



**Background** Ray Bradbury (1920–2012) was born in a small town named Waukegan, Illinois. He was hired to write short stories for a radio show at the age of 14 and joined the Los Angeles Science Fiction Society at the age of 16. In 1953, he published his most famous book, *Fahrenheit 451*, which warned of the dangers of book censorship. In all, Ray Bradbury wrote 27 novels and over 600 short stories.

# There Will Come Soft Rains

Short Story by Ray Bradbury

CLOSE READ  
Notes

1. **READ** ▶ As you read lines 1–15, begin to collect and cite evidence.

- Underline examples of personification in the text.
- In the margin, define “voice-clock,” using clues from the text.
- Circle two phrases that help you infer that no people are in the house.

In the living room the voice-clock sang, *Ticktock, seven o'clock, time to get up, time to get up, seven o'clock!* as if it were afraid that nobody would. The morning house lay empty. The clock ticked on, repeating and repeating its sounds into the emptiness. *Seven-nine, breakfast time, seven-nine!*

In the kitchen the breakfast stove gave a hissing sigh and ejected from its warm interior eight pieces of perfectly browned toast, eight eggs sunny side up, sixteen slices of bacon, and two coffees.

10 “Today is August 4, 2026,” said a second voice from the kitchen ceiling, “in the city of Allendale, California.” It repeated the date three times for memory’s sake. “Today is Mr. Featherstone’s birthday. Today is the anniversary of Tilita’s marriage. Insurance is payable, as are the water, gas, and light bills.”

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, no carpets took the soft tread of rubber heels. It was raining outside. The weather box on the front door sang quietly: "Rain, rain, go away; rubbers, raincoats for  
20 today . . ." And the rain tapped on the empty house, echoing.

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, where hot water whirled them down a metal throat which digested and flushed them away to the distant sea. The dirty dishes were dropped into a hot washer and emerged twinkling dry.

*Nine-fifteen,* sang the clock, *time to clean.*

warrens:

30 Out of **warrens** in the wall, tiny robot mice darted. The rooms were acrawl with the small cleaning animals, all rubber and metal. They thudded against chairs, whirling their moustached runners, kneading the rug nap, sucking gently at hidden dust. Then, like mysterious invaders, they popped into their burrows. Their pink electric eyes faded. 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.

2. **◀ REREAD ▶** Reread lines 1–15. What kind of "personality" does the house have? Support your answer with explicit textual evidence.

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3. **▶ READ ▶** As you read lines 16–38, continue to cite text evidence.

- Underline examples of personification in the text.
- In the margin, explain what the author is referring to when he says "a metal throat."
- Circle what makes the city visible for miles.

40 *Ten-fifteen.* The garden sprinklers whirled up in golden founts, filling the soft morning air with scatterings of brightness. The water pelted 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, hands raised to catch a ball which never came down.

50 The five spots of paint—the man, the woman, the children, the ball—remained. The rest was a thin charcoaled layer.

The gentle sprinkler rain filled the garden with falling light.

Until this day, how well the house had kept its peace. How carefully it had inquired, “Who goes there? What’s the password?” and, getting no answer from lonely foxes and whining cats, it had shut up its windows and drawn shades in an old-maidenly preoccupation with self-protection which bordered on a mechanical **paranoia**.

paranoia:

It quivered at each sound, the house did. If a sparrow brushed a window, the shade snapped up. The bird, startled, flew off! No, not even a bird must touch the house!

4. **◀ REREAD ▶** Reread lines 35–38. What conclusion can you draw from the text about what happened to the rest of the houses in the town?

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5. **▶ READ ▶** As you read lines 39–59, continue to cite text evidence.
- Underline examples of personification in the text.
  - In the margin, explain what the boy and girl were doing when the nuclear event occurred.
  - Circle the sentence that lets you know something bad is about to happen to the house.

60 The house was an altar with ten thousand attendants, big, small, servicing, attending, in choirs. But the gods had gone away, and the ritual of the religion continued senselessly, uselessly.

