

Unit 7

There Will Come Soft Rains

THE FUTURE IS HERE: SMART HOMES EXIST: A 'smart home' is one in which housework or household activity has been automated. A home automation system integrates electrical devices in a house with each other and allows for the control, through a centralised computer network, of heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems along with home entertainment systems, houseplant and yard watering, pet feeding, and the use of domestic robots. The popularity of home automation has been increasing greatly in recent years due to much higher affordability and simplicity through smartphone and tablet connectivity.

(Adapted from Wikipedia)

Do you live in a 'smart' home or building? Describe some of the automated features in your home. Discuss with your classmates some of the features of your home you would like to have automated.

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. 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, two coffees, and two cool glasses of milk.

'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 tread¹ of rubber heels. It was raining outside. The weather box on the front door sang quietly: 'Rain, rain, go away; umbrellas, raincoats for 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 shrivelled² and the toast was like stone. An aluminium wedge³ 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.

Out of warrens⁴ in the wall, tiny robot mice darted⁵. The rooms were acrawl⁶ 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 rubble⁷ and ashes. This was the one house left standing. At night the ruined city gave off a radioactive⁸ glow which could be seen for miles.

Ten-fifteen. The garden sprinklers whirled up in golden founts, filling the soft morning air with scatterings of brightness. The water pelted⁹ window panes, running down the charred¹⁰ 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 titanic¹¹ 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.

¹tread walk ²shrivelled wrinkled and shrunken because of the loss of moisture

³wedge a piece of metal or wood with a thick end and a thin edge ⁴warrens a network of interconnected burrows ⁵darted moved or ran suddenly ⁶acrawl crawled by ⁷rubble waste or rough fragments of concrete ⁸radioactive emitting radiation

⁹pelted hurled ¹⁰charred partially burnt ¹¹titanic powerfully explosive

The rest was a thin charcoaled layer.

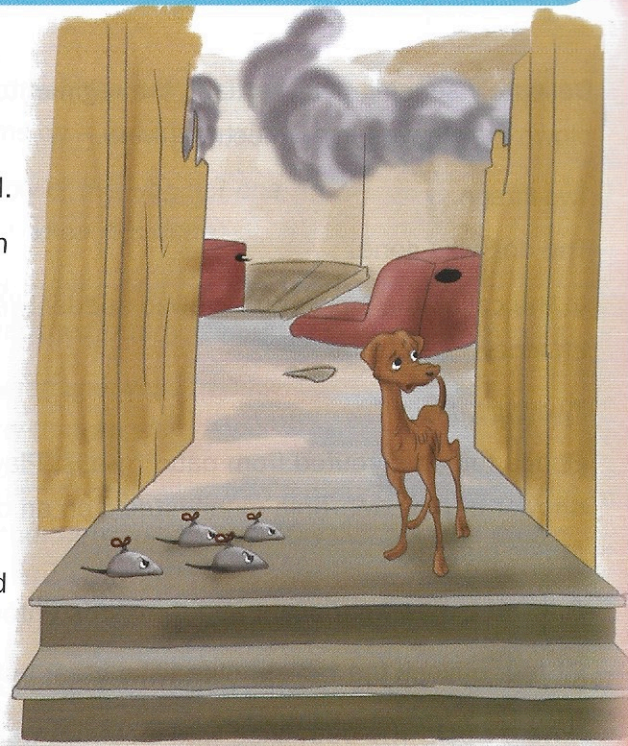
The five spots of paint—the man, the woman, the children, the ball—remained.

The gentle sprinkler rain filled the garden with falling light.

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 whirled angry mice, angry at having to pick up mud, angry at inconvenience.



For even if a leaf fragment blew under the door the wall panels flipped open and the copper scrap rats flashed swiftly out. The offending dust, hair, or paper, seized in miniature¹² 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 incinerator¹³ which sat like evil Baal 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.

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 parlour for an hour.

Two o'clock, sang a voice.

¹²miniature very small of its kind ¹³incinerator an apparatus for burning waste material

Delicately sensing decay at last, the regiments¹⁴ of mice hummed out as softly as blown gray leaves in an electrical wind.

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 patio¹⁵ walls. Playing cards fluttered onto pads in a shower of pips. Martinis manifested¹⁶ on an oaken bench with egg-salad sandwiches. Music played.

But the tables were silent and the cards untouched.

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

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 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.

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 random¹⁷.' 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 tremulous¹⁸ white;*

¹⁴regiments large numbers ¹⁵patio a paved outdoor area adjoining a house ¹⁶manifested appeared ¹⁷at random without a conscious decision ¹⁸tremulous shaking or quivering

*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 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!

'Fire!' screamed a voice. The house lights flashed, water pumps shot water from the ceilings. But the solvent spread on the linoleum¹⁹, licking, eating, under the kitchen door, while the voices took it up in chorus: 'Fire, fire, fire!'

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.

