

man, what a Holiday!



by Arthur Hadley

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What a
Holiday!*

November 11: A holiday at last. Yes, here we are. The sea is a little too rough but it should soon settle down over the next few days I have planned out for peace and quiet, away from the cranes at the office. The break has its compensations — the sun and sand are still there. How wonderfully tranquil it would be to wake up tomorrow morning to the rhythmic sounds of the waves splashing on the shore. Even a little light rain wouldn't be unwelcome because one can still get under the sheets and let time slip away by itself and the mind — most importantly the mind — fall languidly quiet.

free of the thousand-and-one problems that keep surfacing from time to time back at my spruce office. I had to get out of the whirl.

Here, overlooking the sea and across the railway lines is this quiet little guest house, a home away from home but without the hassles of office. We have two rooms to ourselves, one for us and one for the kids. There is a comfortable lounge upstairs where we will be free to play scrabble, watch television or just listen to music of our choice. Peace and quiet for eight whole days. A chance to recuperate. No need to put on any face whatsoever. No showing.

But wait, let me not go into ecstasies in anticipation of perfect bliss. There's a knock on the door. It's one of the guest house room boys saying there's a telephone call for me. I am not going to take it. This is after all my vacation, designed to restore my peace of mind. "Tell whoever it is I am away and there's no word on when I will be back", I tell the young man. I've won!

November 2: My victory was shortlived. Mahendran, one of the boardroom boys from the office calls again the next morning and insists he wants to speak to me. I take him on reluctantly but firmly and remind him that I was taking my holiday of one solid week before all that Christmas rushing around and was not, I hoped he would understand, to be disturbed. "Oh", he said in a kind of hurt voice. "I'll make do in whatever way I can with the more loyal chaps around here. I said fine and hung up. It's nothing but relaxation from now on.

November 3: A quiet morning with only an occasional sound of a passing train to break the blissful monotony of life as it goes by. A jug of juice and a breakfast of buttered bread and corned beef is at my side. And the daily papers mercifully devoid of any shattering news. Nothing to do at all. Isn't it the apotheosis of happiness when there's nothing to do!

A knock on the door again. Who could it be now? "Do you think it could be one of the kids?", I ask my wife. No, we can still hear them frolicking in the next room and perhaps looking forward to relentless activity both on and off the beach from

dawn to dusk. Today we have planned on a drive further down the coast where we can get in a glass-bottomed boat and peer down at all that fantastically psychedelic panorama of coral lying on shallow seaweeds around the reef. Not only that, it could be ping-pong, swimming and beach games if the weather keeps good as it did this morning. What about that knock on the door like the porter's knock on the gate in *Macbeth*? Once again a telephone call. My gosh! wasn't I right about that foreboding. Confound that Mahendran. I go downstairs to answer the call. But this time it was from David the Financial Controller at the office. He tells me the boss would like to speak to me around 5 p.m. on an investment prospect, which must be completed in six days so that it can sit around for a couple of months. I try to get out of the call, but for some reason I feel guilty. I mean, here I am in the middle of paradise. And to think of dandy David bleary eyed after a late night cutting slawing away back home. "Come on Brian", he says, hurried and just a weeny bit resentful. "You have been holding on to this for weeks on end; and there's every chance that if you don't deliver by the eighth it will be your last chance."

Come on. This is a vacation I have been looking forward to. I wanted to get free of the cocoon of work we tend to build around ourselves. Near this ultimatum from the boss just when I thought I was pulling free, enjoying myself, being restored. David may be having his fun controlling, but I am no controller. I am a human being.

Oh, what the hell! I'll just do the job and get it over with.

November 4: I don't feel good. The call with David lasted well into an hour yesterday evening because it had been so interesting. Today it has to be another call that I have to make to check out a few things. It made us pretty late for the lunch reservation — actually a buffet — at one of the 5-star hotels nearby along the beach. My wife was annoyed, as were my children, who were restlessly frolicking around in the vicinity as I tried to figure out details on the prospective new deal with our accounts wizard Arigaratne on the phone. A gloomy silence ensued by the time I had fin-

