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**HEADLINE:** Four Plots With a Car in Common

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**BODY:**

Nobody had to pay author Karin Slaughter to put a BMW in one of her books: it's what the protagonist, Dr. Sara Linton, drives in five Grant County crime novels. In the acknowledgments for "Indelible" in 2004, Ms. Slaughter wrote, "I've had Sara drive a BMW in every one of these books in the hopes that the nice folks over in Munich will thank me with a shiny new 330Ci."

Ms. Slaughter never did get that car, but in a bit of serendipity, her publisher, Random House, was tapped by the automaker to produce a series of short audio books that featured BMW cars. Along with the authors Don Winslow, James Flint and Simon Kernick, Ms. Slaughter contracted to write a short story that weaves a BMW into the plot.

The stories run from about 35 minutes to an hour -- the length of typical commutes, a Random House statement explained -- and have been uploaded to the site [www.bmw-audiobooks.com](http://www.bmw-audiobooks.com) every two weeks, beginning with Mr. Winslow's "Beautiful Ride" on Feb. 7 and concluding later this month with Ms. Slaughter's "Cold Cold Heart."

BMW Audio Books is the second time the company has offered entertainment over the Internet; from 2001 to 2005, it produced "The Hire," widely lauded three-minute downloadable dramas by directors like Ang Lee and Ridley Scott and with actors like Madonna and Clive Owen.

At the center of Mr. Winslow's "Beautiful Ride" is Ted, a once-successful California real estate investor who has lost everything -- except his new BMW. When Ted's wife accuses him of loving the car more than he loves her, he responds, "It's not a car. It's a BMW Z4." Mr. Winslow admitted that he initially spread the paeans to German engineering a bit thick even for his sponsors. "They were sensitive about it being too much of a commercial," said Mr. Winslow, who agreed to excise some references.

Ms. Slaughter, who has owned several BMW's and drives one now -- "My father was a car salesman who sold Fords, so this was my way of rebelling," she said -- dismissed the notion that it was improper to use product placement in her writing. "I wouldn't do it for anything I thought was bad, like an ab cruncher or Peeps," she said, referring to the body-building machine and the Easter confection.

While her compensation was generous, she said it was shy of a BMW's sticker price, the lowest being \$31,000 for a BMW 325i sedan. **ANDREW ADAM NEWMAN**