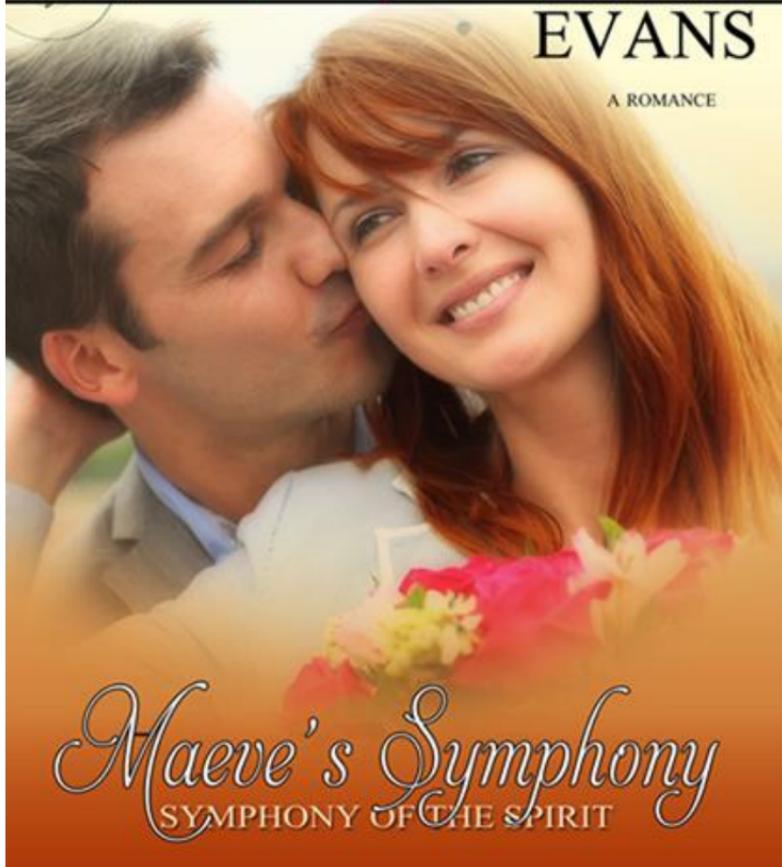


Sisters in Spirit #4



Marianne
EVANS

A ROMANCE



Maeve's Symphony
SYMPHONY OF THE SPIRIT

Maeve's
Symphony

Marianne Evans

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Maeve's Symphony

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Dedication

To Lisa Drummond: Always and forever you are my
sister in spirit. Love ya' lady.

Be sure to pick up all the Sisters in Spirit stories

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

Praise

"Does it make a difference to rely on the Lord for strength and help? Can you find peace in difficult times? You'll find out when you read *Search & Rescue*. If you like loveable characters, then I recommend you drop by *Sal's Place*. You'll be glad you did!" ~ Sherry K. Love2Read Novels Book Review

Devotion

"...There were so many things about this story that I appreciated that I am just going to say, you need to read this book." ~ That's a Novel Idea

"...a book with a real message that will leave you filled with hope. *Devotion* is so very worth reading." ~ Long & Short Book Reviews

I love it when a short story can transport me to a different country and allow me to experience the culture and holiday festivities. Marianne Evans is a gifted writer who has done just that in *Finding Home*. Peter and Alexa will warm your heart. ~ Author Carla Rossi

You will find, as you read, a love so tantalizing you will want to dig deeper into God's intriguing word. I know I did. ~ Renette S. on *Search & Rescue*

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ~ Psalm 51:10

Prologue

Seven Years Ago

Bedecked in a white, ruffled peasant blouse and traditional Scottish tartan, Maeve Callahan swished the skirt of her costume as she sang, launching into a set of soft, dreamy spins that took her across the stage of the Westerville High School auditorium.

Introductory lyrics to ‘Waitin’ for My Dearie’ poured from a spot deep in her soul. She came to rest upon a prop bench that was part of the interior of Fiona MacLaren’s home in the musical classic, *Brigadoon*. She wished, and not for the first time, that she possessed the level of dance skill possessed by her friend Siobhan Douglas. The first set of dress rehearsals for the mid-winter musical had just kicked off, and this was her senior year. She wanted to dazzle.

Her boyfriend, Josh Andrews, was tucked into his usual spot in a seat at the back of the theater. She spotted him from the corner of her eye as she continued to perform, and a thrill beat through her body that timed perfectly to the song she now sang with even greater emotion and emphasis. For, he was her love—the “dearie” she’d live forty lives to claim as her own.

