

Cop-Killer Merkle Didn't Know He Had a

License to Hell

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AUTOMATIC gripped in gaunt hand, "Cop-Killer" Merkle jabbed its muzzle hard against the whimpering man before him.

"Listen, Peters," Merkle rasped, "the heat's on me. Every Fed in town is on the lookout for my car. I'm red-hot—get it?"

The white-faced man stared fixedly at Merkle, almost incoherent from fear.

"You're 'Cop-Killer' Merkle—what do you want with me?" his voice went on jerkily.

Merkle hunched his huge frame forward.

"Sure, I'm 'Cop-Killer.' They told me you were a right guy back in stir. My car's hot. I've got to be in Florida by tomorrow night. Once I'm in Jacksonville everything will be okay. But I've got to have a new paint job on the car and I want some new license plates!"

"License plates?" the little man said unevenly. "Please, Merkle, anything but that. I've gone straight. I haven't touched one of those jobs in years. If the dicks ever found out that I was ever mixed up in the phony license plates racket—"

"Yeah?" growled Merkle, prodding the automatic forward menacingly. "Listen, guy, you used to make fake tags for every mobster in town. I want you to make me a pair of Florida license plates that are the McCoy! I'll work on the car myself, if you give me some quick-drying paint. Now start—*pronto!*"

Peters' eyes gleamed craftily.

"Okay, Lefty—you'll have both plates by morning—as soon as the moulds cool."

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His foot pressing down on the accelerator, Merkle whipped his car through highway traffic, heading for Jacksonville. The dragnet would never catch him now, he told himself. Peters had done a perfect job with those queer plates. The Feds were all looking for a blue sedan with Georgia plates, and here he was, car disguised, on a smooth road.

Too bad he had to kill Peters, though. Merkle smiled grimly as he relived the scene of a few hours before, when he had fed Peters six slugs through the belly, in payment for his help. Peters had turned soft—might phone the cops. He had had to die.

Suddenly, from behind him, Merkle heard the wailing crescendo of a police siren. In his mirror he could see a big police car, filled with troopers, bearing down on him. He jammed his foot harder on the gas pedal. They were getting closer—closer. His car two-wheeled a sharp curve, swayed drunkenly for a moment. For an instant, it seemed poised in mid-air. Then a splintering crash as a ton of metal pinned his body to the road.

The world spun chaotically as consciousness deserted him. His fogged mind could catch snatches of conversation.

"It's 'Cop-Killer' Merkle, all right," a heavy voice was booming. "He almost got through our dragnet with that new coat of paint and the phony plates. But he should have known that all Florida cars have only *one* license plate!"