

BEPPO ROADSWEEPER

from Michael Ende's MOMO

„Every morning, long before daybreak, Beppo rode his squeaky old bicycle to a big depot in town. There, he and his fellow roadsweepers waited in the yard to be issued brooms and pushcarts and told which streets to sweep. Beppo enjoyed these hours before dawn, when the city was still asleep, and he did his work willingly and well. It was a useful job, and he knew it.

He swept his allotted streets slowly but steadily, drawing a deep breath before every step and every stroke of the broom. Step, breathe, sweep, breathe, step, breathe, sweep... Every so often he would pause a while, staring thoughtfully into the distance. And then he would begin again: step, breathe, sweep...

While progressing in this way, with a dirty street ahead of him and a clean one behind, he often had grand ideas. They were ideas that couldn't be easily be put into words, though – ideas as hard to define as a half-remembered scent or a colour seen in a dream. When sitting with Momo after work, he would tell her his grand ideas, and her special way of listening would loosen his tongue and bring the right words to his lips.

„You see, Momo“, he told her one day, „it's like this. Sometimes, when you've a very long street ahead of you, you think how terribly long it is and feel sure you'll never get it swept.“

He gazed silently into space before continuing. „And then you start to hurry“, he went on. „You work faster and faster, and every time you look up there seems to be just as much left to sweep as before, and you try even harder, and you panic, and in the end you're out of breath and have to stop – and still the street stretches away in front of you. That's not the way to do it.“

He pondered a while. Then he said: „You must never think of the whole street at once, understand? You must only concentrate on the next step, the next breathe, the next stroke of the broom, and the next, and the next. Nothing else.“

Again, he paused for thought before adding, „That way you enjoy your work, which is important, because then you make a good job of it. And that's how it ought to be.“

There was another long silence. At last he went on, „And all at once, before you know it, you find you've swept the whole street clean, bit by bit. What's more, you aren't out of breath.“ He nodded to himself. „That's important, too“, he concluded.