

Momo



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?" Was Momo so incredibly bright that she always gave good 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.

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.

(from: "Momo", Michael Ende)