The fire crackled up the stairs. It fed upon Picassos²⁰ and Matisses²¹ in the upper halls, like delicacies, baking off the oily flesh, tenderly crisping the canvases into black shavings.

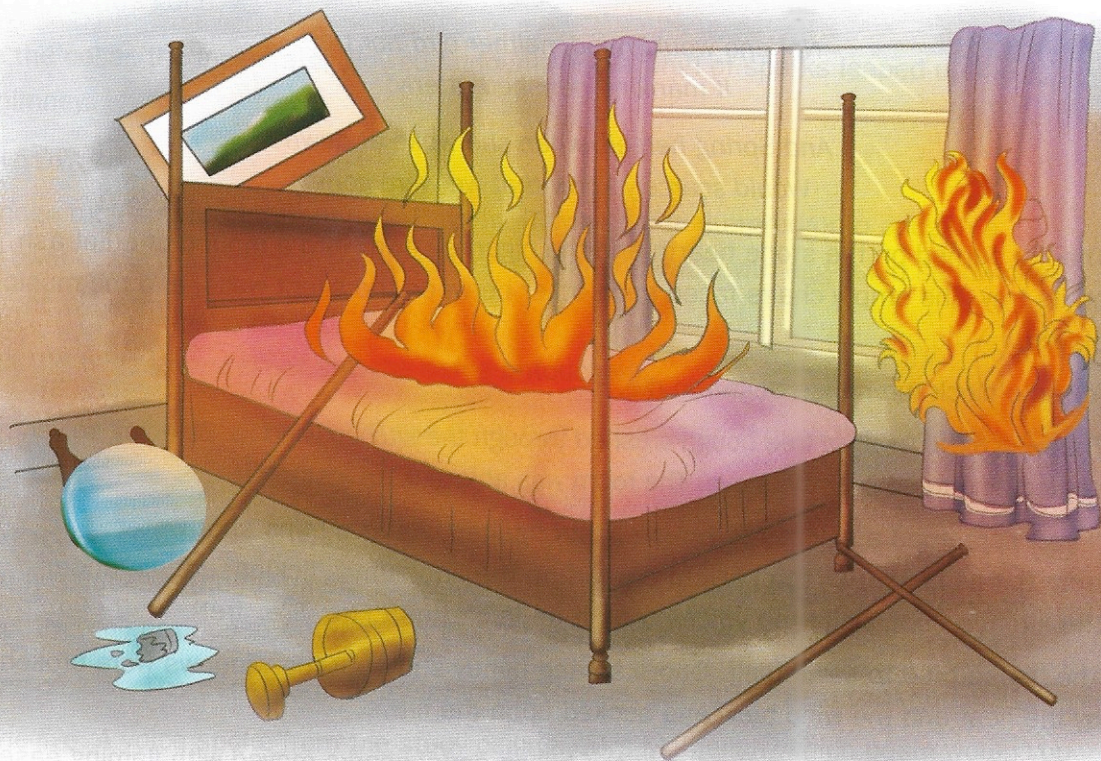
¹⁹**linoleum** a material consisting of a canvas, used as a floor covering

²⁰**Picassos** paintings by Pablo Picasso, a 20th century Spanish painter, sculptor and artist

²¹**Matisses** paintings by Henri Matisse, a French painter and sculptor

Now the fire lay in beds, stood in windows, changed the colors of drapes²²!

And then, reinforcements²³. From attic trapdoors, blind robot faces peered down with faucet²⁴ mouths gushing green chemical.



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 venom²⁵ of green froth.

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 into bronze shrapnel²⁶ on the beams.

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

²²**drapes** long curtains ²³**reinforcements** extra personnel sent to increase the strength of an army ²⁴**faucet** a tap ²⁵**venom** a poisonous substance secreted by animals

²⁶**shrapnel** fragments of a substance thrown out by an explosion

The house shuddered, oak bone on bone, its bared skeleton cringing from the heat, veins and capillaries quiver in the scalded²⁷ 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 sheathings²⁸ like hot chestnuts. One, two, three, four, five voices died.

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 psychopathic²⁹ rate, ten dozen eggs, six loaves of toast, twenty dozen bacon strips, which, eaten by fire, started the stove working again, hysterically hissing!

The crash. The attic smashing into kitchen and parlor³⁰. The parlor into cellar³¹, cellar into sub-cellar. Deep freeze, armchair, film tapes, circuits, beds, and all like skeletons thrown in a cluttered mound deep under.

Smoke and silence. A great quantity of smoke.

Dawn showed faintly in the east. Among the ruins, one wall stood alone. Within the wall, a last voice said, over and over again and again, even as the sun rose to shine upon the heaped rubble and steam:

'Today is August 5, 2026, today is August 5, 2026, today is ...'

Abridged

RAY BRADBURY

²⁷scalded heated to near boiling point ²⁸sheathings protective casing or covering

²⁹psychopathic abnormal or manic ³⁰parlor a sitting room in a private house

³¹cellar basement