

The Boy and the Little Otter



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Sam lived in a small house beside a winding river. Every morning, he pulled on his mustard-yellow rain boots and red hooded jacket. He grabbed his canvas satchel and ran to the water's edge. He loved watching the river wake up. Dragonflies zoomed over the water, and birds sang in the trees. But Sam was waiting for one special friend.



Then, with a splash, the little otter appeared. It had glossy dark-brown fur and a lighter tan belly. Its bright black eyes sparkled, and its long whiskers twitched. The otter swam in little circles, then dove under the water. Sam laughed as its thick tail flipped up like a flag. "Good morning, little otter!" he called.



Sam sat very still on a flat rock. He pulled out his sketchbook and pencils. He drew the otter swimming, fishing, and sliding down the muddy bank. The otter caught a small silver fish and crunched it happily. Sam noticed how clean the water looked and how many fish darted in the shallows. "You need clean water and fish to stay healthy," he whispered.



One day, Sam saw something that worried him. A plastic bag floated near the otter's favorite sliding spot. The otter sniffed it and sneezed. Sam frowned. "That's not good," he said. He watched the otter swim away from the litter. Sam knew that dirty water could make the otter sick. He wanted to help.



Sam decided to learn more. He read books about otters at the library. He learned that otters need clean rivers with plenty of fish. He learned that litter can hurt wildlife. Sam made a list of ways to keep the river healthy. He drew pictures of the otter and wrote facts in his sketchbook. "I can teach others," he thought.



Sam had an idea. He would build a riverside conservation display. He found a flat piece of wood and painted it bright blue. He drew pictures of the otter swimming and fishing. He wrote big, clear facts: "Clean water keeps otters healthy!" and "Pick up litter!" He set up his display near the river path where people walked.



The next morning, a neighbor stopped to look. She was tall and sturdy, with gray-streaked hair in a bun and a wide friendly smile. She wore a green gardening apron and carried a litter-picking stick. "What a wonderful display!" she said. "I didn't know otters lived here. How can I help?" Sam explained his ideas, and she nodded.



The neighbor, Mrs. Green, spread the word. She told her friends and neighbors about Sam's display. Soon, more people came to see it. They read the facts and looked at Sam's drawings. Some people said, "We should pick up litter!" Others said, "Let's keep the river clean!" Sam felt happy. His display was working.



On Saturday, everyone met by the river. Mrs. Green brought extra litter-picking sticks and gloves. Sam wore his red jacket and rain boots. They walked along the bank, picking up plastic bags, cans, and paper. The otter watched from the water, its whiskers twitching. "Look!" cried Sam. "The otter is cheering us on!"



After the cleanup, the river looked much better. The water sparkled in the sun. Sam saw the otter slide down the muddy bank again and again. It caught a fish and ate it on a rock. "You're happy now," said Sam. The otter chirped and dove into the water. Sam knew that clean water made a big difference.



Sam kept adding to his display. He drew a picture of the otter with a fish in its mouth. He wrote: "Healthy rivers help wildlife thrive." More neighbors came to read it. Some brought their children. Mrs. Green said, "Sam, you've started something special." Sam smiled so wide that the gap in his front teeth showed.



One day, a man from the town council visited. He read Sam's display and said, "This is great work. We'll put up more signs about keeping the river clean." Sam felt proud. He knew that his small idea had grown into something big. The otter splashed in the background, as if to say thank you.



Sam continued to watch the otter every day. He noticed that the otter seemed healthier and happier. Its fur was glossy, and it caught fish easily. Sam wrote in his sketchbook: "Otters need clean water and fish. We can help by picking up litter and keeping the river healthy." He drew a picture of the otter smiling.



Mrs. Green organized a river club. They met every month to clean the bank and learn about wildlife. Sam taught the other children how to sketch the otter. They laughed as the otter slid down the muddy bank. "This is the best club ever!" said one girl. Sam agreed. The otter chirped loudly, as if it agreed too.



As the sun set, Sam sat by the river one last time. The otter swam close and looked at him with its bright black eyes. Sam whispered, "We'll keep your home clean, little friend." The otter dove and splashed its tail. Sam knew that healthy rivers help wildlife thrive, and he would always protect this one.



Sam packed up his sketchbook and walked home. His red jacket glowed in the evening light. He felt warm inside. The little otter had taught him something important: even a small boy can make a big difference. And as long as the river ran clean, the otter would keep splashing, and the boy would keep smiling.