

JOHN SMITH

From the book, "*Historical Plays for Children*"

By Grace E. Bird and Maud Starling

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CHARACTERS:

- John Smith
- Henry
- Martin
- William
- George
- Sailors
- Two Indian Braves
- Two Indian Squaws
- Powhatan
- Pocahontas
- Other Indians

SCENE I

Shipboard, near the Coast of England

(John Smith is studying a chart. The sailors are mending ropes.)

WILLIAM: For six long weeks the wind has blown a gale straight toward the land, and the shores of England seem to grow plainer rather than dimmer.

HENRY: Yes, I am tired of this voyage. We are wasting our time. There is nothing to be gained by cruising round in one spot forever.

GEORGE: We are making no progress, and at this rate we never shall.

MARTIN: *(Throwing down his cap.)* Then let us turn back.

WILLIAM: We may as well, unless we lose sight of land soon. Every morning we can see the same line of shore on the horizon, and--

SMITH: *(Looking through a spyglass.)* The weather will change tonight. Then the ship will fly along like a bird before a hurricane.

HENRY: *(Laughing.)* He says that every day. It is merely a habit, and means nothing.

SMITH: I shall not need to repeat it this time. Every indication shows that the wind will change before dawn.

GEORGE: What shall we do to pass away the time? There is no amusement that we have not tried. O dear! (*Yawning.*) Every day seems a week long.

WILLIAM: (*Pointing to a box.*) Let us open that box. It is the only thing on board that we have not examined.

SMITH: King James forbade us to look into it until we reach America. To disregard his orders would be a serious offense. (*Smith goes out.*)

HENRY: It contains the names of those who are to govern the colony. If we knew who they are, we should at least have something to talk about.

WILLIAM: Someone told me that John Smith is going to murder all those whose names appear on the list with his, and make himself sole governor.

MARTIN: Perhaps he will kill some of us, too; but that would be better than dying of weariness. (*All yawn.*)

HENRY: Smith is a queer man. No one seems to know much about his past.

GEORGE: Where did he live before he came to England?

WILLIAM: It is said that he was a soldier in France, where he rose to be captain. Then the Turks took him prisoner and put a heavy iron ring around his neck, but he escaped. He has had many strange adventures for a man only twenty-eight years of age.

HENRY: I believe that he is a dangerous person, and I am not alone in my opinion.

MARTIN: That is true. Everybody is suspicious of him. I really think that something ought to be done.

GEORGE: Then let us ask the captain to lock him up until we reach land. We shall feel safer.

WILLIAMS: Let us do so at once. If you will all come with me, I will try to convince the captain that this should be done. (*They all go out.*)

SCENE II

Virginia

WILLIAM: What a beautiful country this is! It is much better than I expected. (*He points to the surroundings.*)

HENRY: The air is so warm and the sky is so blue that it seems like paradise, after the perils of the ocean.

GEORGE: How large the trees are! Those big oaks must have been growing for a great many years.

MARTIN: Look at the green hills and the broad meadows! All this certainly repays us for the hardships and dangers of the voyage.

GEORGE: (*Picking strawberries.*) See the big strawberries I have found! There are thousands of them here.

HENRY: (*Examining and tasting them.*) They are as large as those in England and as sweet as honey.

MARTIN: This afternoon I found some fine oysters on the shore. They were delicious, and in one of them I spied this beautiful pearl. (*He shows pearl.*)

HENRY: You can have that set in a ring to send home to your wife. It must be valuable. It is so large and white.

(*William nods assent.*)

WILLIAM: I think we shall have plenty of good things to eat in this new land. All kinds of food seem to grow here in abundance.

MARTIN: Indeed, I hope so. I am nearly starved after our long voyage and unsavory ship food.

(*Enter John Smith, with a box in his hand.*)

SMITH: It is now time to open the sealed box, and to find out who are to be the governors of the colony.

WILLIAM: (*Aside.*) We all know who is anxious to rule over us. I do not wonder what he is in a hurry to open the box.

HENRY: It is not hard to guess who has been chosen first by the king. That was all arranged before we left England.

(*They give each other knowing looks.*)

GEORGE: Perhaps there will be less dissatisfaction when the decision is announced.

SMITH: (*Opening the box.*) Silence, my men! (*He takes out a paper.*) Here is the list. I am appointed one of your seven governors.

(*They sneer and assume expressions of disgust.*)

GEORGE: Well, what do you want us to do? Bow down to you as if you were a king?

SMITH: No, I demand nothing unreasonable; but we must all work hard to establish a colony, to show our appreciation of King James's kindness to us.

HENRY: But we are gentlemen. We do not know how to work. Gentlemen in England never work. We have never been taught anything so degrading.

SMITH: Then you must learn.

