



## Noah's Sweetheart (Lancaster County Weddings Book 1)

By Rebecca Kertz



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*A Place to Heal*

After suffering a broken engagement, teacher Rachel Hostetler is looking for a fresh start. When handsome Noah Lapp rescues her from a runaway buggy her first day in town, things seem hopeful. Then Rachel hears talk that Noah is expected to court her cousin, Charlotte. Yet Noah spends all his free time with Rachel. Will Rachel discover the truth without losing her heart? And find a happy-ever-after in Happiness, Pennsylvania?



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## **Noah's Sweetheart (Lancaster County Weddings Book 1) By Rebecca Kertz Bibliography**

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## **Editorial Review**

### About the Author

Rebecca Kertz moved to rural Delaware as a young newlywed. First introduced to the Amish world when her husband took a job with an Amish construction crew, she enjoyed watching the children at play and in swapping recipes with the Amish foreman's wife. Rebecca resides happily with her husband and dog. She feels blessed to have family nearby. She enjoys visiting Lancaster County, the setting for her Amish stories. When not writing, she enjoys traveling, reading and doing crafts.

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*Spring...Lancaster County, Pennsylvania*

Rachel Hostetler watched as Aaron Troyer took her small black valise and loaded it into the carriage.

"If you'll wait in the buggy, Rachel, my sister Martha will soon join you."

"*Danki*, Aaron." Securing the ties of her Sunday-best black bonnet, Rachel nervously chewed on her lower lip.

"Don't worry," he said. "Martha don't take up much room."

"I'm sure she doesn't." Rachel felt her stomach tighten with trepidation. It wasn't the size of Martha that concerned her. It was the type of carriage. The only vehicle available to take her from Lancaster to Happiness was this small single bench-seat buggy, the same type used for courting by the Old Order Amish. Back in Ohio, she'd ridden frequently with Abraham Beiler in a similar buggy when he was walking out with her...until the accident over a year ago that had changed her life forever.

She hadn't ridden in an open courting buggy since, preferring the safety of her family's enclosed carriage. She didn't want to ride in one now, but it seemed that she had no choice. It was the only way for her to get to the village of Happiness and her new position as schoolteacher there.

Without thought, she slipped her hand inside her black traveling cape to touch a protective hand to her midsection. Some things just couldn't be forgotten, no matter how hard she tried. But scared or not, she'd just have to do it. It wouldn't do to start off here in this new place being a coward.

The horse shifted restlessly; Rachel gasped and retreated a few steps. *Don't be a goose*, she told herself. The bay looked like a perfectly sensible animal. But she couldn't help offering a silent prayer.

"Please, Lord, protect me from all evil," she whispered. *No matter what form evil takes*.

She stared at the buggy, took a deep breath, grabbed hold of the side and climbed on board.

"It's nice of you to drive us to town, Noah." Charlotte King smiled at her neighbor and childhood friend. "*Mam* needs more flour and cinnamon for tomorrow's baking, and *Dat* is too busy repairing the windmill to take me."

Noah nodded. "I know your *dat* is busy, Charlotte. I enjoy going to town. 'Tis no inconvenience to take you."

"And me?" Charlotte's little brother piped up.

"*Ja*, Joshua. Nice to have you along as well." He reached back and tugged the boy's straw hat down over his eyes, and Joshua giggled.

The spring sunshine felt warm against Noah's face as he steered the wagon along the blacktop road toward Bird-in-Hand. The surrounding farmland was beautiful, with spring growth in various stages. Songbirds filled the air with nature's music, and the scent of the earth permeated from the surrounding farms. Only once did the roar of a big truck that passed the buggy, blowing black from its exhaust pipes, drown out the quiet of the fields.

It was a good day for a drive; the fact that the day was to be spent in Charlotte's company only made it better. They'd be running errands for his father as well as Charlotte's mother. When Samuel Lapp had heard that Noah would be taking Charlotte to Miller's Store, he'd provided his son with his own list. He would have made the trip in a day or two himself, Samuel Lapp had told Noah, but since Noah was going now...

The three young people chatted easily as they enjoyed the ride. Spying a familiar face behind a plow, Noah lifted a hand in greeting to Abram Peachy, a member of their church.

"Nice morning for plowing, Abram. See you got an early start."

The man nodded. "Hope the weather holds out until we're done planting." His eyes focused briefly on Charlotte before shifting back to Noah beside her. "Morning, Charlotte," he said.

"Morning, Abram," Charlotte called. "How are the children?"

The widower's gaze softened. "They are doing well. 'Tis nice of you to ask."

"We're going to town!" Joshua said. "We're going to get ice cream!"

"Joshua!" Charlotte scolded with a quick look at Noah.

"I like ice cream," the boy insisted.

"You're not to pester Noah for ice cream every time we ride into town with him," Charlotte warned. "Last time was a special treat." And to Noah, she said, "You'll spoil him rotten."

Noah winked at Joshua. "We men have to stick together, *ja*? "

Joshua giggled again and slid back on the bench seat. "*Ja*." With an impish grin at his sister, he began tapping his shoes against the floor.

