

design



THERE WILL COME SOFT RAINS

Author: **David Mizzi**

We have the technology to turn night into day, to create entirely new worlds, to conquer the seas, the skies, and even to begin foraying into space. The ingenious minds of engineers, developers, and inventors have brought robots, AI, and VR to life. While the arts might not seem to have anything to add in this regard, it is the writers, musicians, and artists that invite us to reflect (and who entertain us) about our relationship with technology. We decided to take a look at a particular story related to technology...

'There Will Come Soft Rains', is a short story written by Ray Bradbury, originally published in 1950 as part of his collection of short stories titled *The Martian Chronicles*. The story begins with an automated house announcing 'Today is August 4, 2026, today is August 4, 2026,' before it begins its daily routine. The house dutifully cooks and serves meals, cleans the house, prepares whiskey and cigars, and sets up the nursery, despite its occupants having been evaporated by a nuclear blast. In spite of the advanced technology, the house is unaware of the annihilation of its inhabitants. Toward the end of the story, a tree bough crashes into the house, knocking cleaning detergent on the stove and setting the entire house ablaze. The house is destroyed, save for a lone wall, which continues to tell the time: 'Today is August 5, 2026, today is August 5, 2026, today is...'

Having tiny robot mice (or Roombas) clean the house or a robot prepare meals is certainly a delightful way to utilise technology. However, it is this same technological advancement that enabled a nuclear holocaust in Bradbury's story. The latest scientific advancements that allow us to enjoy virtual lectures and hours of digital content are also part and parcel of the deepfakes that fuel misinformation.

Taking a step further towards the virtual, just as Bradbury's house persists independently of individual users, we ought to spare a thought for our own digital footprint: the websites, social media profiles, and other digital artefacts that would continue to exist in cyberspace long after us. Ultimately, for all of its technological prowess, the house was unable to save itself from the forces of nature: wind and fire. In fact, this

question of nature versus machine is frequently explored in different aspects of pop culture and literature. Bradbury makes a clear reference to Sara Teasedale's poem (published in 1920), which shares the same name as his short story, 'There Will Come Soft Rains':

*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.*

While the march of technological progress continues, bringing with it new opportunities and exciting developments, it is worth taking a moment to examine our relationship with technology. How will we use technology to shape the future? Will the march of progress lead us to a brighter tomorrow or, to paraphrase George Orwell, will the future be a boot stamping on a human face – forever? **T**

The story itself is one of Bradbury's most widely read stories, and it has sparked an array of adaptations. Players of the *Fallout 3* videogame can find the McCellan's family house in Georgetown, a direct reference to the story. Meanwhile, those who'd like to hear the story for themselves can find a reading (from 1975 and by Leonard Nimoy, no less!) on Spotify.

