

'MOMO' chapter 5
by Michael Ende

AN SHADE between
BLACK and WHITE
a response to 'MOMO' by Christiane Holzheid

'Momo' chapter V

by Michael Ende

Life holds one great but quite commonplace mystery. Though shared by each of us and known to all, it seldom rates a second thought. That mystery, which most of us take for granted and never think twice about, is time. Calendars and clocks exist to measure time, but that signifies little because we all know that an hour can seem an eternity or pass in a flash, according to how we spend it. Time is life itself, and life resided in the human heart.

READING TIME 27.81 seconds

The men in gray knew this better than anyone. Nobody knew the value of an hour or a minute, or even a single second, as well as they. They were experts on time just as leeches are experts on blood, and they acted accordingly. They had designs on people's time - long term and well-laid plans of their own. What mattered most to them was that no one should become aware of their activities. They had surreptitiously installed themselves in the city. Now, step by step and day by day, they were secretly invading its inhabitants' lives and taking them over. They knew the identity of every person likely to further their plans long before that person had any inkling of it. They waited for the ideal moment to entrap him, and they saw to it that the ideal moment came. One such person was Mr. Figaro, the barber. Though not by any means a high-class hairdresser, he was wellrespected in the neighbourhood neither rich nor poor, he owned a small barbershop in the centre of town and employed an apprentice. One day, Mr Figaro was standing at the door of his shop waiting for customers. It was the apprentice's day off, so he was alone. Raindrops were spattering the pavement and the sky was bleak and dreary - as bleak and dreary as Mr Figaro's mood. 'Life's passing me by,' he told himself, 'and what am I getting out of it. Wielding a pair of scissors, chatting to customers, lathering their faces - is that the most I can expect. When I'm dead, it'll be as if I'd never existed.' In fact, Mr Figaro had no objection at all to chatting. He liked to air his opinions and hear no objection to wielding a pair of scissors or lathering faces, either. He genuinely enjoyed his work and a man's chin as smoothly

READING TIME 81.93 seconds

against the lie of the stubble, but there were times when none of this seemed to matter. 'I'm an utter failure,' thought Mr Figaro. 'I mean, what do I amount to? A small-time barber, that's all. If only I could lead the right kind of life, I'd be a different person altogether.' Exactly what form the right kind of life should take, Mr Figaro wasn't sure. He vaguely pictured it as a distinguished and affluent existence such as he was always reading about in glossy magazines. 'The trouble is,' he thought sourly, 'my work leaves me no time for that sort of thing, and you need time for the right kind of life. You've got to be free, but I'm a lifelong prisoner of scissors, lather and chit-chat.'

At that moment a smart gray limousine pulled up right outside Mr Figaro's barbershop. A gray-suited man got out and walked in. He deposited his gray briefcase on the ledge in front of the mirror, hung his gray bowler on the hat-rack, sat down in the barber's chair, produced a gray notebook from his breast and started leafing through it, puffing meanwhile at a small gray cigar.

Mr Figaro shut the street door because he suddenly found it strangely chilly in his little shop. 'What's it to be?' He asked, 'shave or hair cut?' Even as he spoke, he cursed himself for being so tactless: the stranger was as bald as an egg. The man in gray didn't smile. 'Neither,' he replied in a peculiarly flat and expressionless voice - a gray voice, so to speak. 'I'm from the timesaving bank. Permit me to introduce myself: agent no. Xyq/384/b. We hear you wish to open an account with us.' 'That's new to me,' said Mr Figaro. 'To be honest, I didn't even know such a bank existed.' 'Well, you

know now,' the agent said crisply. He consulted his little grey notebook. 'Your name is Figaro, isn't it?' 'Correct,' said Mr Figaro. 'That's me.' 'Then I've come to the right address,' said the man in gray, shutting his notebook with a snap. 'You're on our list of applicants.' 'How come?' Asked Mr Figaro, who was still at loss. 'It's like this, my dear sir,' said the man in gray. 'You're wasting your life cutting hair, lathering faces and swapping idle chit-chat. When you are dead, it'll be as if you'd never existed. If only you had the time to lead the right kind of life, you'd be quite a different person. Time is all you need, right?' 'That's just what I was thinking a moment ago,' mumbled Mr Figaro, and he shivered because it was getting colder and spite of the door being shut. 'You see!' Said the man in gray, puffing contentedly at his small cigar. 'You need more time, but how are you going to find it? By saving it, of course. You, Mr Figaro, are wasting time in a totally irresponsible way. Let me prove it to you by simple arithmetic. There are sixty seconds in a minute and sixty minutes in an hour - are you with me so far?'

