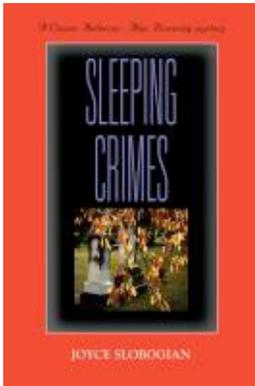


A Connie Anderson / Alan Bowering mystery

SLEEPING CRIMES



JOYCE SLOBOGIAN



Eric Delaney is found murdered in his hotel room in Brandon. Rumour has it that he planned to write a "tell-all" book causing embarrassment to a number of people in town. Which one of them silenced him? Before that riddle is solved, a second man is murdered and the town is in shock. Sergeant Alan Bowering of the Brandon Police Service teams up with his girlfriend, Connie Anderson, to catch the killer.

Sleeping Crimes

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SLEEPING CRIMES

A novel

By

Joyce Slobogian

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PROLOGUE

Spring 2000

Connie Anderson was furious. She slammed down the textbook she'd been reading and took a sip from her cup, grimacing at the taste of the cold coffee. *It's ridiculous*, she thought, *that I'm sitting here wasting my time. I swear the man is not worth it.*

Her boyfriend Eric had promised to meet her right after he was finished with some research at the library. They agreed on six o'clock and it was now after six thirty. This had happened all too often lately, Connie recalled, and she was getting sick and tired of it.

The noise level in The Coffee Cup kept increasing by several decibels, as the popular café filled up with about a dozen students from the nearby Brandon University. Laughing and chatting the young people settled around two tables they had pushed together to seat the whole group.

Connie turned her chair in order to face away from the BU table. Several of the students sitting there were sharing classes with her, and she was not in a mood to join them or to be asked why she was sitting here alone. A waitress approached her offering a refill on her coffee, but Connie shook her head. Checking her watch for the tenth time, she was uncomfortably aware that she had been waiting now for almost an hour.

"Hey Connie, why the long face?" Susie, one of her classmates had seen her.

"I'm just deep in thought," Connie said and smiled. "Trying to wrap my mind around my exams."

"Don't worry about it," Susie's friend Brian exclaimed. "Come join us. We've all decided to forget about school for tonight and just have a good time."

But Connie had stuck around the café long enough. She pushed her chair back and smiled at her friends. "Sorry, I've got to go," she said. "You guys have a good time."

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“Count on it,” Susie laughed, as Connie waved and left the café. *Too bad for Eric if he shows up later*, she muttered as she walked quickly down the street, getting more annoyed by the minute. In fact, her thoughts mirrored escalating anger. *Who does he think he is, anyway? God’s gift to women? I don’t need to wait around for him. The world is full of cute guys. It’s time to tell him to take a hike.*

The decision made her feel much better. She kicked a stone across the sidewalk for emphasis and strode off down the road with new purpose in her step.

The car Eric had been waiting for sped into the park and screeched to a stop inches away from Eric, causing him to jump back in alarm. Rick Smithers didn’t get out. He grabbed an envelope from the car seat and threw it at Eric without a word.

“Hey, Professor,” Eric grinned, catching the missive, “not in a good mood tonight?”

“I should have called the police on you,” the older man growled, directing an angry scowl at Eric from behind his dark rimmed glasses.

“I can’t believe you mean that. It would mean exposing your little secret, wouldn’t it? I don’t think that would do you much good. The powers that be in BU probably wouldn’t like your meetings with pretty young students in your office. If people found out that you use your position to get girls to exchange sex for grades, it’d cause quite a scandal. Not to mention Mrs. Smithers’ reaction.”

“I brought you the money. Take it and go to hell!” Smithers fired up his Lincoln and turned it around, racing down the path towards the road.

The steel blue van turned off Braecrest Drive and onto Eighteenth Street. Stephen looked at his wife and smiled.

“Here we are,” he said, “everything went like clockwork. For a couple of amateurs we did pretty well, eh?”

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“I still can’t believe we did it. I just wish I could have taken a look at the stuff that used to be in that jewellery box.” She pointed to a blue jewellery container resting between them on the seat. “What do you think it was—a bracelet maybe? It’s bigger than a ring box.”

“Who cares,” Stephen said. “We made five thousand dollars for breaking the patio window to get into that house, throw some things around and steal an empty box. The guy had his own reasons for hiring us to do it. Let’s not look a gift horse in the mouth.”

“I guess you’re right,” Rita agreed after a few minutes. “The money’s enough for the down payment on that house we’ve looked at. Just think about it, you, me and little Stevie in our own house!”

“You did count the cash, I hope?”

“It’s all here.” She hesitated. “Stephen - You’re sure nothing will go wrong?”

“What could go wrong? We stuck to the instructions. The cops will investigate for a while, of course. But there’s nothing to link us to the so-called robbery. After a while, the insurance will pay up and we can relax.”

The van was now crossing the bridge over the Assiniboine River. “I can’t wait to get home,” Rita said and snuggled up to her husband. He smiled and took one hand off the steering wheel to give her a hug. As he bent towards her, Rita pulled back and screamed: “Look out!”

Stephen’s reaction came too late. He managed to avoid being hit by the Lincoln racing straight at them from the side road, but he lost control of the van. It flew off the road and rolled over into the field on the west side. Stephen’s last impression was the shattered glass from the side window flying into his face. He was unconscious, when a large shard struck the artery in his throat.

Eric quickly fanned through the stack of \$100.00 bills. It all seemed to be there. He put the envelope in his pocket and turned to his bike.

