



A NEW AMERICAN SERIAL

TEACHERS GUIDE

A BARN CHRISTMAS

BY MARK RUSSELL

PICTURES BY CHAD W. BECKERMAN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| INTRODUCTION | 3 |
| BUSTER THE BLACK LAB SERIES | 3 |
| A BARN CHRISTMAS STORY SYNOPSIS | 3 |
| EPISODE LESSON PLANS | 4 |
| BUSTER THE BLACK LAB LLC | 5 |
| PRINCIPAL OFFICES | 5 |
| EMAIL ADDRESS | 5 |
| WEB SITE | 5 |
| INTERNET STORE | 5 |
| A BARN CHRISTMAS | 6 |
| EPISODE ONE – TRADITIONS | 6 |
| EPISODE TWO – TREE TO GET READY... (1A)(2A) | 11 |
| EPISODE THREE – TREE TOPS (1A) | 16 |



INTRODUCTION

BUSTER THE BLACK LAB SERIES

A Barn Christmas is one in a series of adventure stories about a dog called Buster. Buster lives on a family farm in an agricultural community over half a century ago.

Buster is a worthy successor to a long line of classic American dog heroes like Lassie and Old Yeller. His character profile is meant to provide children of all ages with a positive role model. Buster is loyal, kind, well-spoken, treats both animals and humans alike with a sense of caring, and has a habit of doing the right thing under difficult circumstances.

He is an active protagonist who confronts, anticipates, and reacts to situations and circumstances that threaten his environment. Buster is always part of the solution in each story, which makes him unique in the genre. Rather than going to get help, Buster is the help.

Buster's role on the farm is described in the stories as being the "barn dog." That means he is the animal foreman, or the character that is in charge of keeping all the other animals informed about what is going on, and how they can help the farm succeed. He leads and disciplines all the animals in his domain.

Like most American dog heroes, one of his principal jobs is to also be his master's best friend.

The farm family consists of Farmer Jones, and his wife, Mrs. Jones. They have two children, Amy who is six, and Billy, who is eight years old.

Their farm is clustered among a group of other like farms, whose community creates challenges that enliven this adventure series.

A BARN CHRISTMAS STORY SYNOPSIS

Our story begins with Buster reading a traditional Christmas Eve poem on Christmas Eve. He pauses during the reading so that the young mice, who are all clustered about at his feet, can fill in the appropriate blank. Which they do with enthusiasm, and good cheer. Buster then remembers his days as a puppy in the Jones household, when he had his first Christmas.



Two mice have broken a rule and entered the Jones farmhouse during the Christmas season, only to be completely enthralled by the Christmas tree they find. They spread the word upon their return to the barn, and soon the entire barn wants a tree of their own.

Buster and Bernie the mouse hatch a plan to “borrow” the previously used Jones family Christmas tree. Buster succeeds in dragging the tree into the barn.

His success is greeted with disappointment, once the assembled animals realize that this isn’t the tree they hoped it might be – that is to say, the one they’d heard about. But Buster soon talks them into decorating the tree with their own ornaments, and the Christmas spirit comes alive in the barn.

Buster corrals the Jones family the next day after church, and Amy describes the tree as a “miracle.”

This heartwarming tale is indeed about the miracle of Christmas, and how and perhaps why it lives on in our culture so strongly.

EPISODE LESSON PLANS

A lesson plan is provided for each episode. A Barn Christmas has three episodes. The number of episodes run each week will depend on the agreement Buster the Black Lab LLC has with your local newspaper.

Each Lesson Plan has three sections –

Vocabulary – challenging vocabulary words and phrases will be identified and explained

Newspaper Activities– students will be asked to use their paper to answer questions posed in this section. The purpose is to help the student explore the newspaper, understand its usefulness, and enjoy it.

Questions and Answers – important concepts, plot, and other thought provoking questions will be posed, permitting the teacher to lead a productive classroom discussion.



