust of cold air...and awoke, to find himself laying on a rock near the summit of Anvil Mountain.

- "Uncle Togo!"

Togo groggily shook his head to clear it. Was he still hearing Balto's young voice?

- "Uncle Togo! Help me, please!"

But that wasn't Balto's voice. It sounded like Belle! He stood up as quickly as he could, and scanned the surrounding rocks.

- "Belle?"

- "Down here! Help me! I'm slipping!"

Togo looked down and there, below him some yards away, was Belle. She was hanging onto an icy prominence, which was cracking and threatening to give way. Around her, the ice and rock had already broken free and fallen, and she was slowly losing her grip.

Without wasting time, and ignoring the arthritis burning in his joints, Togo quickly descended to within a few feet of her, but was stopped by a precarious ledge of slippery ice between the two of them. He could now hear the ice creaking and snapping, and his heart sunk. Below her was a fall of many feet to a rocky embankment. The fall would most certainly injure Belle severely, if not kill

her. He had to do something!

Belle screeched in fear, trying to scramble up onto the prominence, while it cracked in response. Togo could see the panic in her eyes.

- "Belle, try not to struggle! I'm coming!"

Belle was in tears, and her voice broke on her response.

- "But I'm afraid, uncle Togo! I can't hold on!"

Togo felt a surge of pity for her. He loved Belle as much as he did his own sons and daughters, and it broke his heart to see her so fearful and in such desperate straights.

- "I know, sweetheart, I know! But if you keep struggling, the ice could break loose. Try and stay calm, and trust me! You know I'd never let you down, kiddo!"

- "Y-yes, uncle To..." there was a loud crack, and Belle let out another screech. Still, the ice did not break.

As Togo was assessing the situation, he saw Balto and Dingo running up from below. But they, too, were separated from Belle, and would not be able to reach her. They both saw what was happening, and reacted with shock. Dingo, Belle's father, even more so.

- "BELLE! Hang on, baby! We're gonna get you out of there!" Dingo was awash with anxiety and fear for his daughter.

Balto looked up and spotted Togo trying to work his way to Belle, and he called up to him.

- "Togo! Can you reach her? I don't think we can!"

- "I'm not sure", Togo replied.

- "I've got some dangerous ice between her and I!"

Dingo pleaded with Togo.

- "Please, uncle Togo! Do something!"

That last plea tugged at Togo's heartstrings. He looked at the ledge between himself and Belle, and considered the distance. Much like it was once before...back in 1925. Only now, there was no water to catch him should he miss his mark. Only hard, slippery ice, which would propel him right off the ledge onto the rocks below.

- "I'll have to jump it - it's the only way!"

Balto and Dingo exchanged a worried glance. Balto looked back up at Togo, and his voice became grim.

- "And that's the only option?"

- "She doesn't have much time, Balto" Togo replied.

- "That ledge is about to give way."

As Togo responded to Balto's question, the white wolf appeared again, just behind them, in a swirl of snow and wind. Balto and Dingo apparently could not see her...but he did. And she looked up at him.

Balto shouted back to Togo.

- "Well, alright then. Jump! But be careful! Jump!"

Dingo also shouted up.

- "You can do it, uncle Togo! If anyone can, you can do it!"

Togo was suddenly overwhelmed with the memory of the incident on the ice floe in 1925. Standing

on the edge of the floe, and hearing Seppala encourage him on.

- "Jump, Togo! Jump boy! You can make it!" The two scenes meshed before his eyes. Togo looked down at Belle, her eyes wide with fright. He looked at Balto and Dingo, who gazed up with great concern and anxiety. And then he looked once more into the mysterious eyes of the white wolf, and his thoughts cleared. Nodding, he leapt.

Time seemed to come almost to a stand-still. He sailed upwards, but age had stolen much of his former grace and agility from him. He came down near the edge of the icy ledge, and began sliding towards Belle. As he struggled to gain some traction with his paws, he slid fast towards her, and the open air beyond. Panic began to take hold as he tried to gain some friction with his paws.

