

LIBRIS

We know
books

Books by Michael Ende

THE NEVERENDING STORY

MICHAEL ENDE

MOMO



Translated by J. Maxwell Brownjohn



PUFFIN

*Contents*PART ONE:
MOMO AND HER FRIENDS

1	<i>The Amphitheatre</i>	11
2	<i>Listening</i>	17
3	<i>Makebelieve</i>	24
4	<i>Two Special Friends</i>	34
5	<i>Tall Stories</i>	41

PART TWO: THE MEN IN GREY

6	<i>The Timesaving Bank</i>	55
7	<i>The Visitor</i>	69
8	<i>The Demonstration</i>	91
9	<i>The Trial</i>	102
10	<i>More Haste Less Speed</i>	110
11	<i>The Conference</i>	122
12	<i>Nowhere House</i>	130

13	<i>A Year and a Day</i>	153
14	<i>Three Lunches, No Answers</i>	172
15	<i>Found and Lost</i>	179
16	<i>Loneliness</i>	188
17	<i>The Square</i>	196
18	<i>The Pursuit</i>	204
19	<i>Under Siege</i>	210
20	<i>Pursuing the Pursuers</i>	219
21	<i>An End and a Beginning</i>	227
AUTHOR'S POSTSCRIPT		237

PART ONE

Momo and Her Friends

The Amphitheatre

Long, long ago, when people spoke languages quite different from our own, many fine, big cities already existed in the sunny lands of the world. There were towering palaces inhabited by kings and emperors; there were broad streets, narrow alleyways and winding lanes; there were sumptuous temples filled with idols of gold and marble; there were busy markets selling wares from all over the world; and there were handsome, spacious squares where people gathered to discuss the latest news and make speeches or listen to them. Last but not least, there were theatres – or, more properly, amphitheatres.

An amphitheatre resembled a modern circus, except that it was built entirely of stone. Seats for spectators were arranged in tiers, one above the other, like steps lining the crater of a man-made volcano. Many such buildings were circular, others semicircular, others oval.

Some amphitheatres were as big as football stadiums, others could hold no more than a few hundred people. Some were resplendent with columns and statues, others plain and unadorned. Having no roofs, amphitheatres were open to the sky. This was why, in the more luxurious ones, spectators were shielded from the heat of the sun or from sudden downpours by gold-embroidered awnings suspended above their seats. In simple amphitheatres, mats woven of rushes or straw served the same purpose. In short, people made their amphitheatres as simple or luxurious as they could afford – just as long as they had one, for our ancestors were enthusiastic playgoers.

Whenever they saw exciting or amusing incidents acted out on stage, they felt as if these make-believe happenings were more real, in some mysterious way, than their own humdrum lives, and they loved to feast their eyes and ears on this kind of reality.

Thousands of years have passed since then. The great cities of long ago lie in ruins, together with their temples and palaces. Wind and rain, heat and cold have worn away and eaten into the stonework. Ruins are all that remain of the amphitheatres, too. Crickets now inhabit their crumbling walls, singing a monotonous song that sounds like the earth breathing in its sleep.

A few of these ancient cities have survived to the present day, however. Life there has changed, of course. People ride around in cars and buses, have telephones and electric lights. But here and there among the modern buildings one can still find a column or two, an archway, a stretch of wall, or even an amphitheatre dating from olden times.

It was in a city of this kind that the story of Momo took place.

On the southern outskirts of the city, where the fields began and the houses became shabbier and more tumble-down, the ruins of a small amphitheatre lay hidden in a clump of pine trees. It had never been a grand place, even in the old days, just a place of entertainment for poor folk. When Momo arrived on the scene, the ruined amphitheatre had been almost forgotten. Its existence was known to a few professors of archaeology, but they took no further interest in it because there was nothing more to be unearthed there. It wasn't an attraction to be compared with others in the city, either, so the few stray tourists or sightseers who visited it from time to time merely clambered around on the grass-grown tiers of seats, made a lot of noise, took a couple of

snapshots, and went away again. Then silence returned to the stone arena and the crickets started on the next verse of their interminable, unchanging song.

The strange, round building was really known only to the folk who lived in the immediate neighbourhood. They grazed their goats there, their children played ball on what had once been the central stage, and sweethearts would sometimes meet there in the evenings.

