

# AN AMISH CHRISTMAS STAR

## by Charlotte Hubbard

### EXCERPT

With the girl's laughter still dancing in his head, Raymond Overholt tried to refocus his thoughts. If he didn't convince Mr. Kraybill to sell his handmade plaques, his past several weeks of work would be for nothing. He'd have to return home to Coldstream with his tail between his legs, and face a long, dreary lifetime of milking his dad's cows. Running a dairy was honest, necessary work but Raymond didn't enjoy spending his early mornings and late afternoons in a smelly barn disinfecting udders any more than the Holsteins liked having him around. Worse yet, if he overslept, his older brothers did the milking and left the hosing down and mucking out of the stalls for him.

"If your customers like these plaques, I can make more," he assured the steely-haired storekeeper. "I—I really appreciate having the chance to sell them here in your new store. Our bulk market in Coldstream is dim and overcrowded with merchandise, and even if the owner there had display space, he wants nothing to do with artwork. It's that Old Order thing."

Mr. Kraybill smiled knowingly. "Jah, Amish stores don't usually carry much that appears English even if they have a lot of customers come in from outside their community to shop," he acknowledged. "But your plaques carry a solid Christmas message—'Wise men still follow His star' and the lyrics to 'We Three Kings' are meaningful reminders about following our Lord's holy light. Thanksgiving always kicks off the Christmas buying season, so we'll give it a shot, Raymond."

He hoped his grateful grin didn't appear too adolescent—or desperate. Raymond gazed around the store, where a gal in a pleated Amish kapp was stocking shelves in the rear. A few early shoppers were pushing carts into the grocery section. "If you need some extra hands when things get busy these next few weeks, I'd be happy to help, sir," he offered. "I've not worked in a store, but I'm gut at tallying sums and I'm a quick learner."

"I'll keep it in mind," Kraybill said with a nod.

Raymond heard probably not in the storekeeper's words, but he'd dealt with people's dismissals before. If he'd dressed in dark broadfall pants with a plain shirt and suspenders—and if he'd chosen glasses with conservative frames—Kraybill might've taken him more seriously. But until he had no other choice than to submit to Old Order ways and join the church, Raymond was determined to wear clothing he liked.

“I'll be back in a few days to see how my signs are selling,” he said. “Denki for giving me a chance.”