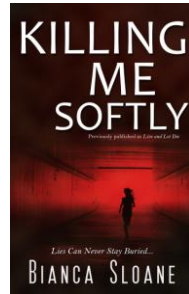


Behind the Book – *Killing Me Softly*



With some of my story ideas, the opening line will pop into my head and I take it from there. Other times, I hear the characters talking (one of the few times it's perfectly acceptable to hear voices in your head) and the plot forms around whatever situation the characters are in.

Killing Me Softly (which I originally published as *Live and Let Die* in 2012; more on that later) was a combination of both – I heard Phillip and Tracy talking while the first line began to worm its way into my head.

I wrote *Killing Me Softly* back in 2005; it was the third full-length suspense manuscript I wrote, but it was by far the hardest. I can't even remember how long it took to complete the first draft. It was a complicated story and I probably changed my mind twenty times about where exactly I wanted the story to go. I knew *what* I wanted to happen, but I had a hard time figuring out *how* I was going to make it happen. I experimented with different scenes, plot devices, formats – you name it, I tried it.

Eventually, I did finish the first draft, but never went back to fix the problems, as I had moved across the country, got a new job, etc., etc.

When I decided (seven years later) to go the indie route, I thought *Killing Me Softly* would be a good choice as my first release, but it would need some surgery. Fixing the plot problems gave me many sleepless nights and at one point, I printed out the middle 100 pages and laid them out on my living room floor like a giant jigsaw puzzle and rearranged them until I liked what I saw.

This was also the book I workshopped when I took my class with Joy Fielding in summer of 2012 (each member of the class had to submit their first chapter for critique. At one point, I got it in my head to cut what is now the prologue (Keegan,

Phillip and Paula) and the first chapter (Tracy and Phillip's wedding) and start with Chapter Two (Sondra racing through the airport to get to Tracy's house after learning about her sister's disappearance.) I felt like I had to start with major action and I thought a jittery woman running through an airport was intriguing. While my fellow students felt overall it was a strong start and liked Sondra, turns out, by cutting out the prologue and first chapter, all I did was muddy the waters, because no one knew what the hell was going on.

So I put them back in.

The two biggest themes I wanted to explore was the bond between the two sisters and how far people will go for love. I actually based Sondra and Tracy on my two younger sisters – one duct tapes her shoes and the other one had eye cream when she was ten. My little tribute to them.

Another theme I wanted to touch on in a very subtle way was the seeming disparity in media coverage when white women go missing vs. when black women go missing. I actually read an article in *USA Today* (which I mention in the book) that examined this very issue. In 2005, we had Laci Peterson and the Runaway Bride, among others, receiving ravenous media attention, while similar cases involving black women seemed to go largely unnoticed on a national level. I thought it was interesting and like I said, while I wanted to touch on it, *Killing Me Softly* is not meant to be a discourse on race. Hopefully, it's just an entertaining book.

As I mentioned above, this book began its "published" life with the title, *Live and Let Die*. Music plays a big role in all my books, and I knew I was going to use a song title to name my book. I had originally chosen "I Can't Make You Love Me," by Bonnie Raitt, but that didn't resonate with anyone, so I hunted high and low to come up with something else. I settled on "Live and Let Die," by Paul McCartney and Wings. While I wasn't crazy about it, at the time, (in keeping with that music theme) it seemed like the best alternative.

As time went on, the more it gnawed at me that I really didn't like the title. So, I hunted high and low again, but this time, a new title fell into my lap. I was cleaning out some old cassette tapes (!) and came across "In Effect Mode" by Al B. Sure! featuring "Killing Me Softly," his remake of the classic Roberta Flack tune, "Killing Me Softly With His Song." While the lyrics of either don't have any relevance where my book is concerned, I think the title is the perfect representation of the story, so I am very happy with it.

Since I was changing the title, I figured I'd go with a new cover as well. I still love the original cover and definitely had a *much* harder time letting it go than I did the title. However, I'm thrilled with the new cover and mad props to my cover designer, Torrie Cooney.

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