to see the editor gazing absently at the paper-knife on his desk.

"Wa-ll, Mr. Phinney," he inquired anxiously. "What do you think of it?"

The answer was irrelevant.

"Did you say this—this spasm was inspired by something you saw last night?" demanded Ben sharply.

"Why, yes. You see——. Yes, 'twas."

The editor was silent, toying with the paper-knife. Then he gave the blotter on his desk a vicious dig with the implement, and said:—

"Give it to me. I'll pay you 2dol for it."

Shakespeare sprang from his chair.

"You will, honest?" he cried. "Why, that's fine! The 'Gazette' wouldn't have paid but one, if that. I told mother I'd earn a livin' by the brains in my head if she give me time enough. Here's the poem, Mr. Phinney."

Ben accepted the proffered manuscript. "See here, you," he said, taking a two dollar bill from his jocket, "you keep quiet about this; understand. You're not to mention it to a soul; nor what you saw, either," he added fiercely.

"Oh, well, all right," Mr. Phinney, if you say so. I see; you want to s'prise her. She will be some s'prised when she see it in the 'Breeze,' won't she?"

The editor smiled a crooked smile.

"I think she will," he observed, with malicious emphasis.

After the exultant Shake had gone Ben read the poem again. Edward White, hey? And he had never suspected. He had been a blind donkey. It would serve her right if he did print the thing.

He rang the bell on his desk. An ink-smeared compositor appeared, wiping his hands on his overalls.

"Here," said Ben. "Here's——"

He paused.

"Yes, sir?" said the compositor.

"Nothing," said Ben, gruffly. "I don't want you."

The man disappeared. Ben thrust the poem into a drawer and turned the key on it. He couldn't print it. Neither should she nor anyone know that he had seen it. He might be a fool, but he wouldn't be a mean one.

Two days later he met the editor of the "Gazette" on the street. His bow was a cool one, but so was hers—surprisingly cool. Shake dropped in at intervals with poems dealing with Miss Foster and young White. Ben paid two dollars for each of these effusions, and interred them in the drawer beside the first. And the "Gazette" flourished like a green bay tree.

The final, and expected, blow fell one morning six weeks later. Ben, opening his letter-box at the post office, found therein a note from White and Sons stating that, as the "Gazette" had proven to be by far the better paying medium, their weekly page ad. in the "Breeze" would hereafter appear no more. Mr. Phinney made a rapid mental calculation of receipts and disbursements. Then he walked up the street, whistling. His sentence of imprisonment in Trumet had been, by fateful circumstances, materially shortened.

Andrew Smalley met him on the way.

"Mr. Phinney!" he shouted. "Heard the news? Ad. White's engaged, and you can't guess who to."

The editor lit a cigar. His hand shook a little, but his voice was calm.

"It's no news," he said. "That is, I've been expecting it. Congratulations to both parties."

Mr. Smalley was disappointed. "Sho!" he exclaimed. "Then you did know it. 'Twas a s'prise to me all right. I'll cal'late we'll read all the particulars in the "Breeze" next week, hey?"

Ben smiled sweetly. "Not in the 'Breeze,'" he answered, "Not in the 'Breeze.' The 'Breeze,' my son, has ceased to blow. The 'Breeze' has emitted its final puff. Hereafter, except for our esteemed contemporary, the 'Gazette," there will be a flat calm in Trumet newspaperdom."

"But — but, Mr. Phinney, the 'Breeze'——?"

"Smalley, to paraphrase the tale of the little boy and the apple, there ain't goin' to be no 'Breeze.'"

Back in the sanctum, and face to face with the inevitable, Ben sat down to write a letter to Uncle Holway. The sale of fixtures would net a partial return on the investment. As for the rest of the debt, perhaps some day he—

Someone was coming up the stairs. The pen dropped from Mr. Phinney's hand. The door opened, and Miss Foster entered. Evidently she had hurried. Her cheeks were red, her jaunty hat was a bit on one side, and her hair was tumbled. The effect, however, was not unbecoming. Even at this stage of the game, and with a hopeless pang, Ben realised that the effect was distinctly not unbecoming. He rose.

"Good morning, Miss Foster," he said. "Have you called to view the remains? It is kind of you. I didn't expect flowers."

The editor of the "Gazette" was out of breath.

"Oh, Mr. Phinney!" she panted. "It isn't true? Andrew Smalley said——"

"So soon? Andrew is a living example of our—pardon me; I forget—of your community's enterprise. Yes, it's true. The 'Breeze' is blown out."

Miss Foster looked genuinely disturbed. "Oh, Mr. Phinney," she said, "I'm so sorry. I really am. Of course, I've tried to make the 'Gazette' a success, but I wouldn't for the world have——"

"Why not? Sit down, Miss Foster. I assure you that I accept the verdict of Trumet's discerning judgment with cheerful resignation. As a newspaper man I'm a flat failure. As a newspaper woman you're a glittering success. You've won and I congratulate you."

"But I didn't want to win—like this. Can't I help you? Is there anything? What do you mean to do? Is it really so bad?"

"Just about so. It might be worse. I figure that when the wages and outstanding accounts are liquidated I shall have my car fare to Boston left. I might have had to walk, you know."

"You're not going to leave town?"

"I certainly shan't take much of the town with me. But there! why weep over the departed? And I believe I have another cause for offering you congratulations. I do offer them, sincerely—on the engagement, you know."

"The engagement? The engagement?"

"Why, yes. Our mutual friend Smalley told me of Mr. White's good luck, and I——"

The young lady sprang from her chair. Her brown eyes snapped.

