

“AUGUST 20026: THERE WILL COME SOFT RAINS”

by Ray Bradbury

In the living room the voice-clock sang, Tick-tock, seven o'clock, time to get up, time to get up, seven o'clock! As if it were afraid that nobody would. Seven-nine, breakfast time, seven-nine!

In the kitchen the breakfast stove ejected eight pieces of perfectly browned toast, eight eggs sunnyside up, sixteen slices of bacon, two coffees, and two cool glasses of milk.

“Today is August 4, 2026, the city of Allendale, California.”

Somewhere in the walls, relays clicked, memory tapes glided under electric eyes.

“Eight-one, tick-tock, eight-one o'clock, off to school, off to work, run, run, eight-one!” But no doors slammed. It was raining outside. The weather box on the front door sang quietly: “Rain, rain, go away; rubbers, raincoats for today...”

Outside, the garage chimed and lifted its door to reveal the waiting car. After a long wait the door swung down again.

At eight-thirty the eggs were shriveled and the toast was like stone. An aluminum wedge scraped them into the sink. The dirty dishes were dropped into a hot washer and emerged twinkling dry.

“Nine-fifteen,” sang the clock, “time to clean.”

Tiny robot mice thudded against chairs, whirling their mustached runners, Kneading the rug nap, sucking gently at hidden dust. Then, they popped into their burrows. The house was clean.

“Ten o'clock.” The sun came out from behind the rain. The house stood alone in a city of rubble and ashes. This was the one house left standing. At night the ruined city gave off a radioactive glow which could be seen for miles.

“Ten-fifteen.” The garden sprinklers pelted the windowpanes, running down the charred west side where the house had been burned evenly

free of its white paint. The entire west face of the house was black, save for five places. Here the silhouette in paint of a man mowing a lawn. Here, as in a photograph, a woman bent to pick flowers. Still farther over, their images burned on wood in one titanic instant, a small boy, hands flung into the air; higher up, the image of a thrown ball, and opposite him a girl, hand raised to catch a ball which never came down.

The five spots of paint – the man, the woman, the children, the ball – remained. The rest was a thick charcoaled layer.

“Twelve noon.”

A dog whined on the front porch.

The front door recognized the dog voice and opened. The dog, once huge and fleshy, but now gone to bone and covered with sores, moved in and through the house, tracking mud.

The dog frothed at the mouth, ran wildly in circles, biting at its tail, spun in a frenzy, and died. It lay in the parlor for an hour.

“Two-fifteen.”

The dog was gone.

In the cellar, the incinerator glowed suddenly and a whirl of sparks leaped up the chimney.

“Two thirty-five.”

Bridge tables sprouted from patio walls. Playing cards fluttered. Martinis manifested while music played.

But the tables were silent and the cards untouched.

At four o'clock the tables folded back through the paneled walls.

“Four-thirty.”

The nursery walls glowed.

Animals took shape: yellow giraffes, blue lions, pink antelopes, lilac panthers. Hidden films clocked through well-oiled sprockets, and the glass walls lived. It was the children's hour.

"Six, seven, eight o'clock." The dinner dishes manipulated like magic tricks, and in the study a click.

"Nine-five." A voice spoke from the study ceiling:

"Mrs. McClellan, which poem would you like this evening?"

The house was silent.

The voice said at last, "Since you express no preference, I shall select a poem at random." "Sara Teasdale. As I recall, your favorite..."

"There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,
And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;

And frogs in the pools singing at night,
And wild plum trees in tremulous white;

Robins will wear their feathery fire,
Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;

And not one will know of the war, not one
Will care at last when it is done,

Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree
If mankind perished utterly;

And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn
Would scarcely know that we were gone.

At ten o'clock a falling tree bough crashed through the kitchen window shattering cleaning solvent over the stove. The room was ablaze in an instant.

"Fire!" screamed a voice. Water pumps shot water from the ceilings while the voices took it up in chorus: "Fire, fire, fire!"

The house tried to save itself, but the wind blew and sucked upon the fire.

Scurrying water rats pistoled their water, and ran for more. And the wall sprays let down showers of mechanical rain.

But too late. The quenching rain ceased. The reserve water supply which had filled baths and washed dishes for many quiet days was gone.

From attic trapdoors gushed a green chemical.

But the fire was clever. It had sent flames outside the house, up through the attic to the pumps there. An explosion! The attic brain which directed the pumps was shattered.

The house shuddered, its bared skeleton cringing from the heat. And the voices wailed, "Fire, fire, run, run," like a tragic nursery rhyme, a dozen voices, high, low. One, two, three, four, five voices died.

Other choruses could be heard announcing the time, playing music, or cutting the lawn by remote-control mower. A scene of maniac confusion, yet unity; singing, screaming, and one voice, read poetry aloud in the firey study, until all the film spools burned.

In the kitchen the stove could be seen making breakfasts at a psychopathic rate, ten dozen eggs, six loaves of toast, twenty dozen bacon strips, which eaten by the fire, started the stove working again, hysterically hissing!

The crash. The attic smashing into kitchen and parlor. The parlor into cellar, cellar into sub-cellar.

Smoke and silence.

Among the ruins, one wall stood alone. Within the wall, a last voice said, over and over, "Today is August 5, 2026, today is August 5, 2026, today is ..."