His feet were propped against the back of the chair

in front of him, and a textbook rested open on his lap. He was supposed to be studying for Bio mid-terms; instead, he remained visibly caught up in her performance. He waited for rehearsals to end, ready to take her home afterward. Maeve didn't have a car of her own; her parents couldn't afford it, but Josh took care of her, and always had—ever since freshman year. Now, the end of high school inched closer with every rise in the temperature, with every lengthening of the day. Ironic that longer days passed so quickly when college and life-changes loomed with such uncertainty.

Except for the love she felt Josh.

When rehearsal ended, Maeve dashed up the aisle and Josh stood. She was breathless and still stirred by the joy of performing, but quickly realized he held his cell phone to his ear. Josh offered his free hand and tugged her to his side. "Yeah, Mom. Actually, she just finished, so I'm on my way home in a few." He chuckled, tilting the phone away from his mouth for a second. "She said she can't wait to watch the performance next weekend."

"Thank you, Mrs. Andrews," she called just loud enough to be heard. She shared a grin with Josh.

"I'll tell her. I know, I know, dinner is waiting. I won't let her keep me long. Promise."

Maeve tucked her head against his shoulder, breathing in the familiar wood spice of his cologne. When a thumb tap ended the call, Josh's embrace became a full circle that sheltered her tight.

"Mom says she's proud of you already. You were fantastic. As always."

"Thanks. I'm no Cyd Charisse—the dance moves are more Siobhan's domain—but it's so much fun to sing and act."

Josh fingered the thick, plated braid that curved down her right shoulder. His touch stirred a ripple of shivers, and she leaned into his arms once again. Another chuckle rumbled from his chest.

"What's so funny?"

"Oh, nothing much, just the thought of my Irish beauty taking on the role of a Scot."

"I still say the red hair is what won me the role."

"And I still say your talent is what won you the role. Period."

That was the beauty of Josh Andrews. He saw so much more in her than she did, and he made it plain how special she was to him—not just in words, but in actions. This past fall, Josh had been elected homecoming king, but he skipped the dance along with all the pomp and pageantry that surrounded the honor when Maeve came down with a raging bout of bronchitis. Rather than enjoy the event stag, or with a group of friends, he kept her company by watching movies with her, laughing over school gossip, plying her with steaming green tea and chicken noodle soup.

But that was only the start.

Once she recovered, he made reservations for two at Damiano Grille, the fanciest restaurant in Westerville. He instructed Maeve to dress in her homecoming gown, fully styled from her hair down to a mani-pedi so they could enjoy a delayed celebration. Dinner was superlative, and afterward, in the expansive, fully finished basement of his home, Josh treated her to a homecoming dance, complete with a suspended sparkle ball, fairy lights, and snacks. The two dozen pale pink roses that adorned the food buffet added a perfect cap to the festivities he created.

He opened entry doors and car doors. He'd hold

an open umbrella over her head rather than his own if they were walking between buildings for class and it was raining. He slipped notes into the pages of her geometry book. Just the other day when she went to her locker at the end of the school day, she had discovered a small, snowy white teddy bear with a red and black scarf perched on the inside shelf with a note tacked to its paws. *'An early Valentine for my forever Valentine, Love ~ Josh'*

Josh Andrews was her one and only—and she recognized the blessing—thanking God for him every day. But changes rolled toward them, fast and unstoppable. Unavoidable, too.

They walked to his car, hand-in-hand, through air dusted by flat, puffy snow, and Maeve ventured a trip into tricky territory. “So...have you heard anything...about the scholarships? I know you’re going to have to decide on a college soon...National Signing Day is next week.”

Maeve detected the way his arm and shoulder went stiff against hers. “Mom mentioned something about an envelope that’s waiting for me. Came via overnight courier.” He unlocked the passenger door of his car and pulled it open, stepping aside so she could toss her book bag and theater duffle into the back seat.

“Which school? U of M or UCLA? Did she happen to say?” *Please be U of M. Please be U of M.* Josh was a two-time state all-star quarterback. He was being courted by top universities across the country, but two offers rose to the top due to full-ride scholarship opportunities. The University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and UCLA in southern California. They had discussed the situation at length—the idea of Josh attending college in Michigan rather than California

held obvious logistical appeal. They could train back and forth on weekends and still stay connected...committed. California, meanwhile, would be a nightmare.

"Hop in, Maeve. I need to get going." He gave her a smile that didn't quite reach his eyes. "Mom was already teasing me about the fact that I'll be late to dinner because it takes me so long to say goodbye to you."

