

The Tempest Summary

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Summary

The Storm and the Shipwreck: A terrible storm rages at sea. A ship sails from the coast of Africa toward Italy. On board are King Alonso of Naples, his son Ferdinand, his brother Sebastian, the Duke Antonio, and the wise old Gonzalo. They are returning home from the wedding of Alonso's daughter Claribel, who has married the King of Tunis in North Africa.

The storm is violent and frightening. Sailors shout and try to save the ship. The nobles shout orders, but only make things worse. The boatswain angrily tells them to stay below. He says that their royal power means nothing in front of nature. Waves strike the ship again and again. The passengers fear they will die. Finally, the ship appears to break apart. Everyone cries out as thunder and lightning fill the sky.

Prospero and Miranda on the Island: On a lonely island nearby, Prospero, the true Duke of Milan, and his daughter Miranda watch the storm. Miranda feels pity for the drowning men. She asks her father to calm the sea. Prospero tells her not to worry. No one will die.

Then he begins to tell her their story. Twelve years earlier, Prospero was Duke of Milan. He loved studying and magic more than politics. He trusted his brother, Antonio, to rule in his place. But Antonio betrayed him. With the help of King Alonso of Naples, Antonio seized the dukedom and sent Prospero and Miranda away. They were placed in an old boat and left to die at sea.

They survived only because Gonzalo, a kind courtier, secretly gave them food, clothes, and Prospero's precious books. The sea carried them to this island, where they have lived ever since. Now Prospero's enemies are near again. The storm, he tells Miranda, was his own doing.

The Spirit Ariel and the Slave Caliban: When Miranda falls asleep, Prospero calls for Ariel, a spirit of the air. Ariel reports that he created the storm exactly as ordered. He made sure everyone survived, though scattered across the island. The sailors are asleep on the ship, which lies safe in a hidden harbor.

Ariel reminds Prospero of his promise to give him freedom. Prospero grows stern and recalls Ariel's past. He reminds him that he was once trapped by the witch Sycorax in a tree until

Prospero freed him. Ariel apologizes and agrees to serve faithfully until his release.

Then Prospero calls Caliban, the island's native and son of Sycorax. Caliban curses Prospero for taking his mother's island. He says the island is his by right. Prospero calls him a liar and reminds him that he tried to harm Miranda. Caliban's hatred is clear. Prospero orders him to bring firewood, and Caliban obeys unwillingly.

Ferdinand and Miranda Meet: Meanwhile, Ariel leads Ferdinand, Alonso's son, toward Prospero's cave with a magical song. The song tells of Ferdinand's father's supposed death. Ferdinand believes he is alone in the world.

When he meets Miranda, both are amazed. Miranda has never seen another man except her father. Ferdinand thinks she is a goddess. They fall in love at first sight. Prospero secretly wants this to happen, but he pretends to be angry. He accuses Ferdinand of coming to take the island. He puts a spell on him and makes him a prisoner. Miranda begs her father to be kind, but Prospero remains firm. He wants to test Ferdinand's love and patience.

The Survivors on the Island: In another part of the island, King Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, and Gonzalo are safe but sad. Alonso believes that his son Ferdinand drowned. Gonzalo tries to cheer him. He says they should thank heaven for being alive.

The others mock Gonzalo's optimism. He then imagines an ideal world where there are no kings, no servants, no rich or poor, and everyone lives in peace. Antonio and Sebastian laugh at him.

When the group becomes tired, Ariel puts them all to sleep—except Antonio and Sebastian. Antonio whispers evil thoughts. He says that since Ferdinand is dead and Claribel lives far away in Africa, Sebastian could become king of Naples. Antonio tempts him to murder Alonso that night. Sebastian agrees. They draw their swords, but Ariel wakes Alonso and Gonzalo in time. The villains hide their crime by saying they heard wild beasts and were defending the king.

The Comic Plot of Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo: Elsewhere, Caliban complains bitterly about Prospero's spirits that sting him. He hides under his cloak when he hears thunder. Soon, Trinculo, the king's jester, wanders by and sees Caliban. He thinks Caliban is some strange fish. To escape the storm, Trinculo hides under Caliban's cloak.

Then Stephano, the king's drunken butler, appears with a bottle of wine. He thinks he has found a four-legged monster. He pours wine into Caliban's mouth. Caliban feels comforted and believes Stephano must be a god. When Trinculo speaks, Stephano thinks the monster can talk from both ends. After much confusion, all three realize who they are. They rejoice that they

have survived the shipwreck.

Caliban swears to serve Stephano as his new master. He promises to show him the island and even help him kill Prospero. Stephano, drunk with power, dreams of marrying Miranda and becoming king of the island. Their foolish alliance begins with laughter and songs as Ariel watches invisibly.

