

Tale of the Wasteland

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My first Balto fanfiction. When the white wolf that Balto had met that fateful night appears, what kind of tale does this wild wanderer have to tell? And what does the future have in store for him?

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1 - Paths Crossed and Re-crossed

Tale of the Wasteland

Chapter One: Paths Crossed and Re-crossed

His name was Frost. He knew this much, at least. A loner was what he was; having had no pack since the last one he'd been a part of had been destroyed. Winter had come early this year, that much was certain, as he wandered through the icy days and nights alone. Then, one rough, wintry night, his path was crossed with that of a wolf-dog. The fellow was at the bottom of a ravine, weeping softly at some perceived failure on his part, at least until he noticed him standing there, and looked up; his sorrow mixed with some fear. But all Frost could think to do, at that point, was howl and try to offer some wordless encouragement to the young mixed-breed. At first, it had the opposite effect on the young stranger....He, at first, laid his head back down, and turned it away, so that his ashamed gaze was not on him. Then, the mixed-breed's ears pricked, and he slowly stood and looked up at the sheer ravine behind him; almost as though trying to gauge how much strength he was going to need in order to climb it. Then the younger canine placed a paw into one of Frost's pawprints, tilted his head back, and howled strongly. Up until this point, Frost had been walking away, thinking that there wasn't any more he could do; pausing when he heard the wolf-dog's howl. At this, Frost hid a smile.

"So he has the courage to embrace it, after all." Frost mused, as he returned to stand in front of the other, and they both howled; their song of triumph sending chills down the backs of those who were able to hear it.....

Winter of 1929: Nome, Alaska

Balto roused up from sound sleep with a start. In his mind's eye, he could still see the powerful form of the white wolf he'd met, almost four years earlier.

"I haven't thought of him even once in these four years since my return here that night with the medicine. I wonder if he's even still alive?" Balto mused, then turned his head and gazed softly at his mate. She slept peacefully beside him, her chin delicately balanced on his left forepaw, and the rest of her body was curled up against him. Once again, her belly was swollen with new life; she was only a week or so away from delivering her newest litter of puppies, and they couldn't be more excited at the prospect.

"I wonder how many there will be, this time? And if one of them proves to be more wolf than dog?" Balto wondered, as he slowly got up, trying not to wake Jenna by doing so. She sighed sleepily as he gently removed his paw from under her chin, and she smiled when he pulled a blanket over her in a loving effort to keep her as warm and comfortable as possible.

"I'll be back in a little while, Jenna." Balto whispered, before nuzzling her cheek, and then going outside for a walk. It was still fairly early in the morning, so not too many people were out and about. There were even fewer dogs wandering around, as well; he could only guess that most of them were still

other's throat. With a mighty effort, Frost leaped to one side, and jerked his neck out of the angry dog's reach. Then, almost expertly, Frost snagged Steele's collar in his teeth, and threw the snarling canine headlong into a snowdrift.

"Unless you want to injure your ego any further, dog, do not do that again." Frost growled, watching with narrowed eyes as Steele climbed out of the snow, and glared daggers into his pure white pelt. It was a look Frost promptly ignored, as he slowly made his way into town; not knowing why exactly he was doing this, but sensing that some help could be had here.

"*I can only hope I find it.*" Frost mused, as he cautiously walked down the main street.

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Kodi and his father had both known, right from the moment that they'd heard Steele's enraged snarls, that something was up. They now raced to the scene, the snow under their paws flying up in a fine white mist behind them. However, they stopped short when they came upon an unusual sight; there, walking slowly towards them, was a huge male wolf! His proud head was lowered in fatigue, and his eyes, though wary, showed clearly the pain and sorrow he carried within him.

"*I don't believe it! It's him! It's the wolf I saw that night, four years ago!*" Balto thought, as the wolf became aware of their presences, and looked directly at them.

"So, we meet again." the wolf murmured, seeming to also share Balto's feelings of irony at the strange situation they now found themselves in.

"Yeah.....But what are you doing here? Why did you come here?" Balto asked.

"I don't know what brought me here, exactly.....When you have nowhere else to go, your paws can take you just about anywhere." the wolf stated, almost casually; smiling slightly when he noticed the curious looks he was getting from Kodi.