Maeve pasted on a smile and complied, but once Josh settled into the driver's seat, she clicked her seatbelt into place and leaned against the car door, arching a brow at him and waiting.

Josh sighed. "U of M wants my signature on a letter of intent, but they can't offer a starting QB position. They've got a Heisman candidate leading the team next year. Meanwhile, UCLA needs a starter immediately. The envelope is from UCLA. I've gotta believe it's the final scholarship documents they said they were sending. Along with the LOI."

Maeve could hardly breathe. She pressed a hand to her chest and looked away, focusing on the familiar buildings and landscape of downtown Westerville rather than the solid, strong profile of the one she loved—who, by all indicators, would be attending college at the opposite end of the country in just a few months. That meant four years apart. Minimum.

"I've already signed on at NYU." Her quiet words cut the air, the mood between them now thick and heavy—not angry, she thought. Just sad. Like they were already starting to say goodbye. "They came up with a performing arts scholarship I couldn't refuse, and I'll be near all the theaters. I...I can't...I can't change my plans."

Josh tightened his jaw, but nodded in understanding, eyes trained on the road ahead.

Meanwhile, Maeve's stomach lurched.

Maeve's ears rang, and her tummy continued to pitch when she sat down with her family to a dinner of pork chops and rice. The food held no appeal.

UCLA.

The four initials beat through her head in an unending cycle. Her muscles went taut all over again. As soon as decorum allowed, she excused herself from the table and loaded her dishes in the washer, dashing to her bedroom so she could sink into her thoughts and figure out how to cope with the separation to come.

She flopped onto the bed, unable and unwilling to focus on an English paper in need of completion. Seconds later, her cell phone blipped to life with a text from Josh.

Need 2 c u. Can I pick u up in a few minutes?

Maeve didn't hesitate. *Absolutely. I'll be waiting. xo*

K. Thanks. My mind is spinning. Need u. xo

Before long, they trotted down the stairs to the basement of his home. Josh kept hold of her hand and didn't let go. Urgency, intensity, and pain wrapped around him in a silence that had stretched uncomfortably from the moment he picked her up. The Andrews's home was empty for the time being—Josh's folks had gone to the neighbor's house for a bi-weekly euchre tournament—so silence pressed all around.

The first thing Maeve noticed was a stack of paperwork spread across an ottoman in front of the couch. Beneath the documents was the tip of what

looked like an overnight envelope.

Maeve let go of his hand and went directly to the couch. Her heart ripped in two when she spotted a familiar scripted logo. UCLA.

Josh didn't look at her. Maeve registered that fact then dismissed it. Paging through the pile of scholarship legalese, she reached the page in the back. Head bent, Josh ambled to the docking station for his iPhone, and soon the music of "You're the One" by Tyrone Wells poured from the speakers. The plaintive ballad was a favorite of theirs.

Maeve's eyes roved across the signature block of the document, and she fought the urge to scream. It was fully executed. Josh's scrawling signature leapt from the page in bold, blue strokes. The lines of his name were so familiar from the bevy of notes he had written her over the course of the years, each of which were stored carefully in a shoe box beneath her bed.

What now? She railed in silence. What next?

She caught her bottom lip between her teeth for an instant and swallowed over a hard lump. "You've signed the scholarship commitment." Her head throbbed with the effort it took to hold back tears that were ready to overwhelm. She hazarded a bleary glance toward Josh, but he kept his back to her.

"The letter of intent is beneath the delivery envelope. I'll sign that next Wednesday at four o'clock for the local press and sport channel cameras." He didn't sound proud, or pleased; he sounded defeated. "Maeve, the opportunity is everything I've ever dreamed of. A full ride. A starting QB position at a premier school." When he spun and met her gaze, the agony she detected further shredded her composure. "But how can I possibly walk away from you? I'm

trapped, because, how can I walk away from them, either?" He approached the couch, every step labored and slow. His voice was rough. "How can something that's such a blessing be such a nightmare?" He growled fiercely. "I can't do it, Maeve. I can't leave you. I can't! It's not what I want. You're what I want. You're what I've always wanted."

"But so is this, Josh."

Maeve set aside the documents and tightened her hands into fists. She lifted her chin, knowing they needed to be strong and brave. They needed to accept and work within this inevitable call to separation. Her lips trembled, but she firmed them into a line, composing herself before she dared to continue. "God will see us through, right? We can survive this, right?"

