



ROBIN BAYNE

SAMARITAN

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**Samaritan**

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Cover Art by Nicola Martinez

White Rose Publishing, a division of Pelican Ventures, LLC  
[www.pelicanbookgroup.com](http://www.pelicanbookgroup.com) PO Box 1738 \*Aztec, NM \* 87410

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Publishing History

By Grace Publishing, 2007

First White Rose Edition, 2012

Electronic Edition ISBN 978-1-61116-143-4

**Published in the United States of America**

## Dedication

With thanks and appreciation to my critique partners:  
Laura Hilton, Diana Brandmeyer, and Christine Cain  
(aka Liz Tolsma).



## Praise for Robin Bayne

Once again, multi-talented author Robin Bayne serves up a story that's sure to satisfy reader appetites. With just the right mix of life lessons, spiritual growth, and romance, she cooks up a delectable story that proves faith can sweeten even the most distasteful of situations. As an added treat, yummy Daniel tickles your taste buds in *Samaritan's* sequel, *Prodigal* ~ Loree Lough

Robin Bayne writes a story about one of the greatest lessons Jesus ever taught—to love one another.  
~ Lori Soard

Gardner's Gazebo Series

*Prodigal*

*Samaritan*







# 1

*“A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.” Proverbs 25:11.*

“What do you mean, he’s gone?” Rachel Martin looked up from her menu-planner to her sister who waved an envelope in the air. She tapped her foot impatiently under the wood dining table.

“I mean,” Sandy said, tilting her red head and extending the envelope, “Davie’s gone, and he left you this.”

Rachel’s spine straightened, and she squeezed the bridge of her nose before taking the envelope. Willing her hands not to tremble, she opened the unsealed flap and shook out two crisp sheets of folded paper. While Sandy waited, Rachel began to read silently.

*My Dearest Rachelle,*

*I’m so sorry to depart so abruptly, but I’ve accepted a once-in-a-lifetime offer to study under France’s top pastry chef. What an opportunity! I had to leave immediately or risk losing the position, and I apologize for everything, but I must find my true calling. Enclosed is a letter for the bank, giving you full access to the company account. Say farewell to dear Sandra for me, and have a wonderful life using your incredible culinary talents. You’ve been a marvelous partner, but this is what I must do with my future.*

*Au Revoir, Davie.*

Rachel lowered the page. The smell of baking bread permeated the small shop, which she usually loved. Now it seemed to gag her.

What about what she wanted? Had Davie even considered that? What about her future?

"What are you thinking?" Sandy asked, studying Rachel through narrowed eyes.

Rachel sighed, jiggled her knees and pinched her nose again. What *was* she thinking? She mentally calculated the cost of the new equipment she'd just ordered, the large supply of goods on their way and the catering jobs lined up for the next few weeks. Silently she gave Sandy the note and pushed her chair back from the table with a scrape of wood across wood.

She paced from the counter to the glass front door, running her hand across the clean, smooth surfaces. Her stomach remained down near her toes and now burned with the adrenalin of panic. What was she going to do without Davie? This was his business, his life—he'd hired her right out of high school because she could decorate a complex, three-tiered wedding cake like a pro. Everything else she knew about food preparation, booking jobs, and organizing parties had come from him—had been his area of expertise.

"So what now?" Sandy's brows knit together in concern, her worried expression fortifying the pounding in Rachel's temples.

"I'm not sure." Long moments passed with only the ticking of the wall clock and the refrigerator's hum.

"Should we try to track him down? Make him listen to reason?"

Rachel considered it for just a moment, but shook her head. "No. If he wants to go off and start a new life, or improve the one he has, it's not up to us to try and stop him."

"Am I out of a job?" Sandy tapped the table with her long, pink-painted nails. "Are you out of a job? Are we closing Davie's Desserts?"

"No!" Rachel whirled on her sister, a new thought striking her. She could run this place without him! "Absolutely not. I can keep this place going, I'm sure. And you know what? I'll bet Davie's back within the week. He probably just needs to get this out of his system." She began to pace again. "He can't live without this shop. It means everything to him. Why, he'll probably return with fantastic gifts for us from Paris, with his hat in his hands, make that a beret, and—"

"Rachel."

"What?"