A sudden screech of tires startled him into turning back. He drew a sharp breath as he watched Smithers’ vehicle careen into the path of a southbound van that had just cleared the bridge over the Assiniboine.

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The driver of the van desperately yanked the wheel around. The vehicle flew off the road, rolled over and landed on its left side with a sickening crash. Professor Smithers' silver Lincoln suddenly revved up and took off at high speed.

As Eric ran towards the accident scene, the passenger door of the van opened. A young woman crawled out and limped towards the bridge, clutching a large bag. "Hey," Eric called, "wait a minute! Do you need help?"

The girl looked back and he caught sight of her terrified face, blood running down her cheek. She quickly turned and staggered north over the bridge. But Eric had recognized her, a student from the Education department. She had shared an English class with him the year before and he'd tried to ask her out. She had laughingly refused and told him she had a husband and a four-year old son.

Eric turned back to the wreck and was horrified at the sight of the driver slumped over, blood pumping out of his neck. He seemed beyond help. Moving closer to the vehicle, Eric smelled gas and took a step back just in time, before fire broke out, instantly creating a fierce blaze.

There was nothing Eric could do for the poor devil in the car. He had no intention of staying around and waiting for the police. As he turned away, he stumbled over something on the ground. It was an object that had been thrown from the van. He picked up and stared at an open blue jewellery box with "Harry Winston Fine Jewels" printed inside in gold letters. It was empty. A quick look around showed no glint of jewellery. If the jewels were left in the van, it was too late to rescue them.

The fire had been noticed and reported by people living in the area. Eric could hear the whine of approaching sirens. "Time to take off", he mumbled, dropping the jewellery box. He ran at high speed across the street, where he had left his bike. By the time the first fire engine became visible he'd already swung astride the bike and was rushing through the park towards the Eight Street Bridge.

TEN YEARS LATER

CHAPTER ONE

Brandon hadn't changed a great deal. At least that's how it looked to Eric Delaney, as he stopped his rented Jeep at the top of the North Hill and stepped out of the car to take in a bird's view of the city. From the tall smokestacks of Simplot and the water tower in the east to the mostly residential area in the west, everything seemed familiar. In her letters, Eric's sister had mentioned changes that took place in recent years: the arrival of a meat processing plant, the expansion of the Keystone Centre, renovations at Brandon University and efforts to spruce up the downtown area. None of these things were visible from the place where Eric stood. The St. Augustine Church spire still reached to the heavens and, closer to the railway, the McKenzie Seeds building and the younger Scotia Tower were prominent among the old buildings that had bordered Rosser Avenue since Brandon's early days. Eric remembered the pigeons that used to congregate in great numbers on the roofs of the higher buildings. Their descendants were probably still doing that, even though undetectable from the Hill.

Closer to Eric's outlook position, in the valley at the bottom of the hill, the Assiniboine River still languidly snaked its way in continuous loops and curves along the changing landscape. On the main North-South route through Brandon, Eighteenth Street, a new, wider bridge had recently been built across the river to accommodate the ever rising traffic. Just north of the bridge, a new commercial center had been built, housing many stores and businesses where ten years earlier prairie grasses and bushes had been a roaming place for deer and rabbits.

Eric leaned his wiry frame against the car and took a deep breath. The fresh Manitoba air gave his heart a lift. "Ah, I do still love this place," he whispered. Even though he hadn't lived in Brandon for years, it still had the feeling of home. Despite the steady rush of traffic

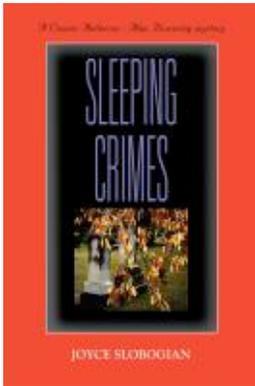
down the hill with its resulting exhaust, the trees and underbrush next to the road lived on as they always did, making the air smell sweet. Birds sang their happy songs, and Eric was amazed to see a couple of deer grazing between the trees, seemingly oblivious to the passing traffic.

A brisk October wind ruffled Eric's sandy blond hair and bit into his cheeks. Shivering in his light shirt, he reached into the car for his suede jacket and slipped it on. He'd forgotten how cool it could get in Manitoba at the end of October. It had been May when he left for British Columbia ten years earlier, planning to find fame and fortune in the big city. *And it worked*, he thought to himself, while lighting a Marlboro. A talent for ferreting out secrets had propelled him into public awareness as the author of several tell-all books about famous people. Film stars, politicians and other luminaries in both Canada and the United States had learned to be afraid of the power of his pen.

Now he was back in Brandon. Just for a while, mind you. Just long enough to take care of some unfinished business. There were a few people in this town who had never expected to see him again. They were probably nervous right now, reading in the Brandon Sun about his return to accept the newly created Alumni Award for Journalistic Achievement. He had also given in to his sister's pleas to give a public reading of his newest book during the PickleFest event.

They were right to be nervous. Eric hadn't forgotten a thing about his last evening in Brandon. He now cast his eye across the river to Eleanor Kidd Park and let his mind return to a time long gone, but not forgotten. The scene might be ten years old, but it was burned in clear detail in Eric's mind, as he overlooked the landscape from the hill. He extinguished his cigarette, took a deep breath and got back in the Jeep, turning it downhill towards the city. As his vehicle sped towards the city, Eric smiled wickedly and whistled under his breath. His visit to Brandon promised to hold something much more interesting than an award and a visit with his sister.

It was going to be a lot of fun.



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