For four years? an evil little voice jibbed. *With Josh as the star quarterback at UCLA? Sure you can, sweetheart. Like he isn't going to have hundreds—thousands—of gorgeous women falling at his feet...*

Josh didn't sit. He stood before her, so strong and so incredible. He was a prince—her prince—handsome and full of heart. They belonged together.

Josh held out his hand. "Dance with me, Maeve." His expression was pained, ridden by sadness. "Please, dance with me."

Tears welled against her lashes and spilled fast down overly warm cheeks. She nodded and accepted his hand. He guided her gently to her feet, and they moved to an open space of the basement.

It was the beauty of homecoming all over again. When she stepped into the familiar sensation of his arms winding around her, Maeve breathed deep of his scent, comforting herself with the solid feel of his body. She snuggled against his shoulder and closed her eyes.

How could anything split them apart?

He rubbed his cheek softly against hers, absorbing her tears. He kissed her neck, his mouth like satin against her skin as next he tasted her jaw, her cheek...then her waiting lips.

The kiss they shared was like none other they had allowed in the past. This kiss ripped away pain and filled her with the promise of fulfillment, of joy and love. This kiss ripped away thoughts of restraint and filled her senses with a completeness that she knew—absolutely knew—would only come from the receipt of his love. This kiss ripped away reason, logic and conscience.

This was Josh, her Josh, pouring through her terrified, needy heart like an intoxicating and fragrant balm. This was right, because this was love, as true as it could be.

Surely...surely...this was OK...

The kiss continued and she spun into a world of mind-dizzying bliss. She slid deeper and deeper into the moment, and so did Josh. She sensed as much in the urgency he displayed. Emotion boiled over, translating into a touch more intimate than any they had ever shared before. His hands slipped warm against the sweatshirt she wore, gliding against her waist...then slowly up her back.

Her knees gave; she sank against him.

The kiss continued on, so rich, so satisfying, yet everything in her body prodded her to seek even more. She wanted everything from Josh, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. She craved unity before an uncertain future pulled them apart.

Gasping, grabbing for a last-ditch semblance of control, Maeve peeled away from his hold, staring into

his eyes, chest heaving as though she had just run a marathon. Heat vanished in the face of cooler air. They stared at one another across the slight distance.

“I...”

“Maeve.” He stepped close again. “Dance with me.”

The words were a softly spoken plea that lifted from his depths. She sensed as much in the way his eyes held hers, the way he trembled, as overcome by the idea of leaving as she was. This wasn’t casual. This wasn’t meaningless. This was a bonding, a most thorough giving of one heart to another.

God understood that, right?

Josh was her forever love. She knew it without any semblance of doubt. This was their moment. A commitment to the love they knew they would always share.

God understood that, right?

When she circled his neck with her arms, when their lips met once more and everything else in the world spun away, she had a fleeting thought. Everything would change if they saw this moment through to culmination. Everything would be different, and the world would be seen through different eyes. In another fleeting instant she happened to catch sight of her purity ring, recalling the vow she had made with her three best friends—Aileen, Siobhan, and Cassidy.

She and Josh tumbled onto the basement couch, cocooned privately within the spot where they had watched movies and studied, held hands and danced, laughed and dreamed—where they had nurtured their love for years. As they surrendered to a moment that nothing could hold back, Maeve tamped down God’s guidance and truth with all the certainty in her heart.

After all, nothing could be more pure and more real than the love she felt for Josh.

God understood that, right?

A short time later, Maeve rolled as quietly and unobtrusively as possible from Josh's sleep-loosened hold. She scooped her clothes into an untidy ball, quaking as she stumbled into the powder room of the basement and quickly secured the door behind her. She splashed cold water into a small paper cup and gulped it down. She looked into the mirror then released a shaky breath.

Terror struck her spirit. This terror, however, had nothing to do with Josh's acceptance to UCLA. This terror came as the result of something brand new she saw within the deepest reaches of her eyes. Knowledge. Good and evil. Right and wrong.

And in this battle, wrong had most definitely won. She knew better. She had known better than to surrender physically to any man outside the bonds of marriage.

She yanked on her clothes as fast as she could. She wanted to be covered. Hidden. All of a sudden, her self-righteous views of Adam and Eve struck her low and left pride crumbled to dust. What on earth had she allowed to happen?

She touched her cheeks and light from overhead glinted off the band of silver on the ring finger of her right hand. *I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.* Purity. A commitment to God, and to her very best friends. Maeve's chin quivered. She leaned heavily against the sink.