Then he hit the end of the ledge, and began to sail out into the open air and, gradually, downwards. As he did, he reached across and grabbed hold of Belle by the scruff of the neck. Just as he grabbed her, the prominence gave way. They began to free fall together. Realizing he only had seconds, Togo tossed Belle, with what strength remained in him, in the direction of Balto and Dingo.

Belle sailed down towards Balto, who leapt up and caught her gently in his jaws, and tumbled down into the snow around them. Dingo turned to follow, and sniffed around at the hole in a large snow drift Balto and Belle had created when they tumbled into it. He began digging at the snow, and found Balto laying on his back, with Belle overturned on his belly.

They each got back onto their feet, and cleared the snow. As they did, Balto shook the snow off of his fur, and took a look around.

- "Togo?" he called. There was no response.

Balto and Dingo began searching around the immediate area while Belle lay recovering from the emotional ordeal. It took a few minutes, but Dingo was the first to find him.

- "Dad? Over here..."

Balto turned. He heard Dingo's voice...the graveness in it. Swallowing hard, and feeling his heart sink, he rushed to join him.

He found Dingo standing over Togo, who was down on his side. His breathing was shallow, but he was not moving otherwise.

- "Togo...?"

Togo opened his eyes but, without moving his head, looked up at Balto.

- "Belle?"

- "She's alright, uncle Togo, thanks to you..." Dingo replied softly.

- "That's good." Togo grunted as his body quaked with painful spasms, and momentarily shut his eyes.

Balto leaned down to him, and spoke softly.

- "Thank you, Togo. You saved her life."

Togo managed a weak smile. He looked up again at Balto.

- "You've been a good friend, Balto. As good as anyone could have." Togo then turned his eyes to Dingo.

- "Dingo, you're a good father, and you've got a good girl there. She reminds me a lot..." He winced in response to a sharp pain, and then continued.

- "...a lot of myself when I was her age."

Dingo looked at Balto...there were tears in his eyes.

- "Can't we do something for him?"

Balto shook his head grimly.

- "I don't think so."

Belle came walking up to her father, and suddenly realized what was happening. She began to

sob.

- "Hey, you three...no tears", Togo replied.

- "I'll see you again...someday. Look to the Northern Lights...I'll be there, looking back!"

Togo felt another spasm of pain, and he winced in response. Balto looked over sadly at Dingo and, without exchanging any words, conveyed his message.

- "Come on, Belle" Dingo said. Let's go."

Belle looked up at her father sadly, and then rushed over to Togo, and gently nuzzled him for a long moment.

- "Goodbye, uncle" she sobbed. Getting up slowly, she joined her father, and they began their walk back to town.

Balto watched them go, and then lay down in front of Togo.

- "I'm gonna miss you, old friend..." His voice broke on the words, and tears continued to fall from his eyes.

For a few minutes, they lay in silence. And then Togo's breathing became labored.

- "Balto..." he said weakly.

- "Yes?" Balto replied.

- "It's...it's been...a good...run."

With that, the great hero exhaled his last breath.

For the first time in as long as he could remember, Balto sobbed openly. After a short time, he sat up, turned his head to the sky, and let loose a long, mournful howl, which was heard even in Nome.

For a long time, Balto lay beside the body of his friend. At long last, the sun began to dip down onto the western horizon, casting the sky into a canvas of bright colors...orange and pink, deep purple and dark blue.

Rising slowly, Balto nuzzled Togo's body, and then began the walk back towards town. He turned

for one last look, and then continued on down the mountain.

And from the heights, on Anvil Rock, Aniu, the white wolf, stood proudly. She turned her head to look back behind her just as Togo came up alongside and smiled. Together, they watched Balto go.

And then, in unison, they turned, and began to walk off. A breeze swirled around them, and then they were gone.

The End.