BUSTER THE BLACK LAB LLC

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A BARN CHRISTMAS

EPISODE ONE – TRADITIONS

VOCAB

Stirring – Verb, meaning to move around, especially briskly. To be active.

Finery – Noun, meaning elaborate adornment, especially fine clothing and accessories.

Squabbling – Verb, meaning to engage in a petty argument or quarrel.

Shimmered- Verb, meaning to shine with a subdued, flickering light.

Coaxing- Verb, meaning to persuade or try to persuade by pleading or flattery. To cajole.

NEWSPAPER ACTIVITIES

- Try to identify announcements in your newspaper from different religious denominations celebrating this traditional season. How are they unique? And in what part of the newspaper do they appear?
- What also happens at this time of the year, right around Christmas, on December 21st? Is there any mention of it in the weather section of the paper? What statistics appear in the weather section, and why is that important for the readers?

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. ***What do you think of Buster so far? Are there any character traits that you notice?***
 - a. He's playful. At the beginning of the story he is waiting for the young mice to complete the line to a well-known Christmas poem 'Twas the Night Before Christmas, encouraging them to yell out the answer.
 - b. He's a leader. He is clearly the center of attention in this opening scene.
 - c. He's friendly. During this expected and well-known moment in the annual festivities, Buster makes contact with his friend Bernie the mouse, who is dressed appropriately for this gala event.
2. ***Why do you think the story starts out this way?***
 - a. Traditions can be heartwarming, celebratory events that can take years to develop. But in traditions lie cultural affirmations that are important to communities that recognize and act on them. In this story a tradition was created in the barn where there was none before. It shows that with effort and commitment, new and positive events can be incorporated into life on a farm, indeed anywhere.
 - b. This is a traditional flashback structure, where the reader starts at the end point, and then is lead back to the steps that got the characters to that end point.
3. ***Can we guess why the mice were not permitted into the farm house during the Christmas season?***
 - a. This is a perplexing part of the tale that Buster does not explain. However, one of the chickens tells her chick that Christmas isn't for them. That is a comment that perhaps implies that there is some resentment among the farm animals, and how they see themselves as being treated differently than the occupants of the farm house.
 - b. The fact that the story of the Christmas tree spreads like wildfire throughout the barn quite quickly tells a similar story.
 - c. Perhaps Buster didn't think he could replicate the good feeling of Christmas Day in the barn. Turns out he was wrong, of course.
4. ***What does Farmer Jones mean when he says that "these are the Christmases of my childhood, only better"?***
 - a. He means that he can sense all the joy he felt as a child, but now has the additional happiness of having given that to his own children.



“Twas the night before Christmas,” (2a) said Buster as solemnly as he could.

“When all through the house,” he tried to remember to pace himself.

“Not a creature was **stirring**,” and paused before the next line.

“Not even a...a what?” he asked? (1a)

“A mouse!” yelled all the young mice as they laughed, sitting at the feet of this 80-pound black lab with his aging Santa’s hat. (1b)

“Not even a ...a what?” he said again, lifting his paw to his ear and cocking his head.

“A MOUSE!” they all shrieked excitedly.

Everyone at this Christmas Eve party – the chickens, the cows, the horses, the barn cats, and the pigs, knew this traditional moment was coming, and still laughed. (3c) He winked at his friend Bernie who was the head mouse in the barn, and had come to their annual Christmas party in all his mouse finery – a strip of a red and white sock as his scarf, a leather glove for a winter coat, and a top hat. Bernie smiled warmly, and nodded at Buster. (1c)

As the Jones’ family’s barn dog, Buster made sure every one knew his job and did it. He also stopped the **squabbling**, for instance, between the dirty pigs and the clean horses. Buster was a cheerleader too, encouraging the cows, the chickens, and the cats to do their very best. Buster made sure that all Farmer Jones’ wishes were carried out, and in turn also promptly brought any barn problems to his attention with a well-timed bark or two.

