

## The Tempest - the story

### Act 1

The play starts with a storm at sea which wrecks a ship carrying **Alonso**, the King of Naples, his brother **Sebastian** and Alonso's son, **Ferdinand**, who are returning from a family wedding in Tunisia. With them are **Antonio**, Duke of Milan, who usurped the Dukedom from his brother **Prospero**, and three noblemen, **Gonzalo**, **Adrian** and **Francisco** as well as various other servants. They all imagine they are about to die.

Scene Two opens on an island inhabited only by Prospero and his daughter **Miranda** along with several spirits. Miranda suspects her father has conjured the storm which caused the shipwreck but he assures her that no-one has been harmed and removes his cloak which seems to have been instrumental in helping his magical powers. He says he will tell her the story of how they came to be on the island. Twelve years ago (when Miranda was three) Prospero was Duke of Milan but he left the governing of his state to his brother Antonio because he wanted to study his secret books - presumably books of sorcery and magic. Unfortunately, Antonio rather liked being in charge and persuaded Alonso, the King of Naples, that Prospero was unfit to rule. Alonso conferred the Dukedom of Milan on Antonio and agreed that Prospero must be 'got rid of.'

Antonio didn't dare kill Prospero and his daughter because the people loved them so he had them set adrift in a rotten boat with no mast or sail and no food, assuming they would drown. Gonzalo, though, who had been appointed to carry out the task, felt sorry for them and provided them with food and clothes and gave Prospero his books which he prized 'above my dukedom.' Luckily they were washed ashore on this island.

Prospero admits to having conjured the storm which 'hath mine enemies brought to this shore' and he presumably has something in mind for them, though he doesn't tell Miranda what it is and makes her fall asleep.

Prospero calls his spirit **Ariel** who has engineered the storm at his master's request. The ship is safe and all the sailors asleep under the hatches, whilst those whom Prospero wanted ashore have all safely landed on the island. Ferdinand is alone, Alonso and all the other noblemen are together and Stefano, Alonso's drunken butler and **Trinculo**, his jester have been washed ashore on a different part of the island.

Ariel asks Prospero to remember his promise to free him from slavery but Prospero says the time is not quite right and there is more work to be done. He goes on to remind Ariel of the torment he freed him from and again we hear a story from the past. Sycorax, a witch, was banished from her home in Algiers with her child and was left on this island. She enslaved the delicate spirit Ariel and when he would not obey her commands, imprisoned him in a pine tree, where he groaned in agony for twelve years until Prospero rescued him. The witch's son **Caliban**, a monster, is now Prospero's servant. Prospero promises to give Ariel his freedom in two days time if he stops moaning and Ariel agrees. Prospero then orders Ariel to become invisible to every eye but his own and sends him on a secret errand.

Prospero wakes Miranda and shouts for Caliban, calling him a 'poisonous slave' among other insults. Caliban's responses are equally unpleasant and he obviously hates both Prospero and Miranda. Part of Caliban's resentment lies in the fact that he thinks he is the rightful owner of the island and that Prospero has taken it from him. At first, Prospero had treated him well and taught him the names of things, taking him into his home and treating him almost like a son. This continued until Caliban tried to rape Miranda. Miranda, too had been kind to him and taught him to speak, but after the attempted rape, Prospero had made him his slave. He keeps him in check by tormenting him with supernatural cramps and stinging pinches. He sends him to fetch firewood.

Ariel, now invisible, leads Ferdinand in by singing. Ferdinand is mourning what he thinks is the death of his father. Prospero stands to one side as Ferdinand sees Miranda. He thinks she is a goddess till he hears her speak. She falls in love with him immediately. Prospero is unpleasant to him, accusing him of being a spy. He wants to see if his love for Miranda is true so he threatens Ferdinand with imprisonment with little food. Ferdinand accepts this as long as he can see Miranda from his prison. She tries to speak up for Ferdinand but Prospero affects not to listen. They leave.

Whilst this end bit moves the plot on somewhat, most of Act 1 is concerned with telling the audience what has happened in the past and introducing all the major characters, both human and non-human.

## Act 2

On another part of the island we see the group of noblemen on whom Prospero wants to wreak revenge for the past wrong-doings we heard about in Act 1. Gonzalo is trying to comfort Alonso who fears his son is dead. Antonio and Sebastian are busily making fun of everyone and seem an unpleasant pair. Alonso says he will not be comforted - he has lost both his son and his daughter. (He is returning from his daughter's wedding in Tunisia and will probably never see her again.)

Gonzalo starts to muse about how he would govern the island if he were the king. He paints a picture of paradise - no poverty, no work, no weapons, nothing unnatural. He sounds like a man who is fed up with the plotting, the unfairness and the nastiness of life at the time. Of course, Antonio and Sebastian are scathing about this and accuse him of prattling about nothing.

Ariel enters, still invisible, playing soothing music which sends Alonso, Gonzalo, Adrian and Francisco to sleep. Left alone together, Antonio starts to persuade Sebastian to do what he, himself, did many years ago - kill his brother and take over his kingdom. With Alonso dead, Ferdinand presumably dead and Alonso's daughter out of the way in Tunisia, nothing would stand between Sebastian and the throne of Naples. They agree that Antonio will kill Alonso and Sebastian will kill Gonzalo. They draw their swords but just as they are about to strike, Ariel re-enters and wakes the sleepers. The two conspirators claim they heard strange noises and the others accept this and move off to search for Ferdinand, in the hope he is still alive.

