

Shayla, a curious young wolfdog/shepherd loved making friends – of all types and sizes. From children to other rescue dogs, horses, even an old tom cat, everyone was her friend.

But one day she met a most unusual friend while exploring at the seashore. The salty mist of a coastal morning clung to Shayla's fur as she walked alone amongst the tide pools, wishing for a companion. Her thick, silver-grey and black coat bristled slightly in the salt air, and her keen, amber eyes scanned the horizon with the alert focus of her breed.

She spied something bobbing in the surf. Floating on its back, a young sea otter was busy at work. It used a flat stone balanced on its belly to crack open a stubborn clam. Shayla froze, expecting the creature to dive, but the otter simply paused, blinking its dark, bead-like eyes at her. With a flick of its tail, it paddled closer to the rock where Shayla sat.

"Well, hello there, who are you?" Shayla whispered, keeping her movements slow.

The young otter gave a sharp, high-pitched whistle. He tucked his stone "tool" into a specialized pouch of skin under his arm—like a furry pocket—and executed a playful barrel roll. When the otter resurfaced, he held a tangled strand of bull kelp, extending it toward the pup as if offering a prized gift. "I'm Oliver the otter, who are you?" he asked.

"I'm Shayla" the pup answered, tail wagging. "Pleased to meet you. What do you have there?"

Oliver's tiny paws were clutching shiny shells and smooth sea glass to bring back to his kelp bed. He floated on his back and held up a particularly bright blue pebble. "It's a treasure! I collect them. But my kelp bed is getting so full, there's hardly room for my family anymore," he admitted with a sigh.

Seeing her new friend so sad, Shayla had an idea. "I'm great at finding spots for things! I'll help you." Together, they started their adventure. Shayla used her nose to sniff out a perfect, hidden tidal nook where Oliver could safely store his overflow of sea treasures.

But it was not easy for Oliver to give up all his treasures. No sooner had he stored a couple of his special finds – a sunflower floating in the water, a colorful pair of swim trunks -- he spotted a "mega-treasure"—a brilliant, sea-polished brass compass stuck deep in a crevice of the reef.

He dove to retrieve it but as he resurfaced, a large, territorial stray dog with a jagged ear—a local bully known as Barnaby—had spotted him from the cliffs.