Sandy shook her head. "He's not coming back. At least, not in time to help us with the Preston wedding, the Jones's confirmation party, and the church fair."

Bells tinkled over the door, and Mrs. Hutchinson entered with her suitcase-sized handbag slung over one shoulder. "Hi, dearies," she called. "I need a pie or something for my daughter-in-law's dinner tonight."

Rachel watched as Sandy went to wait on the woman who always had a smile and a dessert for her loved ones. She listened as they chattered away pleasantly, but her own mind filtered out the actual words, intent on her own problems. Davie would come back to Portlandville, wouldn't he?

The *ching* of their old-fashioned cash register punctuated her thoughts, and Rachel decided she

needed to be pragmatic about the situation. Until she was certain she was alone, she had to keep things going. That included the finances. Pulling the foot-long ledger book from under the counter, Rachel flipped through pages of checks, following the balance line through the most current date. They weren't in the red.

Yet.

Rachel jumped when Sandy touched her shoulder. "We can do this," she said. I'll come in every day after school, and weekends. We can—"

"Sandy." Warmth filled her heart at her sister's offer, and she knew her voice sounded shaky. "I'm sorry, I'm as anxious as you are. But you won't thank me when you've missed all the senior year activities. This is the last spring you'll have before real life kicks in." Rachel reached out and pushed Sandy's bright red bangs from her forehead.

"But—"

"No buts. I really appreciate your working here the past two years, but I'm not about to usurp your last few months of being a teenager. Remember, I was there only seven years ago, and I remember. You're only seventeen once."

Sandy opened her mouth to protest, but smiled instead and leaned down to hug Rachel. "There is this picnic I'd like to go to next Saturday."

"And you will go. I'm sure Mom can stop by and lend a hand if I ask her nicely. I will work this out, don't you worry." She turned her thumb up in a positive gesture. "Now, why don't you go see if the bread is done? I'm certainly glad that food aromas don't have calories."

"Sure smells fattening." Sandy patted her flat tummy. "Good thing you and I don't eat all this great

stuff we make, or we'd not fit through the front door."

Bells tinkled again over the door as if on cue, and one of her best, and cutest, customers entered the room. Sunshine from the windows made Timothy Gardner's dark brown hair almost glow. She believed he must be at least six foot three. This was a man who certainly didn't over eat bread or carbs, she thought as she noticed his flat stomach. Her face warmed a bit as she realized she was staring at his physique.

"Hi, Tim," Rachel said. "What can I do for you this morning?"

"Good morning, ladies." He acknowledged both of them and moved to the chest-high glass counter which showcased homemade pies, cakes, cookies, petit fours and other confections. Resting both elbows on the clear surface, Tim surveyed the variety and smiled. "I'd love to take home a peach pie along with my regular order." He looked directly at Rachel. "Is it ready?"

A buzzing noise from the back signaled that the bread was done, and Sandy took off at a near sprint to ensure it didn't burn. We sure can't afford any wasted food now, Rachel thought, suddenly irritated with the situation her former partner had left her in. No use continuing to deny it.

"I have a shipment of pie boxes coming in by noon, so if it's OK with you I'll deliver your cheesecakes this afternoon."

"By three o'clock?" Tim tapped the glass counter.

"Oh, sure." Rachel could promise that, unless of course, one of the box-supplier's partners had also dumped their job that day.

He nodded his agreement, but didn't move for several seconds, then cleared his throat.

"Is there anything else?" Rachel had the fleeting thought that a man like Tim wouldn't have run out on her and his business. Was he waiting for her to say something else?

"Rachel," he said, in a quiet voice. "Can I at least get the peach pie? Pretty please? A few friends from my church are having a pot-luck supper tonight, and since I can't be there I thought I'd drop one off for their dessert. Or do you want to bring that over later, too?" His forehead crinkled. "Unless you are totally out of pie boxes, of course. I don't mean to put you on the spot."

"Oh, of course, I'm so sorry. It's just been a rough day." Rachel opened a cabinet behind the counter and removed a piece of flat cardboard.

"And it's only ten in the morning."

She knew he was teasing, but Rachel felt her eyes well up as she recalled her first task of the day. Reading Davie's note. She turned away quickly and proceeded to assemble the flat box.

"Are you OK?"

Amazed at how his voice switched from playful to concerned, Rachel took a deep breath and tilted her head back to make sure no tears fell.