Caliban has been collecting firewood as ordered by Prospero. He is wearing a huge coat and is busily cursing Prospero when he hears a noise. He thinks it is a spirit come to torment him so falls flat hoping he won't be noticed. It is, in fact, Trinculo who is wandering round the island and has noticed another storm brewing. There is nowhere to shelter so he dives under Caliban's coat.

At this point, Stefano appears, roaring drunk and still drinking from one of many bottles of wine that were washed ashore from the shipwreck. Stefano hears Caliban begging Trinculo not to torment him and assumes that a four-legged monster lurks under the coat. To tame it, he starts to pour wine into its mouth.

Eventually he realises Trinculo is there and the two are pleased to see each other. Caliban adores the wine and assumes Stefano must be a god so kneels to him. He promises Stefano to show him all the beauties of the island. Stefano is flattered by this and the three of them leave - Stefano and Caliban both drunk.

## Act 3

Ferdinand and Miranda are alone but watched from a distance by Prospero. Ferdinand has been made to move thousands of logs. When Miranda offers to help him he refuses to let her work. Prospero approves of this and the love scene which follows proves to him how much they care for each other.

Caliban and Stefano are drunkenly staggering across the island while Trinculo follows, poking fun at Caliban. Ariel enters and listens while Caliban explains about the 'tyrant' Prospero and offers to lead the other two to him while he sleeps so they can kill him and Stefano can become king of the island. He also mentions the beautiful daughter who Stefano could then marry. Ariel vanishes to tell Prospero, playing a tune on the way which prompts the three to follow.

Alonso and Gonzalo are weary from their search for Ferdinand. Having failed once, Antonio and Sebastian think it will be easy to kill them that night. Prospero enters, having made himself invisible and several spirits enter carrying a table laden with sumptuous food. As the nobles prepare to eat, Ariel descends 'like a harpy, claps his wings upon the table, and, with a quaint device, the banquet vanishes.' Ariel addresses Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian telling them he will turn them mad for what they did to Prospero so many years ago and then vanishes in a clap of thunder. Prospero, too, leaves to see how Ferdinand and Miranda are getting on.

Alonso is distraught, imagining that Ferdinand has been drowned as a punishment for his part in the banishment of Prospero. He leaves, threatening to kill himself. Antonio and Sebastian leave vowing to fight these strange spirits and the others follow.

## Act 4

Prospero explains to Ferdinand why he gave him such hard tasks and says he has proved himself and can marry Miranda but on no account must he sleep with her before the wedding. He orders Ariel to provide a show of goddesses to bless the couple and they sit and watch as Iris, Ceres, Juno and various nymphs per-

form for them. Prospero then remembers the other matters he has to take care of and sends Ferdinand and Miranda to his cell (home- perhaps a cave.)

Ariel tells his master that he left Caliban, Stefano and Trinculo dancing drunkenly in a filthy pool nearby. They set a trap for them, hanging lots of cheap and worthless but colourful baubles and clothes on a tree outside Prospero's cell. Caliban leads them to the cell where they intend to kill Prospero but Stefano and Trinculo are diverted by the sight of the 'goodies'. They load them all up on Caliban, deciding to hide them safely before killing Prospero but at this moment Prospero sets spirits disguised as dogs on them and they run away pursued by the 'dogs.'

## **Act 5**

Ariel has confined the nobles to a lime-grove close to Prospero's cell. Prospero, in his magic robes, draws a circle in the ground, casts a spell and promises that once his work is done he will break his magic staff and throw his books in the sea. Ariel brings the nobles, still under a spell, into the circle. As the spell begins to weaken its hold, Prospero speaks to them in turn, pointing out what they have done and forgiving Antonio and Sebastian. He then dresses himself in the robes of the Duke of Milan and sends Ariel to bring the master and boatswain from the ship. He embraces Alonso who begs forgiveness and Gonzalo. He then turns to Antonio and Sebastian, ensuring that they do no further wrong by saying he will keep quiet about their plot to kill Alonso - for the time being. Antonio is forced to return the dukedom to Prospero.

Prospero invites Alonso to admire his cell and there Alonso discovers Ferdinand and Miranda playing chess. An emotional reunion follows and Miranda is struck by all these people - so far she has only ever seen her father and Ferdinand. 'How beauteous mankind is!' she exclaims, which shows us how much she has to learn.

Ariel leads in the ship's master and boatswain and Alonso begins to suspect that not all that has happened is natural. Prospero says he will explain everything later. Ariel's penultimate duty is to undo the spell on Caliban, Stefano and Trinculo and bring them to his cell. They are sent to tidy the cell and return the stolen goods. Prospero invites them all to stay the night before returning and promises they will all return together safely on calm seas. This will be Ariel's last duty, ensuring good weather, then he will be free.

In his epilogue, Prospero says that the applause of the audience will determine whether he will return to Milan or remain on the island. Shakespeare must have been sure of the response!