

*Sisters in Spirit* #2

Marianne  
EVANS

A ROMANCE

I found myself cheering for these talented, modern women who live their faith, and the men who share their lives.

~ NY TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR,  
RUTH RYAN LANGAN

*Siobhan's Beat*  
BEAT OF THE SPIRIT

# Siobhan's Beat

Marianne Evans

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## **Siobhan's Beat**

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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

First White Rose Edition, 2014

Electronic Edition ISBN 978-1-61116-431-2

**Published in the United States of America**

## Dedication

To anyone who has ever felt like they're at the end of their road and their dreams have died. Endings are only beginnings—if we let go and let God lead the way. May this story help remind you to stand strong, and mount up with wings...as eagles.



Be sure to pick up all the Sisters in Spirit stories

Aileen's Song  
Siobhan's Beat  
Kassidy's Crescendo  
Maeve's Symphony



## Praise

### *Siobhan's Beat*

I found myself cheering for these talented, modern women who live their faith, and the men who share their lives. This talented author satisfies both heart and soul. ~ *NY Times* Bestselling Author Ruth Ryan Langan

### *Devotion*

[is] a beautifully written, compelling tale of love, loss and second chances. ~ Love2Read Novels

### *Hearts Surrender*

[is] a lovely romance...an affecting love story. ~ RT Book Reviews





*Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. ~ Proverbs 4:23*

# Prologue

*Six Years Ago*

Siobhan Douglas wandered toward the wings of the auditorium at Westerville High, her focus intent. Oh, she maintained a casual air; she paused here and there to say hello to bunches of people she knew, but she was on a mission. Of late, a certain...*person*...left her thoroughly intrigued, and she wanted to see him.

*Him* was Brian Morris.

The image her mind conjured stirred a smile. Brian was a shy guy. A good guy. A guy of so-called average features who was therefore overlooked by most teens in their frenetic, claim-all-the-attention-you-can world of high school cliques and socialization. He was decent looking, but an introvert. He was a math and science nerd, not a jock. He was quiet and steady, not a boisterous or showy addition to the *A* crowd. Brian's innate sense of calm didn't deter Siobhan Douglas whatsoever. Rather, the facets of his personality both attracted and intrigued her.

Siobhan first came aware of Brian when plans came together for the Westerville High mid-winter musical, *Brigadoon*. Maeve Callahan, one of Siobhan's best friends in the world, had scored the lead role of Fiona Campbell and Siobhan was a member of the

dance ensemble. Brian, meanwhile, headed up the prop crew. She pictured him with a hammer and nails, speckled by paint and dusted by bits of wood debris.

Sure enough, there he was, nearly hidden by a tall wooden prop already half-painted and on its way to resembling the depths of an enchanted Scottish forest.

Following a flip of her hair—she wished she'd had time to run a brush through it after sixth period—she strode toward the left wing, shedding a lightweight rain jacket and swinging a book bag full of study aids and assignments for upcoming mid-terms. Yuck.

"Hey, Siobhan. How are you?"

Lost in the idea of facing down an intensive math exam Siobhan lost focus for a second, so the fact that Brian greeted her first gave her pulse a happy jump start.

"Hi, Brian."

*Don't be shy. Talk to him like you do everyone else. He's just a nice guy. A really nice guy...*

She dropped her bag and knelt next to him, propping her hands on her knees. "I love the set design. It's really coming together."

"Thanks. We just finished painting the drop for the village." He gestured toward the freshly decorated canvas stretched out nearby that would be lowered and lifted from the rafters as needed.

"I think that's going to be the background for a couple of the dance scenes. I can't wait for full-out dress rehearsals!"

"I watched you practice the other day. You're great...you know, I mean, the ensemble is great."

Another zap of energy swept across Siobhan's skin. "Thank you. And I've heard you sing during bass warm-ups in choir. You have a good voice. You should

have auditioned for the musical. Me? I can't sing worth anything, but being in Mr. Tuttle's mixed chorus class gives me the chance to hang out with my friends."