Sandy returned, dusting flour from her hands and apron. Rachel grabbed the chance to escape with a bit of dignity.

"Oh, Sandy, would you get Tim a peach pie? It's on the house." She made her escape without meeting his gaze, or her sister's, and fled to the security of the storage room beside the kitchen. She knew Sandy would be shooting her a questioning look. Why had she given away a pie when they were in such sudden financial straits?

Rachel wasn't sure herself, but knew she felt the urge to keep Tim's high opinion of her.

She took the lid from a cardboard banker's box and sifted through the contents. Three years' worth of bank statements, envelopes full of cancelled checks and stacks of work orders lay there, rubber-banded together, taunting her. The paperwork for the new oven she'd just ordered sat near the top, the words "Paid In Full" stamped across the invoice. Why had she insisted on paying cash for the thing? She'd managed to deplete the company's cash-on-hand, in anticipation of a lot of cash coming in during the wedding reception season. And it still could, she supposed, if she could afford to hire a helper. Perhaps she could get a loan using the new equipment as collateral, she pondered, jiggling her knee against the side of another carton.

"Hey, Rach?" Sandy poked her head into the storage room. "Tim said not to be late with the desserts." She entered the room and pulled up a stool. "He's really attached to those things, isn't he?"

Rachel nodded and sighed. Tim Gardner definitely seemed attached to what he called his restaurant's "signature dessert," which sounded funny to her since she was the one who made them. She topped silky, smooth cheesecake, on a graham cracker crust, with a layer of fine gold icing. Her secret recipe made the icing look like real gold, when it was really only a thin layer of gold leaf, and perfectly safe to eat. Stamped on each narrow slice sat a tiny gazebo image, to accentuate the name of Tim's place—Gardner's Gazebo Café.

"He's really cute, isn't he?"

*Yes, he is.* "Oh, don't start, Sandy. If you and Mom

had your way I would have been married years ago. Hmm, let's see, there was Davie when he first hired me, Luke from the delivery service, John from the confectionary, Daniel from the culinary college..."

"OK, OK, I'll stop." Sandy laughed and pulled up a stool next to Rachel. "We know you'll find the right guy someday, just like I will."

"After college."

"After college."

They sat together in agreeable silence, for how long, Rachel wasn't sure. Her mind was a jumble of dollar signs and expectant customer faces.

"Rachel?"

"Yes?"

"Give me a warm and fuzzy hug."

"Um..."

"Please?"

Rachel felt numb by the events of the day, but knew this would make them both feel better. Why, she wasn't really sure. Her family had always been huggers of the warm and fuzzy variety. Not just when times were bad, but anytime. All the time. They seemed to be calmed by it, and it worked for them. Rachel had followed along until her father died, but after that she didn't see the point.

After a brief embrace, Sandy squeezed her hand gently. It did feel nice, reassuring.

Rachel squeezed back. Something passed between them. She wasn't sure what, but Rachel took a deep breath and felt stronger.

Door chimes in the distance forced them back to reality, and they hurried back to the shop.

A man in brown shorts waited, chewing gum and tapping a pen on his clipboard. "Delivery."



Sandy moved toward the stack of cartons he'd brought, then turned and arched an eyebrow at Rachel. "There should be twice this many cartons."

Rachel handed the man his clipboard. "What?"

"The cartons, there aren't as many as we ordered. What's going on?"

"Look, ladies, I just deliver the stuff. Give me a break. This is the number of cartons you are supposed to get from Delaware Cardboard."

"I'll go call them," Sandy offered, a sigh in her voice.

Rachel nodded, with a sneaking suspicion that she already knew the problem.

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Tim Gardner set the last vase of flowers in the dining room, glad he'd decided to start opening on Mondays. The lunch rush was over, and the café was now ready for the dinner crunch at the Gazebo. When his parents returned from their cruising tour, they would be proud of the changes he'd made and the increase in profits the family business had seen. They would have no qualms about someday leaving the business to him, despite his young age of twenty-eight. Hard work in the Gazebo during high school and before he'd enlisted had given him a good feel for the restaurant business. Under his management, sales were up twenty percent, of course, nineteen percent of that was due to his adoption of the Gazebo signature dessert.