There didn’t used to be any kind of Christmas in the barn. It started in the unlikeliest of ways. (2b) A couple of mice broke a rule, for which they were severely reprimanded, by going into the house one Christmas season. (3a) They couldn’t believe what they saw in the living room – a sparkling fir tree that **shimmered** in the low light from the fire. They were stunned by its shiny leaves of colors they’d never seen.

Soon the word spread. (3b)

“I heard it was twenty feet tall, with flashing green and blue lights,” announced Harold, the oldest of the ducks, to a group of chickens who had gathered to discuss the matter.

“And a star from the night sky right at the top of it,” put in a chicken called Daisy.



“Why can’t we have one, mother?” yelled her chicks, while they raced around, kicking up a cloud of dust.

“We’re just chickens,” she said, “Christmas isn’t for us.” (3a)

The next day Bernie the mouse had pushed open his front door – a loose board next to Buster’s bed near the main entrance, and talked his ear off about how everyone wanted a tree.

“When did it have to be planted? Or did Farmer Jones get it from a special tree farm?” Bernie wanted to know.

“Was it all of trouble to water, or require special attention? And was that why Buster didn’t want the barn mice in the house?”

Buster smiled remembering his first Christmas when he was barely a puppy. He too had been overwhelmed. He back-pedaled out of the living room as fast as he could when he first saw this gigantic tree that hadn’t been there the night before. How could it have grown so fast?

No amount of **coaxing** by the Jones children, Amy and Billy, could convince Buster to go back in there the next day. “Anything that could grow that fast must need to eat all of,” he thought to himself. Could puppies be on the menu?

The next night six-year old Amy picked him up after supper, and took him squirming into the living room where she sat down on the sofa.

“Look at them,” she whispered to him.

“Just look at all the presents.”

Buster didn’t know what “presents” were, all he could see was the tree. It had grown shiny new fruits – red apples, bright yellow pears, and huge dark green grapes. They glistened in the dancing light of the fireplace.

Beneath the wondrous tree there was more. From maybe its roots burst a dazzling landscape of color. Red and green grasses wound around many of the square, and circular shapes.

“Look at them all, Buster, it’s Christmas. It’s Christmas.”

His puppy fear and awe vanished several days later when one morning the family gathered in the living room. Farmer and Mrs. Jones sat encamped on the sofa, coffee mugs in hand.



“Each of you kids pick out a present for someone to open,” instructed Mrs. Jones.

Amy immediately came back with one that was labeled, “For Mom, From Amy.” Billy had one for Amy. Amy’s present was a large box that said it was “From Santa.”

Putting her own present aside, Mrs. Jones said “You go first, Amy.”

Amy carefully untied the strings. Next she peeled away the blue skin. Beneath that Buster saw another layer, this one firm, brown, and quite stiff. It parted in the center and opened straight up. Amy reached in with both hands. Out came fluffy white paper. Then, she found it.

“Oh, I love her!” squealed Amy, as she lifted out a doll in a blue and white dress.

Soon eight-year old Billy was showing off his new toy tractor to his father.

For Buster, the room gradually turned into a paper playground. He’d charge into a box half-filled with the white softness, and his world would go head over heels over head.

Toys kept coming out time after time. Each of which brought forth a child’s shout of joy.

Farmer Jones, his tousled hair sticking straight up on the back of his head, rocked with laughter in his dressing gown. He clutched Mrs. Jones, and kissed her warmly on the cheek.

“These are the Christmases of my childhood, only better.” (4a) She smiled back at him, and they held each other tightly.

Join us next time as Buster decides whether or not the barn can have a tree of its own, and how they should go about it. Don’t forget to visit us on the web at <http://www.cafepress.com/bustergear> for all your Buster Gear.



EPISODE TWO – TREE TO GET READY... (1A)(2A)

VOCAB

Succession – Noun, meaning a number of persons or things following one another in an order or a sequence.

