

with something like quicksilver in his veins.

"Good job for me I'm in such first-class nick," he murmured, cuddling his rifle in his arm-pit. "Peyton will be snorting like any grampus in that bush. Peyton, dear boy; I'm goin' round the end of it, and then I'll beat you hollow."

He took the bush where it thinned into dead tree-clumps knotted with clematis and supplejack and all other vines. Half-a-mile away, the tails of those vines were laying snares for Peyton, and catching him every time. But that was where the native nettle grew so thickly and so fiercely that it flayed Peyton whether he came to the ground or not.

The sun rode gorgeously over the eastern ranges; but a tui had sighted him first from the swaying top of a three-hundred-foot birch, and was already ringing his liquid notes down to the waking ferns by the brown creeks.

Tony trotted like a mustering dog up the ascent where it steepened in a scented muddle of burnt-out tree-boles made slippery with mosses and spongy with the soft peaty collection of years. Then it became necessary to sling the rifle and swing, hand over hand, up the vines that depended from rocky frontlets. The bush was muggy and hot, and once, when he lay flat on a scarp and waited for breath, a wild sheep burst through the undergrowth with a five-year fleece on it. It sprang away up-hill as a deer moves, and Tony cast hate at it in broken words. For—being a sheep, and therefore, the least sporting animal in the world—it was quite likely to run until it gave the alarm to the sixteen-pointer where he probably fed still on the bluff.

"Peyton'll be sweating all right," grunted Tony, shaking his dripping head. "My aunt! It'll be a snorter 'bout mid-day!"

He crashed out into the open, and found his feet among the dried

tangle of burnt bush which makes the very nastiest stalking country in all the world. For in air that is absolutely clear and still, the snap of a stick under the boot rings like a rifle-shot on the flat.

Tony slid through the rubbish with cautious heels and toes. His heart thumped against his side, and his eyes were contracted to .22 calibre. For the salt-lick to rightward dazzled, and the flinty hog-back that sprang from it winked with a thousand gleams.

He had the whole beautiful young earth to himself up here in the wide clear morning; and it is only the man who serves another knows the added glory of riding to his own beat entirely, with no care for the remainder of the world.

Over a low seductive hill Tony fell with a clatter of shingle on a house-party of hinds and young stags that had lately shed their antlers. A big, moth-eaten mother of the herd sprang out of the ruck and began to cough at him. Tony called her names, and retreated crab-wise. But he made haste to climb the ridge beyond her—it was flint, and scarified his hands—for the fear that her anger should have disturbed her lord where he browsed.

It was from the top of the ridge that Tony saw him, and being somewhat exhausted, rolled off the sky-line, murmuring weakly:

"If Peyton comes along now, I'll lay him out."

The stag fed slowly down the bluff side, and the muscles rippled in sunlight over a massive shoulder and well-set ribs. His head was purely perfect. He raised it once, and Tony shuddered in soul-sick terror. But there was no alarm in the easy, powerful movements that brought him nearer—nearer.

Tony's rifle felt alive in his hand. Undoubtedly its spirit also strained with the lust of slaughter. Said Tony then, "He's mine! Mine!" and straightway trod on a dead stick. It snapped, and in less than