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I climbed the wall and ran along the shore. The tide was already going out fast. I could see at once that he was in great danger. If he stayed where he was he'd soon be stranded. I was walking slowly, so as not to alarm him. Then I crouched down as close as I could get to him, the water lapping all around me. His great domed head was only just out of my reach. We were practically face-to-face, eye-to-eye. He had eyes that seemed to be able to look right into me. He was seeing everything I was thinking.

I was sure he was expecting me to say something. So I did.

"What are you doing here?" I asked him. "You're a bottle-nose whale, aren't you? You shouldn't be here at all. You don't belong in the Thames. On my whale poster it says you live in the North Atlantic somewhere. So you should be up there, near

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Iceland, near Scotland maybe, but not down here. I've seen bottle-nose whales on the telly too, on Planet Earth I think it was. There were lots of you all together. Or maybe it was pilot whales, I can't remember. But anyway, you always go around in schools, don't you, in huge family groups. I know you do. So how come you're all alone? Where's the rest of you? But maybe you're not all alone. Maybe some of your family came with you, and you got yourself a bit lost. Is that it?"

He kept staring back at me out of his big wide eye. I thought the best thing I could do was to just keep talking. I couldn't think what else to do. For a moment or two I didn't know what else to say, and anyway I suddenly felt a bit stupid talking to him. I mean, what if someone was watching me? Luckily, though, there was no one about. So instead, I looked up river, back towards Battersea Bridge, to see if



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any of his family might have come with him, but everywhere the river was empty and glassy and still. There was nothing there, nothing that broke the surface anyway. He was alone. He'd come alone.

And that was when it happened. The whale spoke! I'm telling you the truth, honest. The whale spoke to me. His voice was like an echoing whisper inside my head, like a talking thought. But it was him talking. It really was, I promise you. "No," he said. "My family's not with me. I'm all on my own. They came some of the way with me, and they're waiting for me back out at sea. And you're right. We usually stay close to our families – it's safer that way. But I had to do this bit alone. Grandfather said it would be best. Grandfather would have come himself, but he couldn't. So I've come instead of him. Everyone said it was far too dangerous, that there was no point, that it's too late anyway, that people won't listen, that they



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just won't learn, no matter what. But Grandfather knew differently. He always said I should go, that time was running out, but there was still hope. I was young enough and strong enough to make the journey, he said. One of us had to come and tell you. So I came. There are some things that are so important that you just have to do them, whatever anyone says, however dangerous it might be. I believe that. And besides, I promised Grandfather before he died. I promised him I'd come and find you. And I always keep my promises. Do you keep your promises?"

I could just about manage a nod but that was all. I tried, but I couldn't speak a word. I thought maybe I was going mad, seeing things that weren't there, hearing voices that weren't real, and suddenly that really terrified me. That was why I backed away from him. I was just about ready to run off when he spoke again.