Brian grinned at that. "I've noticed you're really close with Maeve and Cassidy. They'll be great in Brigadoon. And Aileen Brewer—man—she's in a league of her own when it comes to singing."

"True." Siobhan's chest swelled with happiness and pride on behalf of her best friends. "Ailee and Maeve have been accepted to NYU's music program and theater program on full-rides. They're awesome." Siobhan offered a shy glance. "I still think you should give singing a try."

"Nah. Not brave enough. Besides, I never wanted to be the star of the show. That's not my role to play, know what I mean?"

"Absolutely." *See also, remarkable.* "I feel the same way. I love to dance, but I don't need a spotlight, I just love to move in time to the music. It sets me free somehow."

"What about you? What will you do after graduation?" Brian's interest reached out to envelop.

"I'm going to study ballet at the New York Dance Academy."

"Wow."

Dazzled by his reaction, Siobhan felt heat bloom, so to combat the reaction she lifted a brush and dipped it in green paint, adding sprigs of grass to the flat. She tilted toward him and lowered her voice. "Know what I want to do after that?"

"What?"

They were co-conspirators, bound by the sharp aroma of paint, the musty atmosphere of a well-worn wooden stage at their school, and the buzzing chatter

of nearby techs. Public, yet a world unto themselves...

"I want to open my very own dance school."

His eyes went wide. "I have no doubt you'd be fantastic. You...your friends...you're the kind of people meant for greatness."

Siobhan stilled her creative motions at once. "So are you."

Emphatic and sincere, she directed her gaze to his. Brian glanced away, but soon enough his attention returned. "That's really nice of you to say."

"And mean."

He shrugged, dashed dark blue against their shared canvas. "I'm happy to be in the background. You and your friends, though, you're incredible." The concluding statement caused her heart to race. Sure, insecurity was part of his journey, but Siobhan's respect and admiration for him grew tenfold. She bit her lips together and opted at once to take a huge leap of faith...and heart.

"Are you going to Winter Formal?"

In answer, Brian issued a wry chuckle then looked her straight in the eyes. His expression said it all: *Who, me? Are you serious?*

Siobhan lifted her chin and plunged ahead. "Would you want to take me to the dance?"

She actually held her breath, hoping and praying like any other giddy high-schooler, because that's just what she was. Other people might be blind to Brian's gifts and compelling personality, but Siobhan had always sensed his depth of character. Going to Winter Formal on his arm would be the best.

Swirling her brush in water then tipping its bristles in a hue of royal blue, Siobhan continued to paint and divert from any kind of awkwardness. "I

know the girl asking the guy thing is pretty weird, but—”

“Ah...really? I mean, sure. I'd be...like...so honored.”

Siobhan's senses hummed until she noted the way his smile dimmed. “Umm...Siobhan, I can't really afford a limo ride, or a fancy dinner.” His tone lowered, his Adam's apple bobbed when he swallowed. Panic rode through his furrowed brow and struck the light from his sapphire eyes. “I suppose I could take you to a place like—”

“Doesn't matter.” Placing a hand on his forearm, Siobhan cut him off. His build was strong and solid, his skin warm beneath her touch. “Truly. I'll be happy wherever we go, and whatever vehicle we arrive in. I'd be proud to go with you.”

“You're not kidding about this, are you?” His eyes sparkled with teasing mischief...and a hint of doubt.

“I most assuredly am not.” After feigning a lofty air, Siobhan giggled and shot him a playful wink.

“You. And me. And Winter Formal.”

Full of wonder, his reaction shot a thrill through Siobhan's system. That's when it all made sense—her attraction to Brian, the unspoken, as yet unexplored connection they seemed to share. He was simple and unassuming, and didn't care about popularity, not if it meant he had to compromise his ideals. Living life on those terms took character. It took depth of spirit and strength of soul to buck what was popular and culturally accepted. Siobhan could relate, for she had made a vow of solidarity and moral purpose just a few months ago with her three best friends, the very ones Brian had mentioned—Aileen, Cassidy, and Maeve.