One day however, word went around that someone had moved into the ruins. It was a child – a girl, most likely, though this was hard to say because she wore such funny clothes. The newcomer's name was Momo.

Aside from being rather odd, Momo's personal appearance might well have shocked anyone who set store by looking clean and tidy. She was so small and thin that, with the best will in the world, no one could have told her age. Her unruly mop of jet-black hair looked as if it had never seen a comb or a pair of scissors. She had very big, beautiful eyes as black as her hair, and feet of almost the same colour, for she nearly always went around barefoot. Although she sometimes wore shoes in the wintertime, the only shoes she had weren't a pair, and besides, they were far too big for her. This was because Momo owned nothing apart from what she had found lying around or had been given. Her ankle-length dress was a mass of patches of different colours, and over it she wore a man's jacket, also far too big for her, with the sleeves turned up at the wrist. Momo had decided against cutting them off because she wisely reflected that she was still growing, and goodness only knew if she would ever find another jacket as useful as this one, with all its many pockets.

Beneath the grassy stage of the ruined amphitheatre, half choked with rubble, were some underground chambers which could be reached by way of a hole in the outer wall, and this was where Momo had set up house. One afternoon, a group of men and women from the neighbourhood turned up and

LE tried to question her. Momo eyed them apprehensively, fearing that they had come to chase her away, but she soon saw that they meant well. Being poor like herself, they knew how hard life could be.

'So,' said one of the men, 'you like it here, do you?'

Momo nodded.

'And you want to stay here?'

'Yes, very much.'

'Won't you be missed, though?'

'No.'

'I mean, shouldn't you go home?'

'This is my home,' Momo said promptly.

'But where do you come from?'

Momo gestured vaguely at some undefined spot in the far distance.

'Who are your parents, then?' the man persisted.

Momo looked blankly from him to the others and gave a little shrug. The men and women exchanged glances and sighed.

'There's no need to be scared,' the man went on, 'we haven't come to evict you. We'd like to help you, that's all.'

Momo nodded and said nothing, not entirely reassured.

'You're called Momo, aren't you?'

'Yes.'

'That's a pretty name, but I've never heard it before. Who gave it to you?'

'I did,' said Momo.

'You chose your own name?'

'Yes.'

'When were you born?'

Momo pondered this. 'As far as I can remember,' she said at length, 'I've always been around.'

'But don't you have any aunts or uncles or grandparents? Don't you have any relations at all who'd give you a home?'

Momo just looked at the man in silence for a while. Then she murmured, 'This is my home, here.'

'That's all very well,' said the man, 'but you're only a kid. How old are you really?'

Momo hesitated. 'A hundred,' she said.

They all laughed because they thought she was joking.

'No, seriously, how old are you?'

'A hundred and two,' Momo replied, still more hesitantly.

It was some time before the others realized that she'd picked up a few numbers but had no precise idea of their meaning because no one had ever taught her to count.

'Listen,' said the man, after conferring with the others, 'would you mind if we told the police you're here? Then you'd be put in a children's home where they'd feed you and give you a proper bed and teach you reading and writing and lots of other things. How does that appeal to you?'

Momo gazed at him in horror. 'No,' she said in a low voice, 'I've already been in one of those places. There were other children there, too, and bars over the windows. We were beaten every day for no good reason - it was awful. One night I climbed the wall and ran away. I wouldn't want to go back there.'

'I can understand that,' said an old man, nodding, and the others could understand and nodded too.

'Very well,' said one of the women, 'but you're still so little. Someone has to take care of you.'

Momo looked relieved. 'I can take care of myself.'

'Can you really?' said the woman.

Momo didn't answer at once. Then she said softly, 'I don't need much.'

Again the others exchanged glances and sighed.

'Know something, Momo?' said the man who had spoken first. 'We were wondering if you'd like to move in with one of us. It's true we don't have much room ourselves, and most of us already have a horde of children to feed,

but we reckon one more won't make any difference. What do you say?'

'Thank you,' Momo said, smiling for the first time. 'Thank you very much, but couldn't you just let me go on living here?'