At least when they returned this time there would be no repeat of their thirtieth anniversary, when they'd come to find their eldest son and manager Daniel had

taken off for Europe, or somewhere, without a word. The employees had been let go, abruptly, as one waitress later reported. The staff had no warning anything was amiss. Tim's mother had been devastated, cried for weeks. While they'd been vacationing, the café had been closed for a month, hitting the family hard and ultimately sending his father to the hospital with heart problems and subsequent surgery.

Tim would make sure they could rely on him, no matter what. He would make up for Daniel's mistakes.

He dimmed the overhead lighting for evening atmosphere. He liked to make the place a bit more romantic at night. The same menu was served for dinner as for lunch, but Tim used lighting and table candles to produce the desired effect. He wondered how Rachel would look by candlelight, then shook his head. Where had that come from?

A horn sounded out back, and Tim went through the pristine kitchen, smiling at his two cooks who were arguing amiably about some soup recipe. As he'd hoped, a white van bearing the name "Davie's Desserts" waited behind the restaurant.

Rachel appeared after a door slammed, and Tim felt a rush of pleasure. She looked as pretty and fresh as she had that morning. Her dark red hair was still tied neatly in a braid. As she neared, Tim realized the sparkle he usually saw in her green eyes was gone. Must be the afternoon heat, he figured, feeling the humidity clinging in the spring air.

"Let me help you with those." They each pulled a rear door open, revealing about a dozen white pie boxes labeled "GGC" in red marker.

"Thanks. Twelve gazebo gold cheesecakes, just as

you like them. You're my last delivery today."

If he didn't respect her work so much, he'd ask if the cakes could have spoiled sitting in the van. They made two trips each, and he noticed Rachel also smiled at his quarreling cooks, who winked at her. Tim signed her delivery acknowledgment as always, and thanked Rachel as they returned to her van. She had pretty hair, he thought, but always tucked the auburn locks into that braid thing. He wondered what it would look like down and flowing behind her.

Maybe I should ask her to dinner sometime. He'd had that idea before, but always recalled how awful it had been when Liza dumped him in public. He hadn't taken a woman to dinner, outside of his own café, since. But why not start again now?

"Thanks, Rachel. Before you go, can I ask you something?"

She stopped and braced herself with an arm on the driver side door. "Sure. And I have to talk to you about something as well."

Uh-oh. Was she planning to raise her prices? They had a deal, for another six months, as she'd agreed. She had seemed rather frazzled this morning. Or maybe she was already seeing someone?

"Tim?"

"Oh, sorry. What's up?"

She shuffled her feet around, protected only by sandals from the hot pavement. She'd painted her toenails a dark red, which he found attractive. But today, it looked to him like her knees were knocking.

"Well, Davie's left the partnership, rather abruptly."

"What?" He snapped to attention, putting his business face back on.

"I'm afraid he's gone, and if he'll be back is anyone's guess. So I'm on my own for a while." She glanced toward the street. "I'm having a bit of a financial crunch, and I may not be able to meet your orders for a while." She met his gaze. "It's not permanent, I assure you."

Whoa. Tim felt sucker-punched. Was it possible to admire someone's integrity in speaking up while wanting to shake them? An image flashed in his mind—his parents' return and subsequent disappointment because his progress had dwindled. Customers' anger after coming in for his signature cake, and walking out when all he could offer was apple pie. A cold sweat broke out on his neck. Apple pie was so dull.

Rachel was still talking. "So, I'm really sorry. I can get you the normal order tomorrow, but then I have to wait until I can swing the next supply of gold icing, which—"

"Rachel." An idea grabbed his mind. He had a solution.

She paused, looking at him expectantly.

"It's not a problem. Give me the recipe, and I'll have someone else make it. Short-term, of course, until you're back on your feet."

Her mouth fell open. "I don't think so."

"I'll pay you for it." Where he'd get the money for that, he wasn't sure. But it was that important to be consistent.

"I'm sorry, Tim, I can't do that."

"You promised to keep me supplied with gold-leaf cheesecakes for a minimum of six more months."

"Yes, but surely—"

"No buts. I'm truly sorry, Rachel. You're a nice

person." *And a good-looking one.* He scrubbed his hand over his face, hating the stance he had to take. "But I expect you to honor our agreement. And I will hold you to it."