"Sometimes I think you're no older than he is," Charlotte teased.

"But you like me anyway." Noah grinned at Charlotte, who couldn't help grinning back. "We're going for ice cream," he told Abram. "You have a *gut* day now."

The older man waved and then slapped the reins over the horse's back. The big Belgian walked on, and the plow cut a deep furrow in the rich, dark earth.

"A good farm, he has," Charlotte said.

"And a good farmer. A pity Abram lost his wife so young."

"God's will is sometimes hard to understand," Charlotte agreed.

It was easy to drive the wagon through the countryside. As they approached town, the number of cars on the road increased, and Noah had to handle the wagon more carefully. This area of Lancaster County invited tourists, who often didn't realize the danger of passing a horse and carriage at a great rate of speed. Fortunately, on this day, the cars they encountered slowed down appropriately. Perhaps it was the warmth of the spring day that had captured everyone's fancy on this Tuesday. Whatever the reason, Noah was able to relax and enjoy the ride and Charlotte and Joshua's company.

They bought their supplies in several small shops and then drove along the stretch of road from Miller's Store toward the village of Intercourse, where they would enjoy their ice cream. Joshua could barely contain himself; he was so excited to eat his favorite treat. Charlotte gently reprimanded her younger brother, instructing him to be still.

A dog barked ahead. A horse whinnied and then snorted. Noah heard a high-pitched scream as he saw a spooked horse rear back before bolting at a dead run in their direction. He caught sight of a woman's pale face under a bonnet as the open four-wheeled buggy came barreling down the road. He felt a thundering in his chest as he immediately saw the danger she was in.

"Charlotte, take the reins!" he said as he pulled his wagon off the road.

"Noah!" Charlotte exclaimed with alarm as Noah bounded from the wagon. "Be careful!"

But he was already running out to try and stop the panicked horse before the buggy overturned. Fear lodged in his throat at the glimpse of the terrified young Amish woman who sat in the buggy, clutching one side with white-knuckled fingers.

The horse raced closer, its ironclad hooves pounding the road. Noah shifted right, out of its path, at the last moment and then jumped to grab the animal's harness. He cried out with triumph as he got a firm handhold. *Please, Lord, give me strength!* He fought to hold on as the horse continued its runaway pace. Struggling not to become entangled in the gear, he levered himself onto the horse, gripping its sides with his legs to hold on to his seat.

The animal neighed in angry protest. Heart pounding, Noah leaned low against the horse's neck to grab hold of the reins. Successful, he straightened, pulling back on the leather straps.

"Whoa!" he called. *"Schtupp!"* He applied pressure slowly but firmly. The horse jerked and fought before breaking into a trot and finally a walk as he continued to murmur soothingly. "Gently. Take it slow, now. *Gut boy!*"

At last, the carriage rolled to a stop, still upright, as the animal finally obeyed the command, and Noah felt a sudden rush of relief. Once the horse was calm, he turned to check on the buggy's terrified passenger.

"Are you hurt?" he asked.

She gasped for breath, unable to answer. He saw only the top of her black bonnet as she bent forward, hugging herself with her arms.

He climbed down from the horse carefully, patting the animal's neck, speaking to it softly, reassuringly.

"Noah, you could have been killed." A man ran up to help Noah. He took hold of the horse's bridle, freeing Noah from the task.

"*Danki*, William," Noah said, recognizing a neighbor and fellow church member, William Mast. He didn't want to think about what could have happened if things hadn't gone his way.

With growing concern, he approached the occupant in the buggy, stopping at her side. "Are you hurt?" he repeated softly.

Sitting back, she shook her head. "*Nay*."

"What happened to spook your horse?"

He watched her pull herself together enough to stiffen. "Not my horse," she replied. "Not my buggy."

She met his gaze head-on, and he felt a jolt. She had lovely dark eyes, but her pallor was sickly, and he saw that she trembled. "I'm sorry," he said, not really knowing for what. "Are you cold?" He stood back and took off his coat, placing it over her shoulders and around her. "You are shaking."

She released a solid breath. "I could have been killed. You saved me. *Danki*." A shy smile lit up her face, and in that moment he felt his pulse quicken as he noticed every little detail about her...the warmth of her chocolate-brown gaze, the whiteness of her smooth skin, her small nose...the rosy pink of her lips...the glimpse of her white *kapp* beneath her black traveling bonnet. The sweep of hair from a center part across her forehead was dark. She wore a black cape over a dress of spring green.

"I was happy to help." He offered his hand to help the woman alight from the buggy. He sensed her hesitation for only a moment, and then he felt the warmth of her fingertips as she accepted his assistance.

"Rachel!" Aaron Troyer approached at a run. He nodded at William, who gave possession of the horse's bridle to its owner. The animal's sides were caked with sweat, and it was trembling all over.

"Are you all right?" Aaron asked Rachel as he ran his hand over the horse's neck and murmured soothingly to it.

