

THE FIRST TWO PAGES  
OF *GET ME TO THE GRAVE ON TIME*

by D.E. Ireland

First of all, thanks to B.K. Stevens for offering us a spot on this blog. Analyzing the beginning pages is a great opportunity to introduce readers to a new adventure, new characters, and new settings. Our Eliza Doolittle/ Henry Higgins mystery series differs from many others as it features two famous literary characters. Of course, other authors have also turned literary characters into amateur sleuths. A short list would include Sherlock Holmes, Mrs. Hudson, Mr. and Mrs. Darcy, and Jane Eyre. Since both of us loved George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, as well as the film *My Fair Lady* starring Audrey Hepburn and Rex Harrison, we chose to transform the charming and clever Eliza Doolittle and the irascible Professor Higgins into a sleuthing duo. If you haven't read the play, or seen the musical, you've missed out on clever, sparkling dialogue, social conventions being turned on their ear, and Shaw's sharp attitude regarding the battle of the sexes.

When we took on the challenge of recreating Eliza and Higgins, several things became apparent. First, we needed to recreate Shaw's witty dialogue exchanges between them. Second, given their 20-year age difference, we wanted to make clear that Eliza and Higgins are not now – nor will they ever be – a romantic couple. The stubborn Eliza considers herself an independent woman more than capable of standing up to the scholarly but arrogant Professor. Higgins, on the other hand, has worked hard to mold her into the “perfect” lady – Galatea to his *Pygmalion*, for those who know the Greek legend Shaw based his play on. And despite the difference in age and background, Eliza and Higgins are a friendly, often squabbling, pair of equals.

Now let's analyze the first two pages of our latest Doolittle-Higgins mystery, *Get Me to the Grave On Time*, which features four weddings, a funeral, and murder. Higgins, Eliza, Pickering, and Henry's mother Mrs. Higgins are all heading to a wedding ceremony....

*August 1913*

“Why must I subject myself to these blasted weddings?” Henry Higgins asked. “I've been invited to four in the next month alone. Four! I swear, I would prefer murder to matrimony.”

Higgins's outburst elicited groans and eye rolling from his fellow passengers in the chauffeured car. Perspiring from the summer heat, he waved his top hat before his face. “And don't think I'm dealing in hyperbole. I have a basis for comparison. After all, I've spent the past few months solving more than one murder, and been quite successful at it, too.”

Eliza, who sat across from him, lifted an eyebrow. “You wouldn't have solved any of them without my help. Blimey, I've never known a man who thinks so well of

himself.” She turned to the older woman beside her. “Was he always like this? If so, his nanny should have tossed him out of the pram and given a swift kick to his swollen head.”

It’s no surprise that Higgins takes all the credit for solving previous murders, since ego and pride are part of his makeup. Yet Eliza easily cracks that swelled head and lets the hot air out with her scathing reply. Included is a hint of this group’s formal dress when Higgins waves his “top hat”, along with the era and time of year noted by “August, 1913” and “summer heat”. Although King Edward died in 1910, the era is still considered “Edwardian” or perhaps “pre-WWI” given the sixteen month time frame until the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, which set everything in motion. The reader gets a sense of Higgins’s self-indulgent character, as he believes he has better things to do than attend the wedding of a family friend. As for Eliza, the “rough edges” of her former life as a poor flower girl emerge when she uses the phrase “blimey”. Her hardscrabble background also comes through when she says she hopes Higgins’s nanny kicked him in the head.

The following paragraph gives the reader some insight into the backstory these characters have shared in the previous year. And we are shown that despite Higgins’s exasperated grumbling, he is quite fond of both his mother and Eliza.

Although Higgins aimed exasperated looks at his mother and Eliza, in truth he was quite fond of them. Higgins had little use for women, but he regarded his mother as unique to her species: intelligent, cultured, and capable of wielding a wicked wit. As for Eliza Doolittle, a year ago she entered his life like an unexpected windstorm. He thought teaching a Cockney flower seller to speak and behave like a lady would be an amusing lark, as well as an easy way to win a wager from his fellow scholar and friend Colonel Pickering. Instead, she exceeded their expectations by being far more clever, resourceful, and charming than they could have guessed. Higgins found Eliza a delightful companion, but he’d swallow a tuning fork before admitting it.

The reader receives further information on Eliza’s past, notably her contentious relationship with her family. Her father, Alfred, formerly a dustman and now a member of the middle class with money in his pockets and relatives hanging onto his coattails, has married Rose Cleary, his latest in a string of paramours. Needless to say, Eliza is not enamored with his choice.

“In response to your question,” Mrs. Higgins continued, “you’re attending four weddings because for some inexplicable reason these people wish your presence at their nuptials.”

“One of them is his own niece.” Eliza reminded her. “Relatives have to be invited no matter how much you may like them to stay away. I showed up for my dad’s wedding, even though I’d dance in the street if my step-mum dropped dead.”

“Exactly.” Higgins pointed at her. “You also prefer murder over matrimony.”

Eliza sat up with a start. “I never said anything about murder. I’d just like Rose to choke on a chicken bone or something. I don’t want her to be done away with.”

He gave a gleeful chuckle. “But murder is the quickest way, is it not?”

Higgins always has to have the last word. Even more significant, Higgins has already mentioned murder several times in the opening paragraphs, priming the reader to expect a little mayhem and murder at the upcoming wedding.

We hope you’ll keep reading **GET ME TO THE GRAVE ON TIME**, out now on Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Kobo, and iBooks.

Author Bio:



D.E. Ireland is a team of long time friends and award-winning authors, Meg Mims and Sharon Pisacreta, who collaborate on a mystery series based on George Bernard Shaw’s play *Pygmalion*, which inspired the classic musical *My Fair Lady*. The series first appeared in 2014 with the Agatha Award finalist for Best Historical *Wouldn’t It Be Deadly*, and they are currently working on Book Four. Their most recent release, *Get Me To The Grave On Time*, is an Agatha finalist for Best Historical Mystery of 2016. The two Michigan authors also pursue separate writing careers, penning cozy mysteries for Kensington under their respective new pseudonyms: Sharon Farrow and Meg Macy. Sharon’s Berry

Basket series debuted in October 2016, and Meg’s Shamelessly Adorable Teddy Bar series will be released in summer 2017. Both women are grateful to have patient husbands, brilliant daughters, and a shared love of tea, books, and history.

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