

The Boy and the Otters



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The bus bumped down a winding lane and stopped beside a wide, sparkling river. A boy named Sam pressed his nose to the window. He had short curly black hair and big brown eyes that grew wider and wider. Today his class would visit the river reserve. Sam tugged on his bright yellow rain boots and grabbed his green backpack. "Ready for an adventure?" asked Mrs. Patel, smiling behind her glasses.



Mrs. Patel led the class to the water's edge in her olive-green field jacket and wide sun hat. She held up a clipboard and pointed across the river. "This reserve is a special home for wildlife," she said. "And today, we are going to help it." Sam stood tall in his red T-shirt with the little leaf logo. He could hear water rushing and birds singing. Something splashed far away.



"Look!" whispered Sam. A sleek brown animal slid off the bank and dove into the river. It had glossy fur, a cream belly, and a long flat tail. "That is Splash the otter," said Mrs. Patel. "Otters love clean water. They chase fish, dive, and play all day." Sam watched Splash roll and tumble in the sparkling water. His gap-toothed smile grew big and bright.



Splash wasn't alone. A tiny pup peeked out from behind a rock. It had fluffy grey-brown fur, huge round eyes, and a little pink nose. "That's Pip," said Mrs. Patel softly. Pip wobbled on small paws and stayed close to Splash. "Pups need clean water to grow up strong and healthy." Sam crouched down low and stayed very still. Pip blinked at him and gave a tiny sneeze.



Mrs. Patel handed out gloves and big bags. "Our conservation project today is simple," she said. "We pick up any litter we find near the river." Sam pulled on his gloves and looked around. A plastic bottle lay in the grass. A crumpled wrapper floated near the reeds. "Litter can hurt the otters," said Mrs. Patel. "Let's clean it up together."



Sam and his classmates spread out along the bank. Sam picked up a paper cup, a shiny lid, and an old tin can. His bag grew heavier and heavier. "This is hard work," he said, wiping his forehead. "But it matters," said Mrs. Patel. "Every piece you pick up makes the river a little cleaner for the wildlife." Sam nodded and kept going.



Near the reeds, Sam spotted Splash again. The otter flipped onto its back and floated, balancing a pebble on its tummy. Then it dove deep and came up with a wriggling fish. "Wow!" said Sam. "Otters are so playful!" Mrs. Patel smiled. "Playful and clever," she said. "Clean water gives them fish to eat and room to swim." Sam watched Splash twist and turn like a dancer.



Then Sam noticed something sad. A tangled plastic ring was caught in the reeds right where Pip liked to play. Sam pointed. "Mrs. Patel, look!" he called. "That could hurt the little pup!" Mrs. Patel knelt beside him. "Good eyes, Sam," she said. "Let's get it out carefully. We never grab things in the water alone. We work together."



Sam held the bag open while Mrs. Patel gently pulled the plastic ring free. It came loose with a soft, muddy plop. "Teamwork!" she said. Sam felt proud and a little bit brave. He looked at Pip, who peeked from behind a rock with big round eyes. "It's okay, little one," Sam whispered. Pip wiggled his tiny pink nose and blinked.



After that, Sam picked up more litter than anyone. He found a soggy paper bag, a stray sock, and three bottle caps. His green backpack bumped along as he searched the banks. "You're a great helper," said Mrs. Patel. "Clean waterways support wildlife. When we care for the river, we care for the otters too." Sam stood in his yellow boots and felt warm inside.



At last, the bags were full and the riverbank looked tidy. Splash leaped off the bank and splashed into the clean water. Pip scrambled after him and flopped in with a squeak. Sam laughed out loud. "They look happy!" he said. Mrs. Patel nodded. "Clean water helps wildlife stay happy and healthy," she said. "And you helped make that happen."



Sam sat quietly by the water. Splash swam in happy circles while Pip paddled close behind. The river sparkled in the sunshine. Sam thought about the plastic ring and the litter he had gathered. One small boy could make a big difference. He pulled a little notebook from his backpack and drew a quick picture of the two otters.



"Mrs. Patel," said Sam, "when I grow up, I want to help rivers and wildlife too." Mrs. Patel smiled her warm smile. "You don't have to wait, Sam," she said. "You helped today." Sam looked at his gloves and his full bag of litter. He looked at Pip and Splash diving in the clean water. He felt proud and strong and useful.



On the bus ride home, Sam thought about the otters. He thought about clean water and how everyone needs it. He told his friends, "We should pick up litter every day. Even tiny bits." His friends nodded. "We can help nature everywhere!" said one. Sam smiled his gap-toothed smile. He knew that everyone can help protect nature, one small piece of litter at a time.



That night, Sam set his yellow boots by the door. He hung up his red T-shirt with the little leaf logo. In his notebook, he drew Splash the otter and Pip the pup safe and happy in a sparkling, clean river. He wrote three words under the picture: Keep rivers clean. Sam fell asleep smiling. He could almost hear the otters splashing, diving, and playing in the cool, clean water.



The next morning, Sam told his family all about the otters. "Clean water keeps them happy and healthy," he said. "And we can help." His family listened closely. Together they promised to pick up litter when they saw it. Sam felt proud. He knew that one curious boy, one kind class, and one clean river could make the world a little better for wildlife like Splash and Pip.