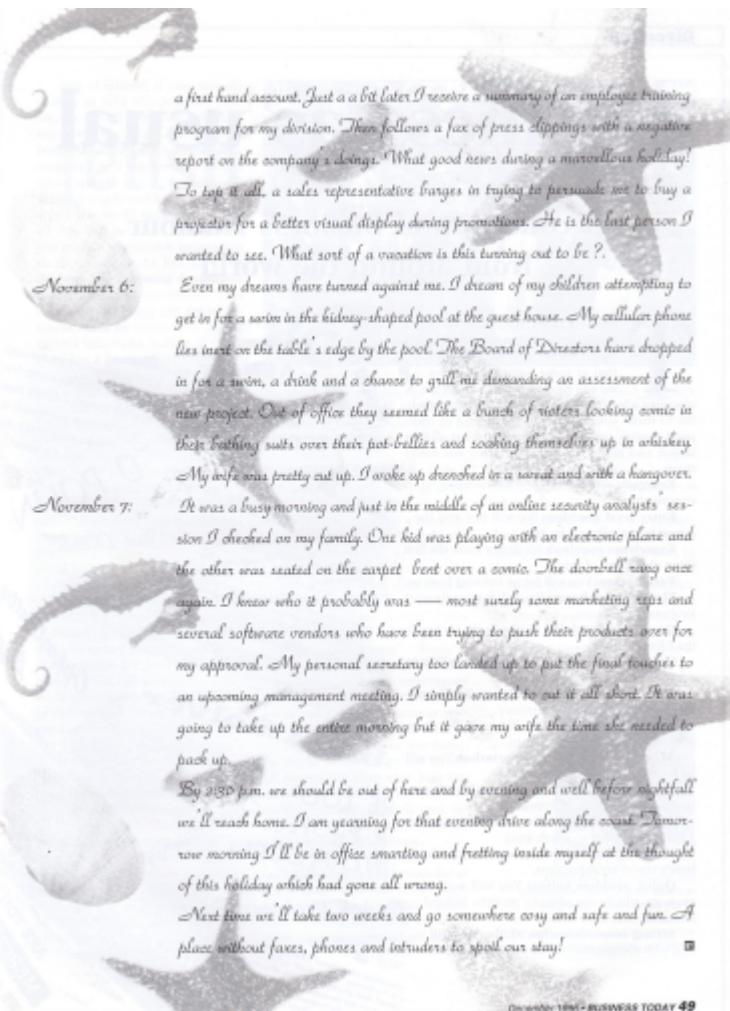
ished and as we walked over for the lunch there was hardly any conversation to change the sullen mood which came over all of us. Once there, however, I realized it was worth it after all. What a place! What smells! What a crowd! I filled my plate with mayonnaise, oysters, shrimp and everything to go with it. They were famous for their seafood.

What a lot of interesting people too, as renowned as some of the dishes served at this hotel. Who's that by the way?

Even the king-pies in many fields don't look like themselves in real life. My eyes soon moved taking a glimpse of someone who looks like a legal eagle. The side view of another who's waging a running battle with a lobster reminds me of a media big-shot. Is he that top guy in the insurance racket? Over there in a corner one two other people huddled over in serious conversation. It's difficult to say whether one of them is perhaps a politico and the other a business wizard although they both look familiar. I feel desirous here, too puny to dine among colossuses. My children were smaller.

By the time we settled down at the table it was almost 2:30 p.m. Worries crowded my mind as I sat down. It took ages for our fresh food order to be processed and to appear on our table. Our food came at around 3 p.m. By then the kids had already stuffed themselves with tid-bits and plenty of coke. They are now engaged in a duel using their table napkins. At the end of it all the meal cost over Rs 2,000. We ambled back to our rooms at sunset hardly seeing the golden glow on the horizon. Our only thought was to hit the pillow early and wait for the next crack of dawn and I was all so washed out.

November 5: This morning again phone calls bombard me. Mostly from my office seeking clarifications and always on matters I was responsible for. The hotel fire then begins to spew out reams of what were said to be crucial reports. First, there was stuff related to a new joint venture we had just managed to get off the ground. It dealt with some aspect of the business all incredibly messed up. I call up office to get



a first hand account. Just a bit later I receive a summary of an employee training program for my division. Then follows a fax of press clippings with a negative report on the company's doing. What good news during a marvellous holiday! To top it all, a sales representative barges in trying to persuade me to buy a projector for a better visual display during presentations. He is the last person I wanted to see. What sort of a vacation is this turning out to be?

November 6: Even my dreams have turned against me. I dream of my children attempting to get in for a swim in the kidney-shaped pool at the guest house. My cellular phone lies inert on the table's edge by the pool. The Board of Directors have dropped in for a swim, a drink and a chance to grill me demanding an assessment of the new project. Out of office they seemed like a bunch of visitors looking comic in their bathing suits over their pot-bellies and soaking themselves up in whisky.

My wife was pretty cut up. I woke up drenched in a sweat and with a hangover. **November 7:** It was a busy morning and just in the middle of an online security analysts' session I checked on my family. One kid was playing with an electronic plane and the other was seated on the carpet bent over a comic. The doorbell rang once again. I knew who it probably was — most surely some marketing reps and several software vendors who have been trying to push their products over for my approval. My personal secretary too landed up to put the final touches to an upcoming management meeting. I simply wanted to cut it all short. It was going to take up the entire morning but it gave my wife the time she needed to pack up.

By 2:30 pm, we should be out of here and by evening and well before nightfall we'll reach home. I am yearning for that evening drive along the coast. Tomorrow morning I'll be in office smarting and fretting inside myself at the thought of this holiday which had gone all wrong.

Next time we'll take two weeks and go somewhere cosy and safe and fun. A place without faxes, phones and intruders to spoil our stay! ■