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Reader's Response: "August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains"

Published in 1950, the short story by iconic author Ray Bradbury allows readers to tour a hallowed house after an atomic bomb. Though the reader understands, early on, that people no longer inhabit the house, it is clear that the house is alive --in its own way. Completely automated and obsessively punctual, the house speaks in anticipation of the "family" that should be interacting with it at particular times during the day. As it speaks to no one, the acute sense of life that once interacted with the house is missed and the pathos that is created as the reader is privy to each subtle detail of routine generates a real sadness, a sense of loss of what was and wonderment at what might have taken them away. Eventually, after a frantic lost pet finds his home and subsequently perishes in it, the system that seemed so reliable, like the family that once relied on it, breaks down, and undoes itself. Flame consumes the house that survived that which the family could not. Thus, we are left with an overwhelming sense of fallibility, bewilderment, and sympathy.

The personification of the house is the central element that drives the story's unnerving effect. The house's punctual voice and seemingly invasive demands are a direct representation of the family that once lived there. At "*Four-Thirty*,' The nursery walls glowed." Glowed with animals to enhance the "children's hour." Five hours later the house inquires,

'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....’

The narrating of the poem “There will come soft rains...” creates a mood of intense emotion up against genuine curiosity. The poem, which seems to echo the sentiments of the personified house, relays “Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree,/ if mankind perished utterly.” Bradbury replaces the family with the house, yet both are unnecessary, obsolete; the realization of mankind’s capacity for destruction is not only replete in the silhouette stained shadows on the outside walls of the house, but also in the insistence of the house to persist with no sense of its loss, no sense of purpose, merely as a captured daily routine stuck in a perpetual cycle. The house eventually dies in a cacophony of automated voices and vicious ironies: “And one voice, with sublime disregard for the situation, read poetry aloud in the fiery study.” Mankind created marvels. Machines who would meet our every need, but as Bradbury suggests, our ingenuity must be paired with a real sensibility for how real are our needs, how necessary are our machines, and how destructive is our ingenuity.

Of course this will become a works citation; but no citation is required for short stories:

<https://docs.google.com/file/d/0BzbtlcAsleTnTINmSnhOV010bHM/edit?pli=1>

DO, include a citation, though, if you use secondary sources.