After much deliberation, the others finally agreed. It occurred to them that she would be just as well off here as with one of them, so they decided to look after Momo together. It would be easier, in any case, for all of them to do so than for one of them alone.

They made an immediate start by spring-cleaning Momo's dilapidated dungeon and refurbishing it as best they could. One of them, a bricklayer by trade, built her a miniature cooking stove and produced a rusty stovepipe to go with it. The old man, who was a carpenter, nailed together a little table and two chairs out of some packing cases. As for the womenfolk, they brought along a decrepit iron bedstead adorned with curlicues, a mattress with only a few rents in it, and a couple of blankets. The stone cell beneath the stage of the ruined amphitheatre became a snug little room. The bricklayer, who fancied himself as an artist, added the finishing touch by painting a pretty flower picture on the wall. He even painted a pretend frame around it and a pretend nail as well.

Last of all, the people's children came along with whatever food they could spare. One brought a morsel of cheese, another a hunk of bread, another some fruit, and so on. And because so many children came, the occasion turned into a regular housewarming party. Momo's installation in the old amphitheatre was celebrated as zestfully as only the poor of this world know how.

And that was the beginning of her friendship with the people of the neighbourhood.

TWO

Listening

Momo was comfortably off from now on, at least in her own estimation. She always had something to eat, sometimes more and sometimes less, depending on circumstances and on what people could spare. She had a roof over her head, she had a bed to sleep in, and she could make herself a fire when it was cold. Most important of all, she had acquired a host of good friends.

You may think that Momo had simply been fortunate to come across such friendly people. This was precisely what Momo herself thought, but it soon dawned on her neighbours that they had been no less fortunate. She became so important to them that they wondered how they had ever managed without her in the past. And the longer she stayed with them, the more indispensable she became – so indispensable, in fact, that their one fear was that she might some day move on.

The result was that Momo received a stream of visitors. She was almost always to be seen with someone sitting beside her, talking earnestly, and those who needed her but couldn't come themselves would send for her instead. As for those who needed her but hadn't yet realized it, the others used to tell them, 'Why not go and see Momo?'

In time, these words became a stock phrase with the local inhabitants. Just as they said, 'All the best!' or 'So long!' or 'Heaven only knows!', so they took to saying, on all sorts of occasions, 'Why not go and see Momo?'

Was Momo so incredibly bright that she always gave good

LEARNING WORDS
advice, or found the right words to console people in need of consolation, or delivered fair and far-sighted opinions on their problems?

No, she was no more capable of that than anyone else of her age.

So could she do things that put people in a good mood? Could she sing like a bird or play an instrument? Given that she lived in a kind of circus, could she dance or do acrobatics?

No, it wasn't any of these either.

Was she a witch, then? Did she know some magic spell that would drive away troubles and cares? Could she read a person's palm or foretell the future in some other way?

No, what Momo was better at than anyone else was *listening*.

Anyone can listen, you may say – what's so special about that? – but you'd be wrong. Very few people know how to listen properly, and Momo's way of listening was quite unique.

She listened in a way that made slow-witted people have flashes of inspiration. It wasn't that she actually said anything or asked questions that put such ideas into their heads. She simply sat there and listened with the utmost attention and sympathy, fixing them with her big, dark eyes, and they suddenly became aware of ideas whose existence they had never suspected.

Momo could listen in such a way that worried and indecisive people knew their own minds from one moment to the next, or shy people felt suddenly confident and at ease, or downhearted people felt happy and hopeful. And if someone felt that his life had been an utter failure, and that he himself was only one among millions of wholly unimportant people who could be replaced as easily as broken windowpanes, he would go and pour out his heart to Momo. And, even as he spoke, he would come to realize

by some mysterious means that he was absolutely wrong: that there was only one person like himself in the whole world, and that, consequently, he mattered to the world in his own particular way.

Such was Momo's talent for listening.

One day, Momo received a visit from two close neighbours who had quarrelled violently and weren't on speaking terms. Their friends had urged them to 'go and see Momo' because it didn't do for neighbours to live at daggers drawn. After objecting at first, the two men had reluctantly agreed.

