

Big Killa

There was once a rapper so crazy that he would shoot a member of his crew on stage at every show. Big Killa was his name and he would literally pull out a gun at some point during his performance and actually *shoot* one of his homies right there, live, in front of everyone. And the people ate this shit up! They'd come from all around to watch Big Killa on the mic, rapping about bitches, hoes, fuck the police, and all that poetry of the streets stuff, then whip out his strap and BAM!—shoot some fool who was dancing and flailing his arms with him. Big Killa offered \$5,000 to any young gee who would agree to perform with him. Kids from the streets, aspiring rappers, artists, students, even actual gang members jumped at the chance to score five Gs and be up there with Big Killa, even though they all knew they might get shot. I mean, this was nuts! I couldn't believe it. Who would do that? Who would allow this? Where were the police?

Turns out, the police were after Big Killa. *Right?* The dude was shooting people, after all, with like, hundreds of witnesses all around. Forget Fight Club! This was Murder Incorporated, live at the Shoot-em-up Festival! Big Killa's sick fans would pay \$1,000 a ticket to go see someone get shot on stage. And no one snitched on him. No one told the cops where Big Killa was, or where he'd play next. Everything was deep, deep, *deep* underground! Like a gore-mongering Roman citizen of old, jockeying for the best view in the stands at the Coliseum, I had to know more! I had to see this for myself to believe it. I had to score a ticket to Big Killa's next show.

I had the money. I had the stomach for it (so I thought). I was pretty pro-police, so

who knew if I would turn Big Killa in to the cops or not, once I found out where he would play next, but, man, I just had to *know*! Was this guy for real? More importantly for me, at the moment was, where would I get a ticket? How would a Wall Street, financial dude like myself, white, privileged, driving a Mercedes, gain entry into one of Big Killa's kill fests? Did they even let rich white dudes into his shows?

Well, surprise, surprise, come to find out that most of the people going to Big Killa's shows were rich white people. How do you like that? The Man was paying big money to see Black people killing other Black people, up on stage no less! How do I know? One of my financial colleagues, clearly "in the scene" asked me to go with her to see Big Killa. You should have heard this lady, Hannah Zipp, with her short, auburn bob and bright red lips: "You like rap?" I played coy: "It's okay." Hannah's blue eyes slid around under her eyelashes like a hockey puck. You would have thought the CIA was coming up behind her the way she was looking around. "Ever heard of Big Killa?" Playing dumb, I went along: "Nah, who's he?" Her eyes widened as she said: "He's the big black guy that shoots people on stage." I thought Hannah was going to wet her shorts. "Sounds pretty sick," I replied, "I'm in."

"Meet me at Union Square at 8:00 tonight? Outside Coffee Shop Bar," she practically whispered.

"He's playing at Union Square?"

"No!" she snapped. "They give you the location later, along with the code word."

"Speakeasy style." I got it.

I couldn't wait until work was over. What was I getting myself into? I was going to a concert where the bullets would be flying! Wait a minute? Did Big Killa ever *miss*?

Did I need a bulletproof vest? Should I tell my mom where I was going? Make out my will? Ours was a sick culture, but I couldn't resist it.

Finally, the time had come. It was raining and I was without an umbrella, but I slogged up and made my way on the train to Union Square. I found Hannah arguing with some homeless guy. Was he the Big Killa connection?

"Hey, what's going on?" I asked. I thought she was gonna take off one of her Jimmy Choo's and throw it at him.

"Bastard wouldn't take the food I was offering," Hannah huffed, throwing a McDonald's bag into the trash. "He just wanted money! He's just gonna drink it all up, or get high."

"You're going to go see someone get shot and you're complaining about some hobo's morals? I wouldn't have taken that McDonald's crap, either. Maybe he wanted money for Whole Foods?"

"Maybe you'd like to find Big Killa's show all by *yourself!*" Hannah retorted.

I put my hands up.

"Awright, awright! My bad!"

Hannah got the code word, and soon we were in a cab headed to a dark, off the beaten path part of the Lower East Side, where there was this large, brick warehouse, with big, burly, Russian-looking security guards outside. Hannah told me I would have to turn in my cell phone at the door. No cell phones allowed. No one was permitted to make calls, text, take photos, video, etc., for obvious reasons. I played along, turning in my cell phone, which they checked to make sure it was a real, working cell phone that was *mine*—I had to like show them my photos, Facebook, and stuff. I totally did...But what I

didn't tell Hannah or anyone, was that I had smuggled in another, smaller smartphone—that belonged to my niece, a junior at NYU—in my shoe (we were patted down and had a metal detector wand waved over our junk). I had to give her \$100 bucks to borrow it for a night.

