

The Boy and the Water Vole



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Sam pulled on his bright yellow rain boots and wiggled his toes. Today was special. He was going to help fix the stream near his house. His green hoodie felt warm and cozy. Mum drove him down the lane. "Have fun, my little helper," she said with a smile. Sam grabbed his canvas backpack and waved goodbye.



At the stream, a tall man in a wide-brimmed sun hat was waiting. "Hello, Sam! I'm Ravi," he said. His olive work jacket had big pockets, and a tool belt hung around his waist. "Welcome to our riverbank project." Sam looked around. The stream gurgled softly, and plants swayed in the breeze. "What are we doing today?" Sam asked.



"We're planting new greenery along the bank," Ravi said. He showed Sam a tray of small green shoots. "These plants will grow thick and strong. They help animals that live here." Sam nodded. He pulled out his notebook and drew a quick sketch of the stream. "What kind of animals?" he asked. Ravi smiled. "You'll see. Let's get to work."



Ravi handed Sam a small trowel. "First, we dig a little hole," he said. Sam pushed the trowel into the soft soil. It smelled earthy and fresh. He placed a plant in the hole and patted the dirt around it. "Good job!" Ravi said. "Now the roots can grow deep." Sam's gap-toothed smile beamed. He dug another hole and another.



As Sam planted, he heard a rustle in the tall grass. He froze. Something small was moving near the water's edge. "Ravi, look!" he whispered. Ravi crouched down beside him. "That's a water vole," he said softly. "Her name is Pip. She lives here on the riverbank." Sam's dark brown eyes grew wide. He had never seen a water vole before.



Pip had glossy chestnut-brown fur and tiny rounded ears. Her long whiskers twitched as she nibbled a green stem. "She's so cute!" Sam breathed. Ravi nodded. "Water voles are shy. They need thick plants to hide in. Without them, they feel scared and exposed." Sam watched Pip dart under a clump of leaves. She disappeared like a little brown shadow.



"Why do they need so many plants?" Sam asked. Ravi pointed to the stream. "Plants give voles food and cover. They also hold the bank together. When it rains, roots keep the soil from washing away." Sam wrote in his notebook: Plants = safe homes. He looked at the bare patches along the bank. "So we're helping Pip?" he asked. "Exactly," Ravi said.



Sam worked hard all morning. He planted rows of green shoots. His yellow boots got muddy, but he didn't mind. Mum arrived with her camera. "Wow, look at all this!" she said. She took a photo of Sam planting. "I saw a water vole!" Sam told her. "Her name is Pip." Mum smiled. "That's wonderful, Sam."



After lunch, Ravi showed Sam a spot where the bank was bare. "This is where we need the most help," he said. "When plants are missing, voles have nowhere to hide." Sam looked at the empty mud. He imagined Pip trying to hide but finding no cover. "Let's plant here first," he said. Ravi nodded. "Good thinking, Sam."



Sam and Ravi planted side by side. Sam's small hands worked quickly. He patted each plant into place. "These will grow tall and thick," Ravi said. "Soon Pip will have a safe path along the whole bank." Sam grinned. He liked the idea of Pip having a secret highway under the leaves. He planted faster, humming a little tune.



Suddenly, Sam spotted Pip again. She peeked out from behind a new plant. Her small dark eyes watched him. Sam held his breath. Pip wiggled her blunt snout and took a nibble of a leaf. Then she scurried along the bank, following the line of fresh plants. "She's using them!" Sam whispered. Ravi nodded. "They're already helping."



Sam felt a warm glow in his chest. "So when we plant greenery, we're protecting Pip and her family?" he asked. "Yes," Ravi said. "Healthy vegetation keeps the water clean and the bank strong. It's like a shield for wildlife." Sam looked at the rows of little plants. They seemed small now, but he knew they would grow. "I want to help more," he said.



Ravi handed Sam a watering can. "Watering helps them settle in," he said. Sam carefully poured water around each plant. The soil turned dark and rich. Mum took another photo. "You're a real riverbank guardian," she said. Sam stood tall. He felt proud. He had made a difference for Pip and all the creatures of the stream.



As the sun began to set, Ravi packed up his tools. "You did great work today, Sam," he said. "Come back anytime. The plants will need checking." Sam nodded eagerly. "I will!" He looked at the stream one last time. He couldn't see Pip, but he knew she was safe among the thick green leaves. That made him happy.



On the way home, Sam chattered about water voles and plants. Mum listened and smiled. "You learned a lot today," she said. Sam nodded. "Plants are like little houses for animals," he said. "And we can help them grow." Mum squeezed his hand. "That's a big idea, Sam." He grinned his gap-toothed grin.



That night, Sam drew a picture of Pip in his notebook. He wrote: Healthy plants = happy voles. He thought about the stream and the little brown vole. He knew he would go back. Caring for plants was like caring for friends. And Sam was proud to be a friend to the riverbank.