

PLOT SYNOPSIS

The play opens with a violent storm at sea. A ship carrying Alonso, the Ruler of Naples and their son Ferdinand, is tossed about by the waves until it sinks. The passengers and crew are washed up on a desert island. However, the storm was an illusion conjured by Prospero, the exiled ruler of Milan, who now lives on the island with their daughter Miranda.

Prospero explains to Miranda how they came to be there. 14 years earlier, Antonio (Prospero's younger sibling), with Alonso's support, usurped Prospero's position as Ruler of Milan. Prospero, more devoted to study and secret knowledge than to politics, failed to guard against betrayal. Cast adrift with Miranda in a small boat, they were rescued by provisions secretly given to them by Gonzalo, a loyal friend, and eventually they found refuge on the island.

Since then, Prospero has used their knowledge and power to master the island's magic. They have enslaved the spirit Ariel, after freeing them from a torment imposed by the witch Sycorax, the island's former ruler. Sycorax's son, a "monster" named Caliban, is also Prospero's slave. He resents Prospero's dominance, believing the island to be rightfully his.

With their enemies now shipwrecked, Prospero orchestrates events to exact revenge on them. Ariel separates the survivors and guides them with music and illusions to different parts of the island. Ferdinand is led to Miranda and the two fall in love at first sight. Though Prospero secretly approves, they test Ferdinand with hard labour to ensure his love is sincere.

Alonso is leading the rest of the survivors in search of their son Ferdinand, though they believe he is probably drowned. With him are his younger sibling Sebastian, Prospero's sibling Antonio (now Ruler of Milan) and Prospero's friend Gonzalo. Antonio schemes with Sebastian to murder Alonso and Gonzalo whilst they sleep and take the throne of Naples for themselves. Ariel overhears their plot and wakes Alonso and Gonzalo, thus preventing their murder.

Elsewhere on the island, Caliban encounters two comic figures from the ship, Stephano and Trinculo. Stephano gives Caliban his first taste of alcohol and its effect makes Caliban believe Stephano is a god. Caliban plots with them to murder Prospero and seize the island.

Seeing that Miranda and Ferdinand's love is true, Prospero releases Ferdinand from bondage and agrees to their marriage. He conjures spirits to celebrate their betrothal.

Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo, now very drunk, are thwarted in their attempt to kill Prospero, who conjures magical creatures to chase them away.

Ariel captures Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian and uses magic to torment them for their part in Prospero's overthrow. They are driven mad and put into a trance.

At last, Prospero has everyone under their power. They confront Alonso, who is grief-stricken, believing Ferdinand drowned, and repentant for aiding Antonio's usurpation. Instead of taking revenge, Prospero forgives Alonso and reveals Ferdinand is alive and betrothed to Miranda. Prospero forgives Antonio for betraying him; however, Antonio remains unrepentant.

Having achieved justice without revenge, Prospero chooses to abandon magic. They break their staff and vow to drown their book, renouncing the art that gave them control but isolated them from humanity. Ariel, finally freed, rejoices in their new-found liberty. Caliban, chastened, recognises his own folly in following Stephano and Trinculo.

The ship, miraculously restored, is made ready for the voyage back to Italy. The play ends with Prospero addressing the audience directly, asking for freedom.