One of them was the bricklayer who had built Momo's stove and painted the pretty flower picture on her wall. Salvatore by name, he was a strapping fellow with a black moustache that curled up at the ends. The other, Nino, was skinny and always looked tired. Nino ran a small inn on the outskirts of town, largely patronized by a handful of old men who spent the entire evening reminiscing over one glass of wine. Nino and his plump wife, Liliana, were also friends of Momo's and had often brought her good things to eat.

So there the two men sat, one on each side of the stone arena, silently scowling at nothing in particular.

When Momo saw how angry with each other they were, she couldn't decide which one of them to approach first. Rather than offend either of them, she sat down midway between them on the edge of the arena and looked at each in turn, waiting to see what would happen. Lots of things take time, and time was Momo's only form of wealth.

After the two of them had sat there in silence for minutes on end, Salvatore abruptly stood up. 'I'm off,' he announced. 'I've shown my good will by coming here, but the man's as stubborn as a mule, Momo, you can see that for yourself.' And he turned on his heel.

LEAF
BOOKS

'Goodbye and good riddance!' Nino called after him. 'You needn't have bothered to come in the first place. I wouldn't make it up with a vicious brute like you.'

Salvatore swung around, puce with rage. 'Who's a vicious brute?' he demanded menacingly, retracing his steps. 'Say that again – if you dare!'

'As often as you like!' yelled Nino. 'I suppose you think you're too big and tough for anyone to speak the truth to your face. Well, *I* will – to you and anyone else that cares to listen. That's right, come here and murder me the way you tried to the other day!'

'I wish I had!' roared Salvatore, clenching his fists. 'There you are, Momo, you see the dirty lies he tells? All I did was take him by the scruff of the neck and dunk him in the pool of slops behind that lousy inn of his. You couldn't even drown a rat in that.' Readdressing himself to Nino, he shouted, 'Yes, you're still alive and kicking, worse luck!'

Insults flew thick and fast after that, and for a while Momo was at a loss to know what it was all about and why the pair of them were so furious with each other. It transpired, by degrees, that Salvatore's only reason for assaulting Nino was that Nino had slapped his face in the presence of some customers, though Nino counterclaimed that Salvatore had previously tried to smash all his crockery.

'That's another dirty lie!' Salvatore said angrily. 'I only threw a jug at the wall, and that was cracked already.'

'Maybe,' Nino retorted, 'but it was *my* jug. You had no right to do such a thing.'

Salvatore protested that he had every right, seeing that Nino had cast aspersions on his professional skill. He turned to Momo. 'Know what he said about me? He said I couldn't build a wall straight because I was drunk twenty-four hours a day. My great-grandfather was the same, he said, and he'd helped to build the Leaning Tower of Pisa.'

'But Salvatore,' said Nino, 'I was only joking.'

'Some joke,' growled Salvatore. 'Very funny, I don't think!'

It then emerged that Nino had only been paying Salvatore back for another joke. He'd woken up one morning to find some words daubed on the tavern door in bright red paint. They read: THIS INN IS OUT. Nino had found that just as unamusing.

The two of them spent some time wrangling over whose had been the better joke. Then, after working themselves up into a lather again, they broke off.

Momo was staring at them wide-eyed, but neither man quite knew how to interpret her gaze. Was she secretly laughing at them, or was she sad? Although her expression gave no clue, they suddenly seemed to see themselves mirrored in her eyes and began to feel sheepish.

'Okay,' said Salvatore, 'maybe I shouldn't have painted those words on your door, Nino, but I wouldn't have done it if you hadn't refused to serve me so much as a single glass of wine. That was against the law, as you know full well. I've always paid up, and you'd no call to treat me that way.'

'Oh, hadn't I just!' Nino retorted. 'What about the St Anthony business? Ah, that's floored you, hasn't it! You cheated me right, left and centre, and I wasn't going to take it lying down.'

'I cheated *you*?' Salvatore protested, smiting his brow. 'You've got it the wrong way around. It was *you* that tried to cheat *me*, but you didn't succeed.'

The fact was, Nino had hung a picture of St Anthony on the wall of the bar-room – a clipping from an illustrated magazine which he had cut out and framed. Salvatore offered to buy this picture one day, ostensibly because he found it so beautiful. By dint of skilful haggling, Nino had persuaded Salvatore to part with a radio in exchange, laughing up his sleeve to think that Salvatore was getting the worst of the bargain.