"Mr. Phinney," she said, "I confess I don't see why you have such an opinion of me. I did try to make my paper better than yours, but for you to believe me so mean, so contemptible as to interfere with your—personal affair! It is outrageous of you. Why should you presume that I cared who you——? How dare you intimate that I had anything to do with Mr. White's engagement?"

"That you—that you had anything to do with it? Miss Foster, either my troubles are affecting my brain or there's a dreadful muddle somewhere. Aren't you engaged to Ed White?"

"I engaged? I! Of course not. What in the world led you to think such a thing?"

Ben wiped his forehead. "Just a minute, please," he said. "Let me think this out."

He was silent for a moment. Then he opened the drawer of his desk and took out a packet of folded foolscap sheets secured by an elastic band. Selecting the three sheets at the bottom of the packet he handed them to her.

Miss Foster sat down once more and read the title at the top of the first sheet "To a Beautiful Young Woman in Trumet."

"The author of that poem told me he was referring to you," explained Ben.

Miss Foster read on. "Why!" she exclaimed; "it's almost like—" Then she paused, the colour flaming in her cheeks.

"The villain!" she cried. "The impudent villain! Did—did you believe this—this awful stuff to be true?"

"Well, Shake assured me that it was founded on something he had seen. And you did walk home with Ed one evening. See here, please: Who is Ed White engaged to?"

"Why, to Annabel Saunders. There! I've told you! I'm very sorry."

"Sorry? Why? I'm glad for them both. Ed might have done worse. So might she, for that matter."

"But don't you care?"

"Care? No. Why on earth should I care who Annabel Saunders marries?"

The door opened and a lanky figure stood on the threshold. The bard of Trumet had called with another consignment of "poetry."

"Shake," commanded Ben, "clear out."

Miss Foster turned like a flash.

"Mr Gott," she ordered sharply, "come here this instant. What did you mean by writing such ridiculous trash as this about me?"

Shake gazed at the foolscap sheets on the desk. He turned red, then a trifle pale, and took a step toward the door.

"I cal'late I won't stop now, Mr Phinney," he stammered. "I see you're kind of busy and—"

"Shake," ordered Ben, "answer Miss Foster's question."

The man of genius was nervous. "Why—why, you see, Miss Foster," he said, "I—I— You be beautiful; ain't she, Mr Phinney? And one night you did walk home from meetin' with Ed White, and—"

"Mr White and I were together that evening because we were discussing a matter of business. I was trying to get his firm's advertisement for the "Gazette"; that was all. But why did you add this—invent this other horrid stuff? What do you mean by it?"

"You mean them about the tender kissin', and the like of that? Why, you see, Miss Foster, there's always things about 'bliss and kiss' in other folks's poems, so I put 'em in mine. And when Mr Phinney paid me 2dol. for it, I thought—"

"I see. You thought the investment a paying one, so you went home and repeated the offense. Mr Phinney, I too, have a poem—several poems—in a drawer of my desk. The first is headed 'To the Smartest Man in Trumet.' The author informed me you were that man. My poem resembles this one closely, except for the change to fit the sex, of course. There are other slight differences. I think I remember some of the lines.

And when through Bassett's pasture dell
I see him stroll with Annabel.
And when with looks of——

The rest is much like this," she added, hurriedly.

"Well you did see Annabel home once, Mr Phinney; I see you," broke in Shake. "And 'twan't my fault, anyway, 'twas mother's. When I told her how you'd paid 2dol. for this piece I made up, she thought for a spell and said it looked to her like I'd struck a good thing at last. She said why didn't I make up one about you and Annabel and try to sell it to Miss Foster? So I changed it round a little mite and took it to her and she paid me 2dol. 50c. for it—more'n you done, you know. And after that mother said, 'Make up more, even if they be all out of your head, and sell 'em.' So I done it and—"

"You lying scamp!" thundered Ben, darting forward. "I'll break—"

But the poet did not wait to ascertain what was to be broken. He made a flying leap to the door and safety. They heard him descending the stairs in reckless jumps.

Mr Phinney halted in his rush. "By George!" he said. "And he sold you that thing about me, and you believed it just as I— But—eh, by George! Why did you buy that poem?"

Miss Foster rose again quickly. "I must go," she said. "Really I must."

But Ben seized her hand.

"Edith," he demanded eagerly, "why did you buy that poem? And buy the others? And never publish them? And why were you so cool to me afterward? And why did you think I might believe you cared who I married? Edith, tell me—did you care?"

Then a sudden realisation of his financial position came to him and he dropped the hand.

"Oh, Lord!" he groaned. "I forgot. I'm ruined, broke, cleaned out. What nonsense I'm talking."

Miss Foster was silent. When, at last, she replied, it was in a low tone and without looking at him.

"I don't see that you are ruined," she said. "You still own the 'Breeze,' and why shouldn't the two papers consolidate on the half-and-half basis, as I proposed when I first met you? The—the "Gazette" is willing."

The "Trumet Weekly Breeze-Gazette" is a great success. The townspeople boast of it wherever they go. Just now, however, they are discussing another consolidation—of interests other than business—which is to take place in the fall.

"Shake" doesn't like the new paper. It refuses to publish his poems. All things considered, he thinks the refusal ungrateful.

His eyes were red, his nose was blue,
He couldn't speak, he'd just say "Tchoo!"
And everybody round they knew
And pitied him, he had the "flue."
At last he gasped "What shall I do?"
And swiftly came the answer, too,
For each one cried "Oh, fool! procure
A bottle of Woods' Great Peppermint Cure