Ferdinand's Labor and Love: Ferdinand now works as Prospero's servant, carrying heavy logs. He does this without complaint because Miranda comes to visit him. They talk sweetly and promise marriage. Miranda offers to carry logs herself, but Ferdinand refuses. Prospero watches secretly. He is pleased that their love is pure and patient. He plans to bless their union soon.

Through their honest love, Shakespeare contrasts innocence and harmony with the ambition and deceit of the nobles.

Temptation and Repentance of the Nobles: The king's group keeps wandering. Alonso mourns deeply. Antonio and Sebastian again whisper about killing him. Suddenly, solemn music fills the air. Strange spirits bring in a grand banquet. The hungry men marvel at the sight. But when they reach for food, lightning flashes, and Ariel appears as a harpy, a winged creature of vengeance.

Ariel rebukes them for their sin against Prospero. He reminds them how they drove him and his child into the sea. He says the storm was punishment for that crime. Alonso feels guilty and repents. Antonio and Sebastian, however, are unmoved. Prospero, watching unseen, feels satisfied. His enemies are now trapped in guilt and confusion.

The Masque and Prospero's Realization: Back at his cave, Prospero blesses Ferdinand and Miranda's engagement. To celebrate, he calls Ariel to summon spirits for a masque, a magical performance of music and dance. Spirits appear as goddesses who bless the couple with love, peace, and harvest.

But suddenly, Prospero stops the show. He remembers Caliban's plot to kill him. The spirits vanish. Prospero turns thoughtful and speaks one of his most famous lines:

"Our revels now are ended. These our actors... were all spirits and are melted into air."

He reflects that all life is like a dream that will fade away. His words reveal his growing awareness of time, age, and mortality. Ariel then reports that Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo are wandering near, soaked with mud. Prospero plans to punish them with a clever trick.

Caliban's Failed Rebellion: Ariel hangs bright, glittering clothes outside Prospero's cell. When Caliban and his drunken companions arrive, they argue and complain. Caliban urges them to kill Prospero first, but Stephano and Trinculo are distracted by the shiny garments. They put on the clothes and act like kings.

Caliban shouts in anger, but it is too late. Prospero sends spirits in the shapes of dogs and hounds to chase and bite them. The three fools run screaming across the island. Caliban's dream of freedom ends in shame and fear. Prospero realizes that even this savage creature cannot escape greed and foolishness.

Forgiveness and Reunion: Now Prospero feels that his plan is complete. Ariel tells him that Alonso, Gonzalo, Antonio, and Sebastian are all trapped and sorrowful. Ariel, though only a spirit, pities them. His compassion touches Prospero's heart. He decides to forgive instead of taking revenge.

Prospero puts on his old ducal robe. He breaks the magic circle and summons the nobles. Ariel leads them in, still under a light spell. Prospero thanks Ariel for his faithful service and promises him freedom soon.

Prospero then addresses each of the men. He forgives Alonso and blesses him for his repentance. He forgives Antonio, too, though Antonio says nothing. Prospero also knows about their plan to murder Alonso, but he keeps it secret to save them from shame. He promises that all shall be restored.

When Alonso grieves again for his son, Prospero tells him there is hope. He opens the door to his cell and reveals Ferdinand and Miranda, happily playing chess. The reunion fills everyone with joy. Alonso embraces his son and accepts Miranda as his daughter.

Miranda looks in wonder at the crowd and exclaims, "O brave new world that has such people in't!" Prospero answers gently, "'Tis new to thee." Her words express innocence and hope; his answer carries wisdom and calm.

Freedom, Return, and Epilogue: Finally, Ariel brings back the boatswain and sailors. They are amazed to find the ship repaired and ready to sail. It is as if no storm ever happened. Prospero also brings Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo, still wearing stolen clothes. The nobles laugh at them. Caliban feels ashamed. He realizes his mistake in worshipping a drunken fool. He says, "I'll be wise hereafter and seek for grace." Prospero forgives him, too.

Prospero invites everyone to rest in his cell for the night. Tomorrow, they will sail to Naples, where Ferdinand and Miranda's wedding will take place. Then Prospero will return to Milan to

rule again. He declares that his only remaining thought will be of his grave—meaning he is ready for peace and old age.

Before leaving, Prospero sets Ariel free. The spirit sings joyfully and disappears into the air. Prospero breaks his magic staff and throws his book into the sea. His extended use of magic is over.

In the final epilogue, Prospero stands alone and speaks to the audience. He says his magic is gone, and he depends now on their kindness. He asks the audience to clap their hands and “set him free.” His words echo the play’s theme of release and forgiveness.

LxNotes