When she drew her hand from his arm, overhead

stage lights shone off the surface of the sterling silver purity ring on the third finger of her right hand.

"I think it would be amazing," she concluded. "I've already climbed out on a limb, and I'm hoping I haven't made a fool of myself, but—are we official then?"

"Of course. I mean...yes...I...sure...I mean, if you're sure...and..."

Siobhan released a joyful sound while he stammered then she wrapped him in a quick, tight hug.

Unexpectedly the moment turned serious. He pulled back to look into her eyes. "Why, Siobhan? Why me?"

He appeared so plaintive, so removed from his element and caught off guard. What a shame that so decent a person should be rattled by returned conviction, and affection.

"Because good guys should never be in the background. Because in my eyes, you're fantastic."

# 1

## *Present Day*

Siobhan Douglas pulled the door closed and locked it tight. Another day at the Douglas Dance Academy had come to a close. Fulfillment worked through her heart and ended in the generous, happy curve of her lips. Her last session tonight had been an intermediate class that pushed her and her pupils to the limit. Still, the exertion felt great.

Now, she couldn't wait to get home.

Quick steps took her down Main Street, to the municipal lot where she parked her car. The air around her featured a prelude to winter, right down to the smell of snow and the sharp, woodsy aroma of fireplaces being put to work. In minutes she was behind the wheel of her small sedan, headed out of town toward her ranch along the O'Mara River; she fantasized about a chick-flick, one brimming with romance, an afghan, and a bit of mental rest. The past few months were catching up with her—not that she would complain in the least. Alongside Aileen Brewer, Cassidy Cartwright and Maeve Callahan, Siobhan was being given the chance to chase a dream of song and dance performance, a dream of sharing their love of God with the world. Sisters in Spirit was taking their lives by storm in the best ways imaginable. Still, a bit of down time was in order, and she relished the prospect.

Dusk turned swiftly to night and rain descended

in a gentle drizzle, coating the curves of the road with a shimmering layer of moisture. By increasing degrees, rain transformed into snow. Siobhan smiled, hunching deeper into her coat. Perfect night to indulge in hot tea and some of her mom's leftover homemade stew.

A piano riff alerted her to an incoming call from Aileen. She didn't have a hands-free device...she hardly knew the ins and outs of her so-called smart phone. She engaged the call and tapped the speaker function so she could drive and talk at the same time.

"Greetings, girlie." Siobhan flipped a wave of blonde hair over her shoulder. "I thought you'd be at dinner with my brother by now."

"Pull over. Seriously. Please, pull over." Not even cellular distortion could hide Aileen's excitement.

Baffled, Siobhan began scouting potential spots to stop. "Ah..."

"Have you pulled over? Are you stopped?"

Aileen behaved like a runaway locomotive, which meant something big was brewing. "OK, Bossy Brewer. I'm almost there. Hang with me a sec—"

"I'm *so* serious right now. I do *not* want you driving off a cliff when I tell you what's happened. It's amazing! It's incredible! It's the best, and you're going to flip!"

Intrigued by Aileen's unbridled enthusiasm, Siobhan navigated to the shoulder of the road and parked. A stand of trees stood sentinel to the right, a guardrail and slight drop-off rested in deeper shadow to the left. Nothing stretched ahead except curving roadway and the night to come.

"I'm as safe as can be. Even my seatbelt is still in place. Now fill me in." A commotion took place. Siobhan could have sworn she heard Maeve Callahan's

voice in the background, and deep, male laughter. Was that Liam? "What on earth is going on, Ailee?"

