

Excerpt from *A Tempest* by Aimé Césaire

(Enter Ariel.)

PROSPERO

Well, Ariel?

ARIEL

Mission accomplished.

PROSPERO

Bravo; good work! But what seems to be the matter? I give you a compliment and you don't seem pleased? Are you tired?

ARIEL

Not tired; disgusted. I obeyed you but why not come out with it? I did so most unwillingly. It was a real pity to see that great ship go down, so full of life.

PROSPERO

Oh, so you're upset, are you! It's always like that with intellectuals! So be it! What interests me is not your moods, but your deeds. Let's split: I'll take the zeal and you can keep your doubts. Agreed?

ARIEL

Master, I must beg you to spare me this kind of labor.

PROSPERO

(shouting) Listen, and listen well! I've got a job to do, and I don't care how it gets done!

ARIEL

You've promised me my freedom a thousand times, and I'm still waiting.

PROSPERO

Ingrate! And who freed you from Sycorax, may I ask? Who rent the pine in which you had been imprisoned and brought you forth?

ARIEL

Sometimes I almost regret it After all, I might have turned into a real tree in the end Tree: there's a word that really gives me a thrill. I think about it a lot: palm tree -- long, high fuse topped with nonchalant, squid-like elegance. Baobab -- like the soft entrails of some monster creature. Ask the calao bird that lives a cloistered season in its branches. Or the ceiba tree -- spread out beneath the proud sun. O bird, o green mansions set in the living earth!

PROSPERO

Stuff it! I don't like talking trees. As for your freedom, you'll have it when I'm good and ready. In the meanwhile, look after the ship. I'm going to have a few words with Master Caliban. I've been keeping my eye on him, and he's getting a little too emancipated. *(Calling.)* Caliban! Caliban! *(He sighs.)*

(Enter Caliban.)

CALIBAN

Uhuru!

PROSPERO

What did you say?

CALIBAN

I said, Uhuru!

PROSPERO

Back to your native language again. I've already told you, I don't like it. You could be polite, at least; a simple "hello" wouldn't kill you.

CALIBAN

Oh, I forgot... But as froggy, waspish, pustular and dung-filled a "hello" as possible. May today hasten by a decade the day

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when all the birds of the sky and beasts of the earth will feast upon your corpse!

PROSPERO

Gracious as always, you ugly ape! How can anyone *be* so ugly?

CALIBAN

You think I'm ugly well, I don't think you're handsome either. With that big hooked nose, you look just like some old vulture. *(Laughing)* An old vulture with a scrawny neck!

PROSPERO

Since you're so fond of invective, you could at least thank me for having taught you to speak at all. You savage . . . a dumb animal, a beast I educated, trained, dragged up from the bestiality that still sticks out all over you!

CALIBAN

In the first place, that's not true. You didn't teach me a thing! Except to jabber in your own language so that I could understand your orders chop the wood, wash the dishes, fish for food, plant vegetables, all because you're too lazy to do it yourself. And as for your learning, did you ever impart any of *that* to me? No, you took care not to. All your science and know-how you keep for yourself alone, shut up in big books like those.

PROSPERO

What would you be without me?

CALIBAN

Without you? I'd be the king, that's what I'd be, the King of the Island. The king of the island I inherited from my mother, Sycorax.

PROSPERO

There are some family trees it's better not to climb! She's a ghou! A witch from whom and may God be praised death has delivered us.

CALIBAN

Dead or alive, she was my mother, and I won't deny her! Anyhow, you only think she'd dead because you think the earth itself is dead It's so much simpler that way! Dead, you can walk on it, pollute it, you can tread upon it with the steps of a conqueror. I respect the earth, because I know that it is alive, and I know that Sycorax is alive. Sycorax. Mother.

Serpent, rain, lightning.

And I see thee everywhere!

In the eye of the stagnant pool into which I gaze unflinching, through the rushes,

in the gesture made by twisted root and its awaiting thrust.

In the night, the all-seeing blinded night, the nostril-less all-smelling night!

Often, in my dreams, she speaks to me and warns me

Yesterday, even, when I was lying by the stream on my belly lapping at the muddy water, when the Beast was about to spring upon me with that huge stone in his hand

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- PROSPERO** If you keep on like that even your sorcery won't save you from punishment!
- CALIBAN** That's right, that's right! In the beginning, he was all sweet talk: dear Caliban here, my little Caliban there! And what do you think you'd have done without me in this strange land? Ingrate! I taught you the trees, fruits, birds, the seasons, and now you don't give a damn Caliban the animal, Caliban the slave! I know that story! Once you've squeezed the juice from the orange, you toss the rind away!
- PROSPERO** Oh!
- CALIBAN** Do I lie? Isn't it true that you threw me out of your house and made me live in a filthy cave, a hovel, a slum, a ghetto?
- PROSPERO** It's easy to say "ghetto"! It wouldn't be such a ghetto if you took the trouble to keep it clean! And there's something you forgot, which is that what forced me to get rid of you was your lust. Good God, you tried to rape my daughter!
- CALIBAN** Rape! Rape! Listen, you old goat, you're the one that puts those sexy thoughts in my head. Let me tell you something: I couldn't care less about your daughter, or about your cave, for that matter. If I complain, it's on principle, because I didn't like living with you at all, as a matter of fact. Your feet stink!
- PROSPERO** I did not summon you here to argue. Away with you! Back to work! Wood, water, and lots of both! I'm expecting company today.
- CALIBAN** I've had just about enough. There's already a pile of wood that high
- PROSPERO** Enough! Take care, Caliban! If you keep grumbling you will be thrashed. And if you don't step lively, if you try to go on strike or to sabotage things, I'll beat you. Beating is the only language you really understand. So much the worse for you: I'll speak it, loud and clear. Off with you, and hurry!
- CALIBAN** All right, I'm going but this is the last time. It's the last time, do you hear me? Oh... I forgot: I've got something important to tell you.
- PROSPERO** Important? Well, out with it.
- CALIBAN** It's this: I've decided I don't want to be called Caliban any longer.
- PROSPERO** What kind of rot is that? I don't understand.
- CALIBAN** Put it this way: I'm *telling* you that from now on I won't answer to the name Caliban.
- PROSPERO** What put that notion into your head?

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CALIBAN Well, because Caliban isn't my name. It's as simple as that.

PROSPERO It's mine, I suppose!

CALIBAN It's the name given me by hatred, and every time it's spoken it's an insult.

PROSPERO My, how sensitive we're getting to be! All right, suggest something else I've got to call you something. What will it be? Cannibal would suit you, but I'm sure you wouldn't like that, would you? Let's see what about Hannibal? That fits. And why not... they all seem to like historical names.

CALIBAN Call me X. That would be best. Like a man without a name, or to be more precise, a man whose name has been stolen. You talk about history well, that's history, and everyone knows it! Every time you call me it reminds me of a basic fact, the fact that you've stolen everything from me, even my identity! Uhuru! (*He exits.*)