

BLAZE

By Liane Fazio

Jake emerged from the steamy bathroom with a towel wrapped around his waist. He padded into the kitchen craving his morning coffee. His red husky, Blaze, waited for him by the refrigerator, tail wagging.

"Alright, you spoiled little baby girl," Jake teased. "I'll get you your cheese." He grabbed his creamer and Blaze's favorite treat from the fridge. She sat patiently, tail wagging, as he handed her a piece of American cheese. With delicate grace, she accepted it and trotted happily out of the kitchen. Jack chuckled, shook his head, and finished brewing his coffee.

After a quick breakfast, Jake went into his bedroom. Blaze lay sprawled on his bed, eyes following his every move. "Must be nice," he mused, petting her head. She blinked lazily, unimpressed by his morning routine. "Now remember," Jake said, "I'll be home early today. I have a big job interview so wish me luck." Blaze yawned, seemingly uninterested. "And if all goes well, we'll go for a nice long w-a-l-k when I get home." Her ears perked up and Jake smiled.

He reached for the clothes hanger atop the closet door, but it was no longer there. Instead, his freshly ironed interview clothes lay in a heap on the bedroom floor with dog paw marks and fur on them.

"Blaze! What did you do?" Jake scolded. She rolled her eyes, unapologetic. Jake gathered his furry clothes and headed to the laundry room. After a quick spin in the dryer, he returned to his bedroom, dressed, checked his phone, and pulled up his driving app. The route to his

interview was marked in green showing no traffic. Leaving now would give him at least fifteen extra minutes.

“OK, sweetie, I’m going now,” Jake called to Blaze. “Be a good girl, and when I get home, you’ll get a nice t-r-e-a-t.” Bag in hand, he approached the garage door, where Blaze sat, blocking his way.

“Shoo. Daddy has to go now.” Blaze tilted her head, unyielding. Jake attempted to reason with her. “Listen, I’ll be back soon. And then I’ll play with you the rest of the day, OK?” Blaze yawned and lay down, unimpressed.

Jake hesitated. “Fine. I’ll go out the front door.” But as he turned away, Blaze stood up and unleashed her signature Husky scream.

“Shh! Stop!” Jake pleaded. “What do you want? I’ll get you anything you want! Just please, shh! The neighbors will complain again.” Blaze stopped howling and her eyes fixed on Jake. “Really?” he asked. “Do you want a bone?” Blaze just stared at Jake. “More cheese? How about some cheese?” Blaze blinked.

“A new toy?” Jake asked her excitedly. Blaze lay down again, uninterested. Jake checked his driving app, and he would still make it to the interview on time, but he wouldn’t have the extra time cushion on which he was planning.

Kneeling, Jake put his bag on the floor. “Come here, girl.” Blaze got up and went to Jake, offering her paw. Jake shook it and asked, “What’s going on? Why won’t you let me leave? You’re never like this. Do you feel OK?”

Blaze licked his face, and Jake petted her head and gave her a hug. “I’ll bring you a bone when I come home, OK? But I have to go now. I love you.” He stood, Blaze watching as he

walked to the door. Before closing it, he turned back. Blaze remained on the floor with her eyes fixed on him.

In the driveway, Jake checked his driving app. The route was now marked in yellow, but he could still make it to his interview on time if he hurried. He backed out and started his journey.

Jake was only ten minutes from his home when he ran into traffic. The four-lane highway was at a standstill, packed with vehicles in both directions. His driving app now marked his route in an angry red. Some desperate drivers used the grassy median to make U-turns. Sirens wailed behind Jake, and he glanced in his side mirror, watching fire trucks and ambulances weave through the opposite lanes. Curious onlookers spilled out of their cars and Jake joined them.

"What's going on?" Jake asked another driver.

"Bad accident up ahead," the man replied, shielding his eyes against the sun as he watched the emergency vehicles drive past.

"What happened?"

"Semi versus four or five cars. One vehicle's wedged under the truck. They're trying to pry it loose. Some cars are flipped over, and some people were ejected. It's a nightmare. Heard they're calling in the life flight helicopter."

"Jesus," Jake muttered. "Whe...When did this happen?" he stammered.

"About twenty minutes ago. I saw most of it happen. Damndest thing," he shook his head.

"I pulled over and dialed 911."

Twenty minutes ago, Jake thought and his stomach churned. That's when he fought with Blaze, trying to leave for his job interview. A sudden wave of dizziness and nausea came over

him and he stumbled to the side of the road, collapsing onto the grass. He sat there, breathing deeply, the world spinning.

“You OK?” the man asked Jake.

“Yeah, I’m great,” Jake replied smiling.

Later, back home, Jake unloaded the groceries on the kitchen island. Blaze trotted in from Jake’s bedroom and stretched luxuriously. Jake dropped to the floor, wrapping his arms around her, squeezing until she whined.

“You are the goodest girl, you know that?” Jake whispered. “I love you so much!”

Blaze’s tail thumped against the floor in a rhythmic beat of devotion.

“Guess what I got you?” Jake asked, pulling out a massive femur bone from the bag. “The butcher saved this just for you.” He unwrapped it and slid it into Blaze’s food bowl. She dove in, gnawing with gusto.

Jake lay beside her, tears streaming. “Thank you for making me late, my Blaze,” he murmured. “I owe you everything. I love you.” As Blaze chewed contentedly on her fresh bone, Jake wondered if fate had a peculiar way of saving lives, sometimes even through stubborn Huskies.