Manage – Verb, meaning to bring about or accomplish, to make something happen.

Peg – Noun, meaning a pin of wood or other material driven into something, from which one can hang things.

Gleefully – Adverb, meaning full of exultant joy, merry, happy.

Glinted – Verb, meaning to make a momentary flash of light or sparkle.

NEWSPAPER ACTIVITIES

- Where can you find news about teams in the newspaper? The sports section? The business section? Why are teams important in our communities?
- Does the newspaper cover stories in which citizens are disappointed, either in one another, or with their government? What sections of the newspaper do those stories appear in?
- Find a Christmas story in your paper if there is one. If not, make up your own. What would you say in this story and why? Remember the “who, what, when, where, and why” rule.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

1. *Is the title a play on words?*
 - a. This is called an **onomatopoeia**. That just means it sounds like another word. In this the word is “three.”
2. *Why would the author title this section using that onomatopoeia?*
 - a. This is a rather nice word play based on the phrases from a famous popular song that includes the phrase, “one for the money, two for the show, three to get ready, four to go.” In this case, Buster and Bernie are getting the tree ready, so it may remind the reader of ways in which “tree,” and “three” sound so similar.
3. *Why does Buster agree to a plan to get the tree in the first place?*
 - a. Much like his edict that mice stay out of the farm house during the Christmas season, this isn’t clear. Perhaps he does it because of the general clamor for a tree that is brought to his attention by Bernie the mouse. What do your students think?
4. *Why does Leo the horse say “So this is Christmas?” at the end of the episode? What exactly does he mean, and why does he speak for all the other animals?*
 - a. Rumors have exactly that effect on those that promulgate them. Christmas to the barn animals suddenly was a larger than life experience, beyond everything they had ever known. For them, Christmas was wrapped up in a magical tree. Instead, Buster appears with a quite lifeless object that clearly isn’t larger than life, and obviously not magical. However, of course, this permits the animals to learn the lessons of what Christmas is all about. And that is giving of yourself to others. Freely, and with no expectation of getting anything in return.

In our previous episode, Buster the Black Lab remembered how the idea of having Christmas in the barn began. Two mice had come upon the Jones family tree, and soon everyone in the barn wanted one. What was Buster to do?

In today’s episode, Buster and his friend Bernie the mouse decide on a plan.



For Buster this once-a-year December celebration was always exciting. Since he was the only barn animal allowed in the house, he was the only one who really knew Christmas.

Yes, Christmas was a tree. But it was so much more.

“Buster,” said Bernie, poking him in the ear, “Are you listening to me?”

“What I’ve been telling you is that we need a tree of our own.”

“I know,” replied Buster “I’m thinking, I’m thinking. (3a) Look, here’s what happens. Every year, maybe a week, maybe two after the special morning, Farmer Jones and I might come in for lunch, or maybe a dinner, and Mrs. Jones will say, ‘It’s ready.’ Then he’ll go into the living room and take the tree outside. Usually he leans it up against the old tool shed. It’ll stay there for a week, maybe more, before he cuts it up. What I was thinking was that’s maybe when we could borrow it.”

“I’ll get four of my strongest mice, and we’ll see if we can’t drag it into the barn,” said Bernie.

Buster smiled at his friend.

“I’ll tell you what, why don’t you let me do the dragging. We’ll get it in here and put it up.”

“You mean here? Right here? How?” asked Bernie in rapid **succession**.

“You leave that part to me,” said Buster. “But we’re going to need a harness, and some string from the tool room. Can you **manage** that?”

The morning after Farmer Jones dragged the tree from the house they went to work. Bernie gathered several of the stoutest barn mice, and four of them managed to unhook an old harness from its **peg** in the barn’s tool room. They then took some string from a drawer, and were ready.

After everyone had gone to bed the crew appeared. As soon as he heard the click of Bernie’s front door, Buster was awake and yawning.

“Everyone ready?” he said, stretching.