"Speaking of paws; yours' are bleeding pretty badly. Did you run all the way here?" Kodi questioned, knowing from experience just how much distance the white wolf had to have covered before arriving there with paws that badly cut. The wolf regarded him for a moment, then nodded.

"Most of the way, yes. Until recently, I was staying the winter with a pack near the mountains. I guess I outstayed my welcome, and the new alpha male elected to send me on my way." the wolf quietly said, then added, with a slight smirk, "And I have the many bumps and bruises to prove it."

"I see.....Come on. The least we can do is offer you some shelter for the night." Balto stated, as he turned to head back in the direction he and Kodi had come from.

"Thank you." the wolf murmured, gratefully.

"Don't mention it." Balto replied, then added, out of curiosity, "By the way, what do you call yourself?"

"Frost....At least, that was the name I was given." the wolf replied, as he followed the pair to the old trawler; sighing somewhat in relief when they arrived inside, and he was finally able to sit down.

"Your name suits you well, since our paths first crossed in a snowstorm." Balto murmured, getting a slight nod from Frost in agreement.

"Hey, Dad, I'm going to go back and get something to treat Frost's paws, okay?" Kodi asked, before trotting briskly back into town.

"Hopefully the humans here won't get the wrong idea." Frost muttered, as he watched the younger canine go.

"I guess we'll soon see.....By the way, I'm going to drop by later with some food. Also have to make sure Steele doesn't raise a fuss about your being here." Balto said; getting a nod of approval from the wolf for his foresight.

"Go to it, then. I will more than likely sleep till one of you returns, anyway." Frost assured him, and as Balto started to walk away from the old boat.

"What a strange turn of events, this is! The one who had helped me regain my lost confidence, is here.....It seems I will finally be able to repay the debt I owe him!" Balto mused, as he galloped back into town, intent on the task at hand.

2 - Another Strange Twist

Chapter Two: Another Strange Twist

The sight of a slumbering white wolf inside of the wrecked trawler had, in no uncertain terms, almost given him a heart-attack. Boris was still collecting his wits, when Muk and Luk, the two resident polar bear cubs, had trundled up and gotten a look at the newcomer.

"Do ya think he's stayin', Uncle Boris?" Muk asked; for once keeping his voice soft so he wouldn't disturb the sleeping canine.

"No way of telling." Boris muttered, then thought, "*But he isn't going anywhere, anytime soon.....His paws have seen to that.*"

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Jenna sighed, as she woke from slumber; the vigorous kicking from her unborn pups bringing her back from the land of dreams.

"I'll be glad when I can finally get a full night's sleep again! This makes the fifth time in a few hours!"

Jenna mused, ruefully, as she made her way to the door and barked to get let out (since she was now too big to fit through the pet door). Within minutes, she was standing in the snow beyond the door; her ears pricking when she heard what sounded like a commotion in the direction of the wrecked trawler.

"*Wonder what's going on now?*" she wondered, as she slowly made her way in the direction. Eventually, she did get there, and was surprised by what she found, sleeping within the old boat's hull.

"*A wolf! But what is he doing here?*" Jenna silently asked, as she cautiously edged her way towards him.

"You sure about that, Miss Jenna?" Boris asked, as he appeared beside her; startling her slightly.

"Boris! Please don't do that!" Jenna gasped, in surprise; backing away from the wolf as she said that.

"Sorry. What are you doing this far away from home? And with a belly full of pups, no less?" Boris asked, as he pointed out Jenna's distended belly with an arched eyebrow.

"Just curious about what is going on. I heard something happen, and came out here to find out what it was. I didn't realize that.....well....." Jenna trailed off, yet gave the wolf a sidelong glance in an effort to complete her thought. A thought that went unfinished, when she found herself gazing into the wolf's tired amber eyes.

"Well' what? That a wolf is resting just outside of your town?" the wolf asked, wearily. Jenna nodded.

"Yes.....What brought you here?" Jenna asked, hesitantly.

"This and that.....Mostly my paws are too badly cut up to continue." the wolf murmured; noticing that Jenna seemed nervous and wary of him, and speaking softly so he wouldn't scare her. At this, Jenna looked down, and saw that what the wolf had just said was true; his paws were a mess of lacerations, almost all of which were bleeding heavily.