*Twelve noon.*

A dog whined, shivering, 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. Behind it whirred angry mice, angry at having to pick up mud; angry at inconvenience.

70 For not a leaf fragment blew under the door but what the wall panels flipped open and the copper scrap rats flashed swiftly out. The offending dust, hair, or paper, seized in miniature steel jaws, was raced back to the burrows. There, down tubes which fed into the cellar, it was dropped into the sighing vent of an incinerator which sat like evil Baal<sup>1</sup> in a dark corner.

The dog ran upstairs, hysterically yelping to each door, at last realizing, as the house realized, that only silence was here.

It sniffed the air and scratched the kitchen door. Behind the door, the stove was making pancakes which filled the house with a rich baked odor and the scent of maple syrup.

80 The dog frothed at the mouth, lying at the door, sniffing, its eyes turned to fire. It ran wildly in circles, biting at its tail, spun in a frenzy, and died. It lay in the parlor for an hour.

*Two o'clock,* sang a voice.

Delicately sensing decay at last, the regiments of mice hummed out as softly as blown gray leaves in an electrical wind.

<sup>1</sup> **Baal:** In the Bible, the god of Canaan, whom the Israelites came to recognize as a false god.

6. **◀ REREAD AND DISCUSS** Reread lines 39–50. In a small group, discuss what conclusions you can draw about the nuclear event, based on the silhouettes, or outlines, on the side of the house.
7. **▶ READ** As you read lines 60–96, continue to cite text evidence.
  - Underline examples of personification in the text.
  - In the margin, explain who the attendants and gods are.
  - In the margin, explain why the dog yelps at each door.



*The voice said at last,  
'Since you express no  
preference, I shall select  
a poem at random.'*

*Four-thirty.*

The nursery walls glowed. Animals took shape: yellow giraffes,  
blue lions, pink antelopes, lilac panthers cavorting in crystal  
100 substance. The walls were glass. They looked out upon color and  
fantasy. Hidden films clocked through well-oiled sprockets, and the  
walls lived. The nursery floor was woven to resemble a crisp cereal  
meadow. Over this ran aluminum roaches and iron crickets, and in  
the hot, still air butterflies of delicate red tissue wavered among the  
sharp aromas of animal spoor! There was the sound like a great  
matted yellow hive of bees within a dark bellows, the lazy bumble of a  
purring lion. And there was the patter of okapi<sup>4</sup> feet and the murmur  
of a fresh jungle rain, like other hoofs, falling upon the summer-  
starched grass. Now the walls dissolved into distances of parched  
110 weed, mile on mile, and warm endless sky. The animals drew away  
into thorn brakes<sup>5</sup> and water holes.

It was the children's hour.

*Five o'clock.* The bath filled with clear hot water.

*Six, seven, eight o'clock.* The dinner dishes manipulated like magic  
tricks, and in the study a *click*. In the metal stand opposite the hearth

<sup>4</sup> **okapi:** an animal, similar to a giraffe, with zebra striping.

<sup>5</sup> **thorn brakes:** clumps of thorns; thickets.

9. **READ** ▶ As you read lines 97–140, continue to cite text evidence.

- Underline examples of personification in the text.
- In the margin, explain why “not one will know of the war” (line 132).
- Circle evidence that helps you infer that the animals are not real.

where a fire now blazed up warmly, a cigar popped out, half an inch of soft gray ash on it, smoking, waiting.

*Nine o'clock.* The beds warmed their hidden circuits, for nights were cool here.

120 *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.” Quiet music rose to back the voice. “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;*

tremulous:

130 *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.”*

The fire burned on the stone hearth, and the cigar fell away into a mound of quiet ash on its tray. The empty chairs faced each other

140 between the silent walls, and the music played.

At ten o'clock the house began to die.

The wind blew. A falling tree bough crashed through the kitchen window. Cleaning solvent, bottled, shattered over the stove. The room was ablaze in an instant!