MARTIN: Learn to work! Ha, ha! That is a good joke.

(They all laugh in derision.)

WILLIAM: The man must be crazy.

(They all go out, laughing, followed by Smith, who is scowling and reading the list again.)

SCENE III

The Forest

FIRST BRAVE: What shall we do with him?

FIRST SQUAW: *(Sharpening her knife on her moccasin.)* Torture him! Torture him!

SECOND BRAVE: No, make him help us fight the white men. Then we may have some more prisoners to torture.

SMITH: *(Aside.)* I will surprise them with something they have never seen before. *(He shows the Indians his compass. They crowd around. He turns the needle. All watch the point return to the north. They exchange looks of surprise, grunt, and point toward the north.)*

SECOND BRAVE: *(To First Brave.)* I should like to try it. *(He takes the compass, but drops it in fright.)*

SECOND SQUAW: *(Shuddering.)* Wonderful! It has magic power.

FIRST BRAVE: *(Reaching for his tomahawk.)* The man is bewitched. Let us kill him! He will do us harm.

SECOND BRAVE: No, let us take him to Powhatan, our chief. If we try to kill him, we may fall dead ourselves.

FIRST SQUAW: Let us hurry. I feel queer already. *(She shrugs her shoulders.)*

FIRST BRAVE: Powhatan will soon kill him.

SMITH: *(Aside.)* I shall show no fear either of them or of their chief.

(They bind their hands and lead him away.)

SCENE IV

A Wigwam

(Indians speak in their own language, which Smith does not understand.)

POWHATAN: Who is this paleface that you have brought to me?

FIRST BRAVE: I believe he is the chief of the white men, and I know he is bewitched.

POWHATAN: Where did you find him?

SECOND BRAVE: In the forest. We would have killed him then and there, but we were afraid.

FIRST BRAVE: When you do kill him, let me strike the first blow. *(He feels the edge of his tomahawk.)* My tomahawk is just sharpened, and I should like to try it.

POWHATAN: Be quiet! Give him a chance to speak. He cannot harm you so long as I am here to protect you.

(Smith shows the compass to Powhatan, who looks startled. Smith then, by pantomime, indicates that he wishes to buy corn, by taking a few grains of corn from his pocket, showing a bag and then offering some beads to the chief.)

POWHATAN: *(Shaking his head and speaking to Indians.)* We have no corn to sell to palefaces.

(Smith looks angry and tries to free himself.)

POWHATAN: *(To Braves.)* Ha, ha! He cannot get away from us so easily. We will teach our enemies a lesson.

(Smith, by pantomime, indicates that, if his friends hear of this, they will shoot the Indians. He motions towards the English settlement, points a finger at the Indians, and imitates the pulling of a trigger.)

FIRST BRAVE: The white man is getting excited.

POWHATAN: *(To Braves.)* On one condition will we allow him to live. He must join our tribe, marry a squaw, and show us how to attack the fort of the white men. *(Powhatan points to Smith, then to the tribe; he motions to a squaw to step forward, and points to her. He then brandishes a war club in the direction of the English settlement. Smith shakes his head stubbornly.)*

POWHATAN: *(To Braves.)* Then he must die. Get ready to kill him.

(Indians exhibit scalping knives, tomahawks, and war clubs.)

FIRST and SECOND BRAVES: We will bind him. *(They fetch ropes and bind his feet.)*

POWHATAN: *(To First Brave.)* Place his head upon that flat stone.

FIRST BRAVE: Everything is ready.

(They place John Smith's head upon the stone and raise the clubs to strike.)

POWHATAN: Now strike to kill. We will not waste time torturing him. He is not worth the trouble.

POCAHONTAS: (*Rushing in and throwing herself beside Smith.*) He is a brave man. Save him! I cannot bear to see him die.

POWHATAN: My child, this is no place for you. Go away.

POCAHONTAS: If you kill him, you will have to kill me. Spare him, I beg you.

POWHATAN: Pocahontas, you have saved his life, (*Aside*). I cannot refuse the child anything.

POCAHONTAS: (*Standing up.*) I thank you, Father. I knew that you would be merciful.

FIRST BRAVE: (*To Powhatan.*) What will you do with him? It is not safe to set him free. (*Aside.*) I wish Pocahontas would keep out of such affairs.

POWHATAN: Untie the cords that bind him. He shall make hatchets for me, and bells and beads for my daughter.

(*They unbind Smith.*)

SMITH: (*Aside.*) Heaven bless the child! How can I thank her for saving my life? (*He kisses her hand.*)

POWHATAN: Come, all of you. Bring the prisoner, little daughter, and we will have a feast.

(*They all go out, Pocahontas leading John Smith by the hand.*)

CURTAIN