"They look serious...." Jenna said, as she, without even realizing it, entered the boat and got a closer look.

"Two dogs have just gone to get something to treat them, and some food.....since I obviously can't

hunt, right now." the wolf stated.

"I see....By the way, what do you call yourself?" Jenna asked, as she lay down in front of him.

"Frost." the wolf replied, then gave her what seemed to be a concerned look, "Are you sure you should be out here? You look as though you should be searching for a den to birth in, right now."

"I'm fine. I have at least one more week." Jenna reassured him; a bit surprised and touched by his worry for her, even though he had only just met her.

"Balto had told us about a wolf he'd met on the way back. Are you that wolf?" Boris questioned, from the relative safety of the edge of the hole.

"He was one of the dogs that had just left from here, correct?" Frost in turn asked; tilting his head to one side to show that he was curious about where this topic was taking them. Both the snow goose and husky nodded.

"He's my mate, and the father of the pups I am carrying." Jenna added.

"Then, to answer the goose's question; yes. I am that wolf." Frost stated, quietly.

"You deserve our gratitude, then. By helping him regain his confidence, you also indirectly saved Nome.....and you saved my human's life, as well." Jenna murmured; giving him a grateful smile, even as she blinked a few tears back. At this, Frost could only manage an abashed look.

"I did nothing special, just gave encouragement where it was needed. That is all. Your mate did the true lifesaving, that night." Frost said, humbly, even as a mischievous glint appeared in his amber eyes,

"Yet, if I had known there would be such a beauty waiting in this town for him, I would have pulled the sled myself!"

"Huh?!" Jenna almost yelled, even as Boris chuckled and shook his head.

"Miss Jenna, I do believe you've just been flattered by a most roguish wolf!" Boris chortled, as he now confidently approached Frost, threw a wing about his broad shoulders, and winked to let the wolf know that he was joking around. Frost arched an eyebrow, then feigned a look of insult.

"I'm not anything of the sort! I just happen to know beauty when I see it!" Frost argued; inwardly smiling when he saw the fervent blush showing through even the fur on her face. Yet, before Jenna could say anything else, her face suddenly took on a wince, and she curled in on herself.

"T-too soon....." Jenna whispered, knowing that the snow goose and wolf would know what she meant. Already, Frost could tell that her scent was changing; her body readying itself for birthing. And after that, he noticed an even more disturbing scent.....

"Is there anything here we can transport her on?" Frost asked, as he abruptly stood and made his way towards the hole in the hull.

"Not here." Boris replied, worriedly, as he placed a wing on the husky's shoulder to try and comfort her.

"S-sled.....M-my human's.....s-sled....." Jenna moaned, almost incoherently.

"Where is your home? And where can I find the sled?" Frost questioned, gently.

"S-second.....to last house.....near the edge.....of town.....Th-the sled.....is outside.....near the back door....." Jenna whimpered; struggling to articulate through the contractions.

"I'll be back as soon as I can. Hang in there." Frost murmured, as he leaped out of the ship and raced back towards town; ignoring the blood flying from his paws as he ran.

"I'm not going to let another litter die.....nor am I going to let another female share in my mate's fate. That much I swear." Frost thought, as he dashed past surprised humans and dogs alike, in his self-imposed race against time.

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“Quite. With the townsfolk now fully awake, even two dogs will have some difficulty getting here before the rest of the pups arrive.....and we don’t know how many she’s carrying. I would rather avoid risking the pups’ or their mother’s lives by being over-cautious with my own safety.” Frost said, boldly.

“Right.....” Boris agreed, as he hurriedly adjusted the leather straps to fit on the white wolf’s larger frame. When that was done, Frost ushered for the goose to get on the sled as well, and hold Jenna down.

“Hang on! This is going to be a bit rough.” Frost warned, then surged forward. Through the haze Jenna’s mind was currently in, she could feel some amazement at the wolf’s strength. The small sled was almost flying across the snow; at some points not even touching it, as he rushed back to town. *“If it weren’t for the fact that he’s a pure wolf, I would swear that he was an incredible sled dog, himself!”* Jenna mused, distractedly; not even noticing when the wolf-drawn sled rushed into town and swiftly ended up in front of her home.