The mice nodded **gleefully**.

“OK, Bernie, you come with me, the rest of you meet us out at the tree.”



Like some elephant rider in the circus that came to town once a year, Bernie grabbed Buster's left ear, and shimmied up the side of his head until he sat astride his friend's neck, grabbing his blue collar and kerchief. Then off they went to the tool room to get the harness. Buster found it in a jumble on the floor, and took it in his mouth. They went down the barn's back stair case, and Buster nudged open the door. Soon the two of them were out into the winter night. The light from a half moon **glinted** off the two-week old snow that had slightly melted and then refrozen.

Around the corner there it stood, propped up against the shed, its sturdy branches still outstretched in the moonlight's glow.

Bernie's assistants each took a piece of string in their mouths and scurried up to the top of the tree. There they wound it around an upper limb, and parachuted back down making a rustling sound as they came. By the time they had finished this first job, Buster was ready. He'd nosed his way into the harness, and four pieces of string were then attached to it. Bernie had dismounted and was directing the operation.

"OK," said Bernie "haul away."

Buster thought it best to try and pull the tree away from the barn, so lurched forward pretty firmly once he felt some tension. Neither Buster nor the mice were prepared for what happened next.

The tree glided away from side of the shed. And in their direction. The mice let out a yell as it began to topple toward them. Everyone scattered.

In slow motion the world caved in on Buster. He didn't have time to run or hide. He assumed the worst.

Instead of crushing him, the tree gently pushed him down onto his belly and smothered him in its scent.

Buster squirmed his way out to a stunned silence.

"I thought you'd been killed," said Bernie, a look of shock and horror still written across his face. "Are you sure you're alright?"

"I'm fine," said Buster, "where are the others?" Then he spied four sets of young eyes peering at him from around the corner of the shed.

"Come on," said Buster, "it's alright, let's get on with this."



He and Bernie persuaded the young mice, who couldn't believe that they had been convinced this would be a fairly harmless affair, to come back and give a hand.

Soon, Buster was straining against the strings again, but this time trying to pull the bottom of the tree away from the barn. Once they got it going in the right direction, which took some doing, the six foot Douglas fir shooshed across the wintry surface quite easily. Pulling it up the ramp into the barn was more of a challenge, but Buster made sure he had plenty of speed going as he made his approach. He was glad he did. The friction of the old concrete surface put on plenty of extra drag, and he only just made it up and into the barn.

Buster had been so busy getting to the top of the ramp that he didn't think what he might find there. When he stopped, his head lowered panting, there, right in front of him, in a semicircle, was almost every barn animal.

Finally, one of them, it might have been Leo, a chestnut horse who was older than the others, broke the silence and said **"So this is Christmas?"** (4a)

"Yeah," piped up a mouse, "and what have you done with the colored leaves?"

"You all got me up in the middle of the night fo' this?" interjected Jeremiah, a southern hog. "Thas' nothin' but a tree, and a dead one at that. I'm goin' back to bed," she said with a harrumph, and turned, waddling back to her sty.

The crowd began to disperse, and Buster could hear the general disappointment. Had this all been for nothing?

*Join us next time when we find out if Buster can find any Christmas spirit in the barn.
Don't forget to visit us on the web at <http://www.cafepress.com/bustergear> for all your Buster Gear.*

EPISODE THREE – TREE TOPS (1A)

VOCAB

Collective – Adjective, meaning of or characteristic of a group of individuals taken together.

Rivets– Noun, meaning a metal bolt or pin having a head on one end, inserted through aligned holes in the pieces to be joined and then hammered on the plain end so as to form a second head..

Clambered – Verb, mean to climb with difficulty, usually on all fours.

Sliver – Noun, meaning a small, slender, sharp piece of wood or glass.

Corralled – Verb, meaning to gather together.