It was dark as we walked through several doors. I hadn't seen this many white people in one place since a family reunion in Ocala, Florida. You would have thought we were all about to see *Hamilton* the way everyone was dressed. I was aghast at all the privilege I was surrounded by. I was *white* and I felt oppressed, micro-aggressed. I never knew there were this many people like me, seemingly good people, with college degrees and families, that were this cruel, bloodthirsty. We were going to potentially see some poor, underprivileged soul get *shot* for chrissakes! Well, I wasn't gonna just stand by and watch this idly. I had a college buddy who was a Detective with the NYPD. Yeah, that's right! I had secretly stiffed in a tip with the cops. I was turning Big Killa in. I was gonna do the right thing and save a life tonight! My "tricky" cell phone's GPS was up and running, and I knew that the cops would be raiding the joint at any minute.

I hoped Hannah wouldn't notice how nervous I was, looking toward the doors and exits, while also sneaking glances at her cleavage. Damn, I didn't know her boobs were that big.

Anyway...

The lights turned down low. Then a bunch of other, colored lights started flashing, and a chest-thumping beat silenced the room as the stage was illuminated, revealing a bunch of homies filling the stage from dark curtain like they were coming out of a clown car. My heart nearly skipped a beat as I breathlessly looked for Big Killa. What would he

look like? Would he be decked out in baggy, gangsta clothing, a Kangol hat at a jaunty tilt on his head? Did I even know what gangsta clothes looked like? Would there be bicycle chain-like gold jewelry swinging from his neck? Would his teeth be gripped with bedazzled jewels and gold letters spelling KILLA, as he whipped out a MAC-10 and started blasting on fools?

I started to get queasy and had a bad feeling that this wouldn't end well.

Then...he emerged in all his criminal glory: Big Killa!

He was big...and *menacing*! But there was no gold jewelry, no Kangol hats, bling in his grill, powder blue sweat suits, baggy clothes, thousand-dollar Jordans he had jacked from some kid on the streets, no...Big Killa came out in an all-black, three-piece suit: black shirt, black tie, coat and pants, with a NY Yankees cap on. He was a darker-skinned brother, with an intense gaze and an etched scowl. There was no flash, no cussing or bitches and hoes. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Who was this Big Killa?

I was gripped.

“NEW YORK CITY!” he shouted into his mic, throwing up in his arms. “WHITE New York City! Welcome to my show! Big Killa is in the house, SUCKAS! And I'm here to get you WOKE! I got rappers on my stage! Artists and performers tryin' to come up in the *Man's* world. I'm gonna have fine ass African Queens shaking their *big*, black *booties* on stage! But that's not why you're here, is it?”

“NOOOOOO!” everyone shouted, jumping and screaming in joy and ecstasy.

“You all want to see another BLACK MAN pull out a STRAP and SHOOT a *BLACK BODY!*”

“YESSSSSS!” People were jumping up and down, cheering and screaming like the Yankees had just won the pennant.

Then...the music started bumping, and the beats started thumpin,’ and the lights started blaring, and the women started staring, at the black women pouring out from behind the curtains. The rappers started singing, their jewelry started blinging, and my phone started pinging!

But wait...

This wasn’t what I expected. I wanted to hear what Big Killa had to say. He was a force bigger than life. He took to the edge of the stage like a man about to jump from the Brooklyn Bridge onto the gentrified concrete of DUMBO down below.

“We wasn’t invited—we was forced!” Big Killa started. “Brought us here to instill FEAR! Break our bodies, break our souls, or so you thought! Didn’t know we secretly FOUGHT! Spoke our language, sung our songs, formed families you never thought, grew our leaders in the fields, and wrought, the future you left us for naught! We rose above, learned your lingo and grew our minds, raised our children in a new America, newly free, we got Booker T., WEB, Malcolm, who didn’t live to say, neither MLK! We fought your wars and hoped for more, told no, got Jim Crow, pushed through Selma, Little Rock, Detroit, Chicago, LA, and Crack, you think we just about RAP, guns, and killin’ fools, some of us do, the world is cruel, but for white America, the only rule is know your place and suffer through, the schools we left for you, never leave your hood, buy your weave, and struggle for food, well I’ve got news for YOU...”

That’s when Big Killa did what I realized I had forgotten he’d do. He pulled out a GUN! He started *shooting* at his fellow band mates!

POP-POP-POP!

NO! I thought. But *wait!* I suddenly realized that the gun was firing *blanks!* The band members were all *in on it!* What? Big Killa had given us a clue earlier...

Performers!

NO! This was a performance *art piece!* All along, it was a *statement!* The gun, the legend of Big Killa shooting people...it was *all a show!* How could I not know?

“Someday this barrel might be pointed at YOU! Not the barrel of a GUN, but the barrel of accountability, responsibility, for the loss of our aspirations, the dream of reparations...”

That’s when, to my utter shock and horror, the black helmet-clad SWAT team members of the NYPD burst through the doors of the underground club, their AR-15s cutting through the stunned onlookers, as they advanced on the stage, shouting for everyone to *get down, show them their hands.*

Big Killa, staying true to himself and to his message, stood on the edge of that Brooklyn Bridge, his arm outstretched, pointing that fake gun toward us all, toward the cops, as if an accusatory finger...And the police opened fire.

What else could they do? And the American tragedy repeated itself again...

And again...

My God, what had I done?