“Frost!” two male voices shouted, as their owners galloped over to him. To the wolf’s evident relief, there was Balto and Kodi; panting with exertion, yet their eyes widening when they saw Jenna on the sled.

“Mom! Are you okay?!” Kodi yelped, as he rushed over to her side.

“Th-they’re coming early.....” Jenna panted, as Boris showed them the newborn that lay nestled in the blanket near Jenna’s belly.

“I see.....” Balto muttered, then glanced at Frost; a new appreciation for the white wolf’s courage emerging within him.

“Get your humans’ attention, Balto. Your mate needs the help and shelter only they can provide, now.” Frost said, as the wolf-dog nodded and rushed up to the door; scratching at it for all he was worth.

“What about you, Frost? How’re you holding up?” Kodi asked, concernedly.

“My paws hurt like hell, but at least the following pups will arrive in safety.....That dog I’d met earlier.....his scent was far too close for my liking. He’d kill those pups, if he had the opportunity.” Frost replied, grimly.

“Steele.....Then you did the right thing, then.....Thank you.” Balto said, gratefully; returning to their sides when he heard the humans’ footsteps coming towards the door.

“Think nothing of it.” Frost replied, honestly, then looked up when the front door opened, and a red-haired little girl rushed out.

“Jenna! Daddy, Jenna’s having her puppies! Hurry!” the girl shouted, urgently; ignoring the fact the sled not only had her pet husky and a newborn puppy on it, but a snow goose as well. Nor did she realize that a wolf was currently strapped to the small vehicle, until her father got a closer look.

“Rosie! Get away from there! That isn’t a dog at all! It’s a wolf!” the man yelled, when he’d picked Jenna up, and then carefully backed away. At this, the little girl turned and gave Frost a confused look; how on earth had a wolf ended up harnessed to her sled?! With the boldness only a child could show, Rosie slowly approached Frost, and held out one of her hands. Confused to no end about this, Frost at first sniffed the proffered hand, then gingerly placed his right forepaw in it! At this, even Balto and Kodi exchanged stunned looks; they certainly hadn’t seen this coming!

“Well I’ll be.....” the girl’s father muttered, when he’d seen the unbelievable happen right in front of him, then noticed that blood was dripping from the paw Rosie now held in her small hand, and that it stained the snow beneath the three on the ground.

“He’s hurt! His feet are bleeding! Daddy, let’s help him! Please?” Rosie begged. With a longsuffering sigh that seemed to tell Balto, Kodi, and Frost that he might end up regretting it, the man then nodded.

“Let’s get Jenna inside and comfortable first, then we’ll see what we can do for him, okay?” the father asked; and got a fervent nod from his daughter as an answer.

“Okay!” Rosie agreed, then started to remove the harness from the wolf’s powerful frame.

“Such an odd turn of events, wouldn’t you say?” Frost asked, when he’d watched the humans return inside, then usher for them to follow.

“Yeah.....But at least it looks like you won’t have to worry about your paws, or where your next meal will come from.....Rosie seems to have adopted you, as well.....” Balto murmured, as they stepped inside, and the door was closed behind them.

3 - More Unusual Twists

Chapter Three: More Unusual Twists

To say that the humans were surprised by how quiet and seemingly gentle Frost acted was an understatement. With the boundless patience only a pet dog would show, Frost allowed Rosie's father to treat and bandage his injured paws.

"You're not taking offense at this, are you?" Balto later asked, when he and the white wolf had lain down in front of the fireplace.

"No. Why would I?" Frost in turn questioned; sighing with relief that the weight was off of his now-bandaged paws.

"I just couldn't see you as the type who would accept help and shelter from humans. You'd seemed too independent and wild back then." Balto said; surprised when Frost snorted slightly, and shook his head.

"Even a so-called 'symbol of the wild' needs some leisure time every now and again.....And after what I've been through, I think I'm at least a little deserving of it." Frost replied, then ruefully added, "Though I must admit, in some ways I am envious."

"Why?" Balto heard himself ask.