'Of course,' said Mr Figaro.

Agent xyq/384/b produced a piece of gray chalk and scrawled some figures on the mirror. 'Sixty times sixty is three thousand six hundred, which makes three thousand six hundred seconds an hour. There are twenty-four hours in a day, so multiply three thousand six hundred by twenty-four to find the number of seconds in a day and you arrive at a figure of eighty-six thousand four hundred. There are three hundred and sixtyfive days in a year, as you know, which makes

thirty-one million five hundred and thirtysix thousand seconds in a year, or three hundred and fifteen million three hundred and sixty thousand seconds in ten years. How long do you reckon you'll live, Mr Figaro?

'Well,' stammered Mr Figaro, thoroughly disconcerted by now, 'I hope to live to seventy or eighty, god willing.'

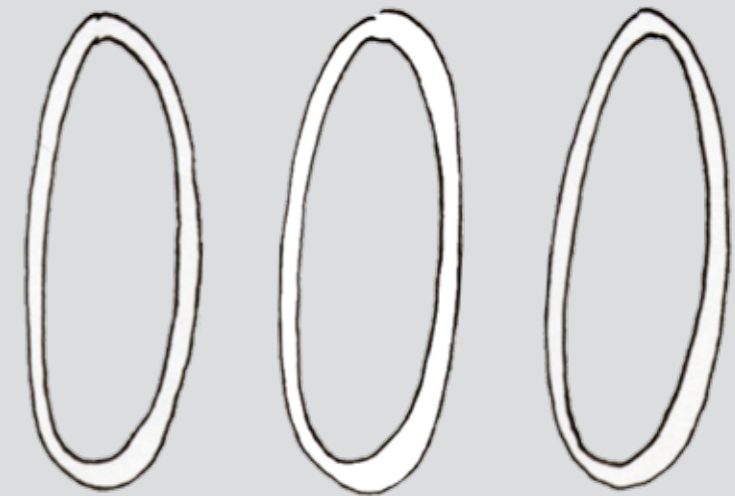
'Very well,' pursued the man in gray. 'Let's call it seventy, to be on the safe side. Multiply three hundred and fifteen million three hundred and sixty thousand by seven and you get a grand total of two billion two hundred and seven million five hundred and twenty thousand seconds.'

He chalked this figure up on the mirror in outsized numerals - and underlined it several times.



2,207,520

READING TIME 22.73 seconds



'That, Mr Figaro, is the extent of the capital at your disposal.' Mr Figaro gulped and wiped his brow, feeling quite dizzy. He'd never realised how rich he was. 'Yes,' said the agent, nodding and puffing at his small gray cigar, 'it's an impressive figure, isn't it? But let's continue. How old are you, Mr Figaro?' 'Forty-two,' the barber mumbled. He suddenly felt guilty, as if he had committed a fraud of some crime. 'And how long do you sleep at night, on average?' 'Around eight hours,' Mr Figaro admitted. The agent did some lightning calculations. The squeak of his chalk as it raced across the mirror set Mr Figaro's teeth on edge. 'Forty-two years at eight hours a night makes four hundred and forty-one million five hundred and four thousand seconds. We'll have to write that off, I'm afraid. How much of the day do you devote to work, Mr Figaro?' 'Another eight hours or so,' Mr Figaro said, apologetically. 'Then we'll have to write off the same amount again,' the agent pursued relentlessly. 'You also spend a certain proportion of the day eating. How many hours would you say, counting all meals?' 'I don't exactly know,' Mr Figaro said nervously. 'Two hours, maybe'. 'That sounds on the low side to me,' said the agent, 'but assuming it's correct we get a figure of one hundred and ten million three hundred and seventy-six thousand seconds in forty-two years. To continue: you live alone with your elderly mother, as we know. You spend a good hour with the old woman every day, that's to say, you sit and talk to her although she's so deaf she can scarcely hear a word. That counts as more time wasted - fifty-five million one hundred and eighty-eight thousand seconds, to be precise. You also