10. **REREAD AND DISCUSS** Reread lines 126–137. The title of this poem is “There Will Come Soft Rains.” In a small group, discuss why Bradbury might have borrowed this title for his story.

11. **READ** As you read lines 141–189, continue to cite evidence.

- Underline examples of personification in the text.
- In the margin, explain what the “twenty snakes” are.
- Circle the names of parts of the body.

"Fire!" screamed a voice. The house lights flashed, water pumps shot water from the ceilings. But the solvent spread on the linoleum, licking, eating, under the kitchen door, while the voices took it up in chorus: "Fire, fire, fire!"

150 The house tried to save itself. Doors sprang tightly shut, but the windows were broken by the heat and the wind blew and sucked upon the fire.

The house gave ground as the fire in ten billion angry sparks moved with flaming ease from room to room and then up the stairs. While scurrying water rats squeaked from the walls, pistoled their water, and ran for more. And the wall sprays let down showers of mechanical rain.

But too late. Somewhere, sighing, a pump shrugged to a stop. The quenching rain ceased. The reserve water supply which had filled baths and washed dishes for many quiet days was gone.

160 The fire crackled up the stairs. It fed upon Picassos and Matisse in the upper halls, like delicacies, baking off the oily flesh, tenderly crisping the canvases into black shavings.

Now the fire lay in beds, stood in windows, changed the colors of drapes!

And then, reinforcements.

From attic trapdoors, blind robot faces peered down with faucet mouths gushing green chemical.

170 The fire backed off, as even an elephant must at the sight of a dead snake. Now there were twenty snakes whipping over the floor, killing the fire with a clear cold venom of green froth.

But the fire was clever. It had sent flame outside the house, up through the attic to the pumps there. An explosion! The attic brain which directed the pumps was shattered into bronze shrapnel on the beams.

The fire rushed back into every closet and felt of the clothes hung there.

The house shuddered, oak bone on bone, its bared skeleton cringing from the heat, its wire, its nerves revealed as if a surgeon had



torn the skin off to let the red veins and capillaries quiver in the  
180 scalded air. Help, help! Fire! Run, run! Heat snapped mirrors like the  
first brittle winter ice. And the voices wailed, Fire, fire, run, run,  
like a tragic nursery rhyme, a dozen voices, high, low, like children  
dying in a forest, alone, alone. And the voices fading as the wires  
popped their sheathings like hot chestnuts. One, two, three, four, five  
voices died.

In the nursery the jungle burned. Blue lions roared, purple  
giraffes bounded off. The panthers ran in circles, changing color, and  
ten million animals, running before the fire, vanished off toward a  
distant steaming river. . . .

190 Ten more voices died. In the last instant under the fire avalanche,  
other choruses, **oblivious**, could be heard announcing the time,  
playing music, cutting the lawn by remote-control mower, or setting  
an umbrella frantically out and in, the slamming and opening front  
door, a thousand things happening, like a clock shop when each clock  
strikes the hour insanely before or after the other, a scene of maniac  
confusion, yet unity; singing, screaming, a few last cleaning mice  
darting bravely out to carry the horrid ashes away! And one voice,  
with **sublime** disregard for the situation, read poetry aloud in the  
fiery study, until all the film spools burned, until all the wires  
200 withered and the circuits cracked.

The fire burst the house and let it slam flat down, puffing out  
skirts of spark and smoke.

In the kitchen, an instant before the rain of fire and timber, 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 fire, started the stove working again, hysterically hissing!

oblivious:

sublime:

12. **◀ REREAD AND DISCUSS** Reread lines 149–185. In a small group, discuss the ways in which the “personalities” of the fire and the house create an impression of war.
13. **▶ READ ▶** As you read lines 190–216, continue to cite text evidence.
  - Underline examples of personification.
  - In the margin, describe two actions that happen at both the beginning and the end of the story.