"You've got a beautiful and loyal mate. If I thought I could get away with it, I'd find one like her." Frost said; the mischievous glint returning to his golden eyes when he saw Balto's almost dumbfounded expression. Then, with an almost exasperated sigh, Balto shook his head, then gave the wolf a grave look.

"You'd said that Steele had been dangerously close by when Jenna started giving birth. How close was he?" Balto asked, quietly; almost afraid of what the answer would be.

"Close enough that he was a danger to her and the pups.....He was coming from downwind, so I almost didn't catch his scent until it was nearly too late. We got lucky this time, Balto, but I can't say if luck will save her, next time." Frost murmured, looking up when Rosie ran in and excitedly hugged his neck, and then Balto's.

"Eight! Jenna had eight puppies, this time!" Rosie shouted, in delight; unaware that the white wolf was giving her a bemused look.

"Eight.....I wonder how many will turn out to act more like wolves than dogs, this time?" Balto mused, aloud, when the child had bounced away again.

"I take it one turned out that way in the last litter?" Frost questioned.

"Yeah. My daughter Aleu." Balto muttered, as he remembered what had happened that time, and instantly started dreading the next time. Frost only chuckled at the chagrin on the mixed-breed's face, and shook his head.

"I heard something about her in my travels. She's in Nava's pack, isn't she?" Frost asked. Balto nodded.

"She joined that pack last winter. I wonder how she's doing now?" Balto sighed, with true parental concern for his headstrong daughter, in his voice.

"Last I'd heard, they're doing well. She hasn't chosen a mate yet, though." Frost stated, then yawned and glared at the roaring fire behind them, "The main concern I have now, however, is why this confounded fire is making me sleepy."

"Something you'll have to get used to, I guess, while your paws heal." Balto said, smiling when he saw how drowsy the larger canine already was.

one Steele used to lead; the one that had brought the medicine back from Nenana.” Balto stated. Once again, they were lying in front of the fireplace; the heat and roaring of the flames making for a calm atmosphere to talk about what had gone on only hours before.

“And that was the same team you’d led back here, after so much hardship. An unusual twist of fate, that I would be chosen to lead that particular team.” Frost muttered, as he ruefully shook his head; smiling slightly as he did so. The sense of irony had not been lost on either of them.

“Got that right.” Balto agreed, then asked, “But what do you think? Would you be interested in doing something like that?”

“I really can’t say, at this point. While it may have been true that all dogs descended from wolves, it seems strange that the people of this town have accepted a wolf so easily into their fold. Part of me says to be wary of something like this.....but the other part just thinks it could make for an interesting tale to tell future generations. A wolf who spent some time as a ‘sled dog’.....Truth be told, I am curious.”

Frost murmured; turning his head when a knock was heard at the door, and Rosie’s father answered it. “It looks like the vet is here to check on your paws. Depending on what he says, it could be a matter of time before you are able to satisfy that curiosity.” Balto said, as the kind-faced man entered, and took a good look at Frost.

“Well, there’s a sight I never thought I’d see! He certainly is a wolf, all right!” the vet said, as he slowly approached, kneeled, and gently scratched Frost’s ears. Balto chuckled softly when he noticed Frost unconsciously leaning towards the kind human; enjoying the feel of the weathered fingers massaging the back of his head.

“Quite the quiet fellow, I must say. I’ve never seen a wolf react like this. It’s almost as though he’d been raised by humans.” the vet murmured, then carefully lifted one of Frost’s bandaged paws and gently removed the gauze from around it.

“How does it look?” Rosie’s father asked, as he also got closer and kneeled beside the vet; reaching over and scratching Balto’s ears as he spoke.

“These cuts are quite deep, but they should heal on their own, as long as he doesn’t overdo it. Give him about two months or more, then he’ll be as good as new.” the vet replied as he started applying more medicine to the lacerated pads, then wrapped them in clean bandages. He did this to the other three paws, as well, before he stood up again and went to wash his hands.

“Two or three months, is it? Shouldn’t be too hard to wait.” Frost muttered.

“No, it shouldn’t.” Balto agreed, then thought, “*And by then, we’ll know just which pups in Jenna’s new litter will act more like wolves than dogs.....*”