

Hope.

Martin, Head Guide at The Natural History Museum stood under the giant Blue Whale skeleton. He looked at his watch – time to start his presentation.

He floated a welcome through-out the gothic entrance hall, then pointed directly upwards. 'I'd like to introduce you to Hope, our star exhibit. She's been living here in Kensington for the last hundred-and-thirty years.

A little boy at the front of the crowd harangued his mother. Disappointed that one of the museums dinosaurs was missing, he whined. 'But I want to see Dippy. Whales are so boring. Mum!'

The Mum looked at the Martin with a despairing glare.

Every day, the same complaint. He blamed the Paddington movie but to be fair Dippy had always been the visitors' favourite.

'Young man, I'm really sorry but Dippy is on holiday and he's asked Hope, his best friend, to look after the museum for him.'

'Has he gone to the seaside?'

Martin laughed, 'does Norwich Cathedral count?'

The boy shook his head.

'Well, I think whales are very interesting. Shall I tell you Hope's story?'

A murmur of agreement rippled through the hall

'Hope was found, stranded on a sand-bank outside of Wexford Harbour on Ireland's East coast. Now this was really unusual, because in those days, whales were hunted; almost to the brink of extinction. Blue Whales are one of the most endangered species on Earth.'

'Why did people want to hurt Hope?'

'That young man is an excellent question. Before electricity, whales were hunted for their blubber which was boiled down to make oils for candles and lamps to provide light. Whale oil burned brightly and without any smoke or odour, unlike fats rendered from other animals.'

'Err, that's horrible.'

'I know and that's not the worst. They used the Baleen, the plates that whales filter their food with, to make corsets and anything that now might be made of steel or plastic. Do you want to know a secret?'

An affirmative echoed.

'Last year I came across a lost treasure chest buried deep in the Museum's basement. When I opened it, I found lots of Hope's Baleen plates tucked away and totally forgotten about. We sent samples to be tested and the analysis, surprised us all. We now have an idea why Hope became beached. You see she'd just had a baby.'

An 'ahhhh,' ran up the staircase and around the gothic arches.

'Weakened from feeding her calf, she was caught in a great storm that ravaged the Irish sea in the days before she beached. We think both these factors exhausted her. Pushed poor Hope beyond her limits.

'Ooooh.'

'Now Hope died, aged only fourteen. But I'll tell you the best part of the story. Blue Whales normally live for a hundred years and their numbers are increasing. Through modern DNA sampling, the Natural History Museum's marine-conservation team think they've found Hope's Grandchild; who has just had her own calf. So, maybe, just maybe; if we can sort climate-change – there's hope for us all.'

500 words