keep a budgerigar, a needless extravagance whose demands on your time amount to fifteen minutes a day, or thirteen million seven hundred and ninety-seven thousand seconds in forty-two years.' 'B-but -' Mr Figaro broke in, imploringly. 'Don't interrupt!' Snapped the agent, his chalk racing faster and faster across the mirror. 'You're mother's arthritic as well as deaf, so you have to do most of the housework. You go shopping, clean shoes and perform other chores of a similar nature. How much time does that consume daily?' 'An hour, maybe, but -' 'so you've already squandered another fifty-five million one hundred and eighty-eight thousand seconds, Mr Figaro. We also know you go to cinema once a week, sing with a social club once a week, go drinking twice a week, and spend the rest of your evenings reading or gossiping with friends. In short, you devote some three hours a day to useless pastimes that have lost you another one hundred and sixty-five million five hundred and sixty-four thousand seconds.' The agent broke off. 'What's the matter, Mr Figaro, aren't you feeling well?' 'No,' said the barber, 'yes, I mean. Please excuse me!' 'I'm almost through,' said the agent. 'First, though, we must touch on a rather personal aspect of your life - your little secret, if you know what I mean.' Mr Figaro was so cold that his teeth had started to chatter. 'So you know about that, too?' He mumbled feebly. 'I didn't think anyone knew except me and Miss Daria -' 'There's no room for secrets in the world of today', his inquisitor broke in. 'Look at the matter rationally and realistically Mr Figaro, and answer me one thing: do you plan to marry Miss Daria?' 'No-no,'

said Mr Figaro, 'I couldn't do that?' 'Quite so,' said the man in gray. 'Being paralysed from the waist down, she'll have to spend the rest of her life in a wheelchair, yet you visit her every day for half an hour and take her flowers. Why?' 'She's always so pleased to see me,' Mr Figaro replied, close to tears. 'But looked at objectively, from your own point of view,' said the agent, 'it's time wasted - twenty-seven million five hundred and ninety-four thousand seconds if it, to date. Furthermore, if we allow for your habit of sitting at the window for a quarter of an hour every night, we have to write of yet another thirteen million seven hundred and ninetyseven thousand seconds. Very well, let's see how much time that makes in all.' He drew a line under the long column of figures and added them up with the rapidity of an computer. The sum on the mirror now looked like this:

SLEEP :	44	504	000	do.
WorK :	44	504	000	do.
MEALS :	13	376	000	do.
MOTHER :	55	188	000	do.
BULLER- GAY :	13	797	000	do.
FRIENDS :	65	564	000	do.
Social club :	55	504	000	do.
MISS DARIA :	27	594	000	do.

DAYDREAMING: 13,797,000 db.

GRAND
TOTAL: 1,324,5

READING TIME 2.13 seconds

12,000 SecONDS.

'And that figure', said then man in gray, rapping the mirror with his chalk so sharply that it sounded like a burst of machine-gun fire, 'that figure represents the time you've wasted up to now. What do you say to that, Mr Figaro?' Mr Figaro said nothing. He slumped into a chair in the corner of the shop and mopped his brow with a handkerchief, sweating hard despite the icy atmosphere. The man in gray nodded gravely. 'Yes, you're quite right, my dear sir, you've used up more than half of your original capital. Now let's see how much that leaves of your forty-two years. One year is thirty-one million five hundred and thirty-six thousand seconds, and that, multiplied by forty-two, comes to one billion three hundred and twenty-four million five hundred and twelve thousand seconds.

TOTAL time AVAILABLE :
Time Lost to DATE :

BALANCE : 0,000,00

1,324,512,000 SECONDS
1,324,512,000 do.

0,000 SECOndS

Then he pocketed his chalk and waited for the sight of all the zeros to take effect, which they did. 'So that's all my life amounts to,' thought Mr Figaro, absolutely shattered. He was so impressed by the elaborate sum, which had come out perfectly, that he was ready to accept whatever advice the stranger had to offer. It was one of the tricks the men in gray used to dupe prospective customers. Agent no. Xyq/384/b broke the silence. 'Can you really afford to go on like this?' He said blandly. 'Wouldn't you prefer to start saving right away, Mr Figaro?' Mr Figaro nodded mutely, blue-lipped with cold. 'For example,' came the agent's grey voice in his ear, 'if you'd started saving even one hour a day twenty years ago, you'd now have a credit balance of twenty-six million two hundred and eighty thousand seconds. Two hours a day would have saved twice that amount, of course, or fifty-two million five hundred and sixty thousand. And I ask you, Mr Figaro, what are two measly little hours in comparison with a sum of that magnitude?' 'Nothing!' Cried Mr Figaro, 'a mere flea bite!' 'I'm glad you agree,' the agent said smoothly, 'and if we calculate how much you could have saved that way after another twenty years, we arrive at a handsome figure of one hundred and five million one hundred and twenty thousand seconds. And the whole of that capital, Mr Figaro, would have been freely available to you at the age of sixty-two!' 'F-fantastic!' Stammered Mr Figaro, wide-eyed with awe. 'But that's not all,' the agent pursued. 'The best is yet to come. The timesaving bank not only takes care of the time you save, it pays you interest on it as well. In other