NEWSPAPER ACTIVITIES

- Is there a Christmas tree lighting ceremony every year in Washington DC? Where does it appear in your paper?
- Are there pictures in your newspaper of Christmas lights in your community?
- What kinds of stories appear in the newspaper on Christmas Eve? Christmas Day?
- Can you find Santa's image in your newspaper? Where is it? Why do you think it's there?

QUESTION AND ANSWER

1. ***The author entitles the episode “Tree Tops.” What is the reason for that?***
 - a. The phrase implies something that is at the very top. Something that is high. Bringing Christmas, and creating the Christmas spirit in the barn that becomes a tradition is a very high achievement.
2. ***What do all the animals suddenly want to do, and why?***
 - a. They decide that they want to adorn the tree with something very special and personal, which creates an extraordinary sense of togetherness. It further builds the bonds of their community.
3. ***Why does Buster want to put his puppy collar on the tree, and why do the other animals want it at the top?***
 - a. For Buster, this collar reminds him of his childhood, when he had no responsibilities, and didn’t have to run the farm. This was a time of innocence for him.
 - b. The animals want it at the top, because he is their leader.
4. ***How does the story define the Christmas season, and the Christmas spirit?***
 - a. The animals in the barn wanted the magic that several of their community members came across in the Jones farm house. They thought it was a tree. It turned out to be something completely different. The tree was merely an embodiment of the love and giving that characterized the Jones household. The tree was simply a traditional symbol of their love and affection.
 - b. The barn community, whether they understood it or not, got past the symbol, and turned the tree into what made it magical – an emblem of how they were willing to share the special parts of their lives with one another in an unpretentious way. Christmas, for them, became a time of sharing, good cheer, love, and a celebration of their community at the end of the year. All the components that help Christmas endure year after year.

Earlier in our story, two mice had stumbled onto the Jones family Christmas tree one winter season. Word had spread throughout the barn, and everyone wanted a tree of their own. Bernie the mouse convinced Buster that they could “borrow” the Jones tree once it had been removed from the house. A plan was agreed upon, and soon Buster had hauled the tree up into the barn. Its lifeless form was greeted with disappointment by the crowd of animals who awaited its arrival. Soon they were all on their way back to their stalls, and bed.

In today’s episode, we find out whether or not Buster finds any Christmas spirit in the barn.

“Wait a minute,” Buster said, still out of breath as the crowd thinned, “where’s everybody going? Let’s give the tree a chance.”



“A chance?” came a voice from the darkened and shrinking semi-circle of barn animals. “How can you give something dead a chance?” (4a)

“Help me get it up,” said Buster, ignoring the comment. “Let’s get it over against a wall, like it was outside.”

“That’s not how Farmer Jones does it,” came a squeaky voice, undoubtedly from one of the mice. “It stood there on its own, like magic.”

“Christmas is what you make of it.” said Buster. “Howabout we make some magic of our own? Leo, you come over here and help me. Bernie, get me out of this harness, and give Leo those four pieces of string.”

“Do you think you can lift the tree straight up Leo,” asked Buster. “And you guys,” he said, gesturing to the other four tree thieves, “you get up there on the wall. See that large nail? Try to tie the string to it, if Leo can get it to you. Snug it nice and tight if you can. Then we’ll see where we are.”

It didn’t take long before that Douglas fir was standing straight as an arrow in the corner of the room, tied off by the four pieces of string at its top. It drew a **collective** gasp from those that hadn’t gone back to bed.

“It’s so tall,” said one.

“And straight,” said another.

“Its smells like the woods,” said a third.

“But what about the special leaves,” intoned the same mouse. “What about the colored leaves? Will they grow back?” (4a)

“What if we were to decorate the tree with things from the barn until they do?” said Buster.

“It wouldn’t be the same,” squeaked the mouse.”

“It wouldn’t indeed,” said Buster, “but it would be ours, and that might make it better.”

“I’m gonna be first,” cried out one of the chickens, and she raced off to her coop.