"Oh...I can't tell you everything. I want to tell you everything, but I won't. I just *can't!* I need to see you live and in person!" Aileen bubbled. "Please, sweetie, just get to my apartment as fast as you can! There's big news, huge news, on multiple levels. I'll tell you this—we landed the recording contract—but that's not even the half of it, and I won't be able to properly rejoice until you get here, do you hear me?"

Siobhan's heart lifted in syncopation to the joy she detected in Aileen's voice. "Good Lord above, Aileen, you win! I'm turning around and heading to you as soon as I hang up."

"Perfect! I can't wait! Love you!"

"Back to you doubled. See you in a few."

Laughing, Siobhan ended the call and engaged her car, pulling ahead to a spot where she executed a smooth turnabout that would lead her back to downtown Westerville. Traffic was no problem—by now, most folks were hunkered in for the night, enjoying dinner or some relaxing down time while the winter season began its inevitable push forward.

A recording contract. Obviously, they had scored the deal—excitement lit Siobhan's nerves. She drummed her fingertips against the padded steering wheel. What else could be going on, though?

The lights of downtown loomed just ahead as she navigated a sharp curve leading downhill. The roads were slickened by freezing rain and a gloss of snow. Belatedly Siobhan realized she had unconsciously accelerated...eager to see her friends and partake in whatever celebration brewed.

Cursing herself for distraction, she gently tapped

the brakes, grateful for empty roads, but instead of slowing, the car began to fishtail, careening toward the guardrail that protected traffic from a steep drop off.

Siobhan's world went into slow motion as terror took hold. On one level, time went into suspense. On another, the universe slid into super-speed. The guardrail she tried desperately to avoid swerved in and out of view as she fought to regain control of her vehicle. Thrown into panic, heart pounding, she overcompensated, and instead of tapping the breaks, she laid on them with both feet and braced, praying desperately. Squealing tires, a horrific spin and an acrid aroma overwhelmed her senses at once. Metal crunched against metal, more jarring, crashing...

"Jesus, please!"

The words lifted from her lips at the same instant a body jarring slam caused her car to bounce, the door to collapse inward against her left arm and leg. Siobhan's body bucked, and pulled, and snapped against the restraint of her belt, stealing her breath until she didn't even have the power left to scream.

And scream was all she wanted to do. Her chest burned; glass shattered with such power it promptly embedded in her hair, stinging against her cheeks, her arms. Cold air whooshed and a spasm of pain flooded her body in a sweep so powerful, so final, that her entire world faded to black.

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In the dream, she danced.

Fresh from performing a solo piece, drained yet thoroughly exhilarated, Siobhan guzzled cold water from an uncapped bottle. Her chest heaved and her

heart pumped. Never did she feel more alive than in these moments, when her love of music, rhythm and motion swirled together, blending into a seamless display that not only roused the audience to cheers and ovations, but lifted her spirit to Heaven itself.

This, she knew, was the thrill of following and trusting God's call.

Basking in a glow stirred by exertion and joy, she tucked from view in the wings of the Westerville Theater. A costume attendant dashed forward, handing Siobhan a towel, which was promptly utilized to pat away traces of perspiration from her bare arms, her neck, and shoulders. Aiding that effort, Siobhan stood near a fan where she absorbed a few moments of cool air. Meanwhile, a makeup artist stepped to the fore and went to work on a quick refresher, dabbing her face with powder, brushing on a fresh layer of blush.

While exerted muscles relaxed, Siobhan closed her eyes and automatically accepted the ministrations, continuing to recover following an intense performance segment. Inwardly, however, she already ticked off the minutes until her next entry cue, until the stage, the audience and the music would bring her to life once again.

Through it all, she watched her three dearest friends move across the stage. Their powerful voices combined into a sweet, rich harmony, stirring goose bumps along Siobhan's arms. She peeked discreetly into the house, noticing the crowd was enthralled. Siobhan offered up a small, three-word prayer that filled her heart and soul to overflowing: *Thank you, God.*

"Siobhan, are you ready for the next number?"