words, you end up with more than you put in.' 'How much more?', Mr Figaro asked breathlessly.

'That's up to you,' the agent told him. 'It depends how much time you save and how long you leave it on deposit with us.'

'Leave it on deposit?' Said Mr Figaro. 'How do you mean?'

'It's quite simple. If you don't withdraw the time you save or five years, we credit you with the same amount again. Your savings double every five years, do you follow? They're worth four times as much after ten years, eight times as much after fifteen, and so on. Say you'd started saving a mere two hours a day twenty years ago: by your sixty-second birthday, or after forty years in total, you'd have had two hundred and fifty-six times as much in the bank as you originally put in. That would mean a credit balance of: twenty-six billion nine hundred and ten million seven hundred and twenty thousand seconds. And the agent produced his chalk again and wrote the figure on the mirror:

26,910,720,000.0

READING TIME 01.08seconds

'You can see for yourself, Mr Figaro,' he went on, smiling thinly for the first time. 'You'd have accumulated over ten times your entire life span, just by saving a couple of hours a day for forty years. If that's not a paying proposition, I don't know what is.'

'You're right,' Mr Figaro said wearily, 'it certainly is. What a fool I was not to start saving time years ago! It didn't dawn on me until now, and I have to admit I'm appalled.' 'No need to be,' the man said soothingly, ' - none at all. It's never too late to save time. You can start today, if you want to.' 'Of course I want to!' exclaimed Mr Figaro. 'What do I have to do?' The agent raised his eyebrows. 'Surely you know how to save time, my dear sir' work faster, for instance, and stick to essentials. Spend only fifteen minutes on each customer, instead of the usual half-hour, and avoid time-wasting conversations. Reduce the hour you spend with your mother by half. Better still, put her in a nice, cheap old folk's home, where someone else can look after her - that'll save you a whole hour a day. Get rid of that useless budgerigar. See Miss Daria once every two weeks, if at all. Give up your fifteen-minute review of the day's events. Above all, don't squander so much of your precious time on singing, reading and hobnobbing with your so-called friends. Incidentally, I'd also advise you to hang a really accurate clock on the wall so you can time your apprentice to the nearest minute.'

'Fine,' said Mr Figaro, 'I can manage all that, but what about the time I save? Do I have to pay it in, and if so where, or should I keep it somewhere safe till you collect it' how

does the system operate?' The man in grey gave another thin-lipped smile. 'Don't worry, we'll take care of that. Rest assured, we won't mislay a single second of the time you save. You'll find you haven't any left over.'

'All right,' Mr Figaro said dazedly, 'I'll take your word for it.' 'You can do so with complete confidence, my dear sir.' The agent rose to his feet. 'And now, permit me to welcome you to the ranks of the great timesaving movement. You're a truly modern and progressive member of the community, Mr Figaro. I congratulate you!' So saying, he picked up his hat and briefcase.

'One moment,' said Mr Figaro, 'shouldn't there be some form of contract' oughtn't I to sign something' don't I get a policy of some kind?'

Agent no. Xyq/384/b, who had already reached the door, turned and regarded Mr Figaro with faint annoyance. 'What on earth for?' he demanded. 'Timesaving can't be compared with any other kind of saving - it calls for absolute trust on both sides. Your word is good enough for us, especially as you can't go back on it. We'll take care of your savings, though how much you save is entirely up to you - we never bring pressure to bear on our customers.'

Good day, Mr Figaro'

WHO ARE YOU
GRANDMAN? I HEAR
ABOUT YOU FEEL
YOU, EVEN SMELL YOU
SOMETIMES, and I
CAN SEE THE MARKS
YOU LEAVE AROUND ME.

Since January, 2008 South Africa has faced an electricity shortage.