“Me too,” said another. Soon, the room was completely empty, except for Buster and Bernie the mouse. (2a)

“What are you gonna put on the tree?” asked Bernie.

“I thought I’d put my blue puppy collar on it. The one with the shiny rivets. I keep it under my bed, to remember what it was like before I had to work and take care of the farm,” said Buster. (3a)

“I’ve got just the thing too,” said Bernie. And he came back dragging a shiny silver fish hook over his shoulder.

“Why the fish hook?” asked Buster, as others began to appear with their own personal treasures. “I found it at the town dump the first time I went there. That’s where I discovered newspapers and learned how to read. So it’s special to me.” He **clambered** up the tree with ease, and gingerly placed the hook on one of the upper branches. It caught a **sliver** of moonlight that had made its way into the corner of the room, and glinted momentarily.

No one said anything as the tree took on its ornaments – like a dried tangerine that Jeremiah had been convinced to part with, a half dozen almost perfect half egg shells from the hen house, and **Buster’s collar, which everyone said needed to be at the top. (3b)**

“Well now,” said Buster standing back to survey what they’d done. “I think it’s…”

“Christmas,” said one of the animals in the back.

“Our Christmas” said another. (4b)

“Haven’t we forgotten something?” asked Bernie.

“What’s that?” said Buster.

“What will Farmer Jones say?”

“What he’ll do,” said Buster in reply, “Is scratch his head, look at me, pull my ear gently, and say ‘What have you been up to?’ Then he’ll laugh, and go get Mrs. Jones, Amy, and Billy. That’s what he’ll do.”

Buster thought it best to tell Farmer Jones that morning, but then the early morning milking had gone a little slower than usual, which had almost made the Jones family late for Sunday church.



Buster **corralled** them though as soon as he heard the crunch of the truck as it crept up the gravel driveway.

Mrs. Jones door swung open almost before they'd stopped in the barnyard.

“Who’s for pancakes?” she asked.

“Me!” yelled Amy and Billy at the top of their lungs. They had piled out her side, and were already on their way to the backdoor and a breakfast full of riches.

Buster stood at Farmer Jones’ door as he got out, and like he did on so many occasions, he knelt down to give his barn dog a squeeze and ask him if everything was alright. Buster nuzzled his master’s cheek, and then backed away and barked. He turned, walking quite purposefully up the ramp into the barn. From there he looked back towards Farmer Jones to make sure he was coming. He needn’t have, his master was already on his way.

Buster stood next to the tree in the corner.

Farmer Jones entered, wondering where Buster had gone, and what it was that was so important.

The still early-morning grayness of the day kept his eyes from adjusting to the half light of this large, window-less room. Then over in the corner he spied the shimmering tree. The white half egg shells must have caught his attention. He took one step closer, then realized what he was seeing. Disbelievingly, he turned, went to the door and called, “Esther!”

One more call brought Mrs. Jones from the kitchen. She’d shed her Sunday best, and was wiping her hands on her apron as she came across the barn yard.

“Wait,” he said, “Get the kids, they’re really going to want to see this.”

The tone in his voice made her stop, take one more look at him, then go inside.

She returned with them hand-in-hand. Billy was eating a piece of jam-covered toast, while Amy clutched her favorite doll Cindy.

“Will?” she said, tilting her head as she came to the top of the ramp.

“There.” Was all he could say, pointing over to the corner of the room where Buster stood.

Mrs. Jones let out an “Oh, my,” before she covered her wide-open mouth with her hand. Amy let Cindy drop to the floor with a clump.



“Goodness,” cried Amy running to the tree. She hugged Buster, and whispered “I love it,” into his ear, over and over again. Buster’s tail wagged.

Mrs. Jones called Amy back, and they joined together, hand in hand, in a stunned silence before this makeshift Christmas tree with a blue dog collar at the top.

“It’s magic,” said Amy.

“Of course it is,” said Farmer Jones, “It’s Christmas.” (4b)

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