



The Killers: A Narrative of Real Life in Philadelphia

George Lippard

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PHILADELPHIA, the 1840s: a corrupt banker disowns his dissolute son, who then reappears as a hardened smuggler in the contraband slave trade. Another son, hidden from his father since birth and condemned as a former felon, falls in with a ferocious street gang led by his elder brother and his revenge-hungry comrade from Cuba. His adopted sister, a beautiful actress, is kidnapped, and her remorseful black captor becomes her savior as his tavern is engulfed in flames. Vendetta, gang violence, racial tensions, and international intrigue collide in an explosive novella based on the events leading up to an infamous 1849 Philadelphia race riot. *The Killers* takes the reader on a fast-paced journey from the hallowed halls of academia at Yale College to the dismal solitary cells of Eastern State Penitentiary and through southwest Philadelphia's community of free African Americans. Though the book's violence was ignited by the particulars of Philadelphia life and politics, the flames were fanned by nationwide anxieties about race, labor, immigration, and sexuality that emerged in the young republic.

Penned by fiery novelist, labor activist, and reformer George Lippard (1822-1854) and first serialized in 1849, *The Killers* was the work of a wildly popular writer who outsold Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne in his lifetime. Long out of print, the novella now appears in an edition supplemented with a brief biography of the author, an untangling of the book's complex textual history, and excerpts from related contemporaneous publications. Editors Matt Cohen and Edlie L. Wong set the scene of an antebellum Philadelphia rife with racial and class divisions, implicated in the international slave trade, and immersed in Cuban annexation schemes to frame this compact and compelling tale.

Serving up in a short form the same heady mix of sensational narrative, local color, and impassioned politics found in Lippard's sprawling *The Quaker City, or The Monks of Monks Hall*, *The Killers* is here brought back to lurid life.

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