READING TIME 9.3 seconds

ARE YOU AUTHORITY—
YOU ARE SUPPOSED
TO BOW IN FRONT
OF YOU? BUT GRAY
MAN I HAVE NEVER
SEEN YOUR FACE.

At first all the power was cut off up to three times daily.

Sometimes up to three hours in a row.

This amounted to a loss

of 32,400 seconds of electricity a day, but also a

loss of precious time

Imagine

suddenly, in the midst of your

daily activities

your electricity was shut

without warning—outrages.

What can people do? "Nothing, there is nothing you can do! Shops close, some restaurants stay open, most people leave work and go home. People are buying generators."

(says Gregor Roehrig, multi-media production editor of The Times in Johannesburg)

Apparently this problem will last for up to eight years.

READING TIME 40.3 records

YOU ARE WEARING A
GRAY SUIT WITH A GRAY
BOW TIE. WHAT YOU HAVE
A GRAY BRIEFCASE, A
GRAY NOTEBOOK AND
SMOKE A GRAY CIGAR!
GRAY MAN I WILL LOOK

The mining industries are about to collapse, water will get contaminated.

small businesses might go bankrupt and as a result the whole economy will suffer greatly.

South African government might start controlling the countries electric consumption. They might be able to force fully switch off peoples electricity or even start penalizing individuals if they use too much.

READING TIME 26.35 seconds

OUT FOR YOU THEN
AND SURELY I WILL
BOW IN FRONT OF YOU
TWO CROSS MY
WAY OF COURSE!
YOU ARE POWERFUL!

Someone is controlling what are ultimately the most basic needs to survive in a city - electricity - without it it will be dark.

READING TIME 19.46 seconds

"GRAYMAN" I WONDER
 IS THERE ANYTHING YOU
 CAN DO ABOUT THIS?

The whole incident seems very dubious and controversial. The day South Africa experienced their first electricity shortage was the

READING TIME 29.40 seconds

"GRAYMAN" I WONDER.
 WHAT THE HELL SENDS
 OLD SHIVERS DOWN
 MY SPINE? THIS
 ALL A MONEY MAKING
 BUSINESS WHERE
 THE GOVERNMENT

READING TIME 76.16 seconds

STEELES ELECTRICITY
 ARE SOCIAL AND
 ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES BEING IGNORED?

change. Media design somehow used to present time, since it is constantly changing and very difficult to keep up with. It also presents and creates new opportunities to use time in different ways.

"GRAV MEN" ARE YOU
 SOMEONE/SOMETHING
 THAT'S TRYING TO
 MANIPULATE ME/US/
 A WHOLE COUNTRY WITHOUT
 SHOWING A FACE.

LEAVING PEOPLE
SPECULATE AND IN
THE GRAY YOU HAVE
BEEN TRAINED TO
PRACTICE AUTHORITY
TO EFFICIENTLY MANIPULATE
PEOPLE, SELL YOUR-

"if I could only lead the right kind of life, I'd be a different person altogether"

-like I read about it in glossy magazines... "you need time for the right kind of life, you have got to be free!"

READING TIME 16.77seconds

SELF AND FORCE
BELIEVE UPON US IN
A CONVINCING WAY.

READING TIME 03.52seconds

GLOSSY MAGAZINES?
GRAMMAR IS THIS
ANOTHER ONE OF YOUR
METHODS? ALL THE TIME
SPEND MAKING MONEY
TO BUY THE MAGAZINE
THAT TELLS ME TO

Maybe wasted time is time well spent after all. Maybe we have enough time to waste and to some just enjoy it for what it is.

READING TIME 15.79 seconds

WORK HARDER SO
NEXT TIME CAN BUY
THE THING IN THE
MAGAZINE A RUG A
SWEATER OR MAYBE A
NICE WATCH - HOW ABOUT
A TINY LITTLE CELL

Maybe gray men have wasted so much time trying to steal it from the rest of us that they are actually the one's running out of time. Maybe gray men lead very gray lives and can't help but envy those whose hearts pump blues and reds through their veins, giving them a rich warm pigment to their skin.

READING TIME 27.46 seconds

Phone With A Big Clock
ON ITS FACE

Perhaps
saving time
means slowing
down and taking it all in.

READING TIME 07.36 seconds

IF I TAKE YOUR
HURRIED ADVICE I
WILL ONLY BE
RUSHED TO MY GRAVE.
GRAVEMEN YOUR
TIME IS ALMOST UP.

READING TIME 05.48 seconds