"I am fine, Aaron. Thanks to—"

"Noah," Noah supplied. "Noah Lapp."

"Noah," Aaron said, out of breath. "I'm grateful." Then to the woman he said, "I didn't realize that Josef would be so easily scared. My brother meant for you and Martha to take Daisy."

"Is Josef all right?" She appeared concerned.

"*Ja*, with some care, he will be fine."

"Noah! Noah! Are you hurt?" Charlotte called out from the wagon seat. "Fou *could have been killed!* When I saw you jump onto that horse, I was afraid you'd fall and be crushed—" She had steered the wagon to within yards from where the buggy had come to a full stop.

"You doubt my ability with horses?" he teased. Upon seeing her expression, he sobered. "I'm fine, Charlotte."

Charlotte's gaze settled on the woman standing next to the buggy and her eyes widened. "*Rachel?* Rachel Hostetler?"

The woman seemed to search her memory before her features brightened. "Charlotte!" she exclaimed. "I am surprised that you got my message so quickly."

"We didn't." Charlotte climbed down from the wagon. "We were in town to pick up supplies for *Mam* and Noah's *vadder*. We didn't expect you to arrive until tomorrow."

"The English driver my family hired had to leave a day earlier. He had a family emergency and apologized that he couldn't drive me directly to Happiness. He left me at Troyers' Buggy Excursions. I called the number your *mam* sent me from a payphone while I waited for a ride."

"*Ja*." Charlotte nodded. "Whittier's Store. They take messages for us."

Surprised, Noah watched and listened to the exchange with growing interest. The two women talked as if there was no one else around. "Charlotte?"

Charlotte looked startled as if she suddenly remembered there were others nearby, waiting for an introduction.

"Noah, this is Rachel Hostetler. She is our new *schuul* teacher—" Charlotte smiled "—and my cousin. Aaron—it seems that you have already met."

"You're Charlotte's kin?" Noah asked, pleased to learn that he'd be seeing more of her. Rachel nodded.

"And you are a schoolteacher," he said. "At our Happiness school?"

Rachel studied him and nodded. "*Ja*."

"Welcome to Lancaster County," he said. "Come. We'll take you home."

The intensity of Noah's regard captured her gaze. Feeling her cheeks heat, Rachel quickly looked away. She felt the warmth of his coat and, embarrassed, she removed it and handed it back to him.

"Rachel, let's go," Charlotte urged, drawing Rachel's attention and saving her from acting foolish. "You will come with us—*ja?*"

"We're going for ice cream," Joshua said.

"I don't know now, Joshua," his sister said. "Rachel has had a terrible fright. She may want to go straight home."

Rachel studied the young boy seated in the back of the wagon. "You're Joshua—and such a big boy! I'm your cousin Rachel. We've never met. The last time I saw your sister was years ago, when we were eleven and twelve, I think." She looked to Charlotte, who nodded.

"We're not going for ice cream?" Young Joshua looked crestfallen.

"No, I think I'd like to have ice cream," Rachel said, and then asked Joshua, "What kinds can we choose from?"

She did feel a bit shaky, she realized, as Joshua began to list the many flavors of ice cream available, but she didn't mind stopping for the treat first. It might help to put away the thought of what could have happened if not for the sudden appearance of Noah Lapp.

Rachel sensed the intensity of her rescuer's look, but refused to meet his gaze. She felt as though she was still wrapped in the warmth of his coat.

"Let's go, then," Noah said quietly. "I'll get your bag."

Only then did she glance his way. His soft, quick smile in her direction did odd things to her insides.

"Are you certain, Rachel?" Charlotte asked.

She nodded at her cousin. "I have the Lord to thank for my safety. The Lord and your friend Noah Lapp."

"I'm so glad that *Mam* needed some things in town or we may not have been here when."

Rachel shuddered.

"I'm sorry, Rachel," Aaron Troyer said.

"No harm done," Rachel assured him with a half smile. "I'm fine."

"Here's your money. Next time you need a ride, there will be no charge." After Rachel thanked him properly, Aaron left, leaving her alone with her cousins. With Rachel's bag in hand, Noah stopped to speak with Aaron.

"Are you truly all right, Rachel?" Charlotte asked. "I can't believe this happened to you. I can only imagine how you must have felt with the memory of that awful accident last year."

Rachel still felt shaken. "It was a terrible time."

"*Ja*," Charlotte agreed as they made their way toward the wagon on the side of the road. "Mam and *Dat* will be happy to see you. You'll be staying at the house until the cottage near the *schuulhaus* is finished."

"I will like that." Rachel breathed deeply in an attempt to calm her fear as she climbed onto the wagon.



"You have nothing to be afraid of, Rachel," Charlotte told her. "Noah is a *gut* driver."

Rachel nodded. "I know." She glanced in his direction.

The Lord was watching over her. He hadn't abandoned her so far from home. He'd sent her help in the form of Noah Lapp...from Happiness, Pennsylvania. What more could she ask for?

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Willie Clark:**

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#### **David Mathews:**

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