

had insisted on a promise that if Verne should ever visit the States he would make New Utrecht his headquarters. And now, on this very morning, there had come a wireless message via Seagate, saying that Verne was on a ship which would dock that afternoon.

The dilemma may seem a trifling one, but to Stockton's sensitive nature it was gross indeed. He and his wife knew that they could offer but little to make the poet's visit charming. New Utrecht, on the way to Coney Island, is not a likely perching ground for poets; the house was small, shabby, and the spare room had long ago been made into a workshop for the two boys, where they built steam engines and pasted rotogravure pictures from the Sunday editions on the walls. The servant was an enormous coloured mammy, with a heart of ruddy gold, but in appearance she was pure Dahomey. The bathroom plumbing was out of order, the drawing-room rug was fifteen years old, even the little lawn in front of the house needed trimming, and the gardener would not be round for several days. And Verrill had given them only a few hours' notice. How like a poet!

In his letters Stockton had innocently boasted of the pleasant time they would have when the writer should come to visit. He had spoken of evenings beside the fire when they would talk for