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William Shakespeare  
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## PERICLES

The scene: dispersedly in various countries

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

ANTIOCHUS, *King of Antioch*

PERICLES, *Prince of Tyre*

HELICANUS }  
 ESCANES } *two lords of Tyre*

SIMONIDES, *King of Pentapolis*

CLEON, *Governor of Tharsus*

LYSIMACHUS, *Governor of Mytilene*

CERIMON, *a lord of Ephesus*

THALIARD, *a lord of Antioch*

PHILEMON, *servant to Cerimon*

LEONINE, *servant to Dionyza*

*Marshal*

*A Pandar*

BOULT, *his servant*

*The daughter of Antiochus*

DIONYZA, *wife to Cleon*

THAISA, *daughter to Simonides*

MARINA, *daughter to Pericles and Thaisa*

LYCHORIDA, *nurse to Marina*

*A Bawd*

*Lords, Knights, Gentlemen, Sailors, Pirates,  
 Fishermen, and Messengers*

DIANA

GOWER, *as Chorus*

PERICLES,  
 PRINCE OF TYRE

[I Prologue] *Before the palace of Antioch, with  
 heads displayed above the entrance*

*Enter GOWER, as Chorus*

*Gower.* To sing a song that old was sung,  
 From ashes ancient Gower is come,  
 Assuming man's infirmities,  
 To glad your ear and please your eyes.  
 It hath been sung at festivals,  
 On ember-eves and holy ales;  
 And lords and ladies in their lives  
 Have read it for restoratives;  
 The purchase is to make men glorious;  
 Et bonum quo antiquius, eo melius. 10  
 If you, born in these latter times  
 When wit's more ripe, accept my rhymes,  
 And that to hear an old man sing  
 May to your wishes pleasure bring,  
 I life would wish, and that I might  
 Waste it for you like taper-light.  
 This Antioch, then; Antiochus the great  
 Built up this city for his chiefest seat,  
 The fairest in all Syria:  
 I tell you what mine authors say: 20  
 This king unto him took a fere,  
 Who died and left a female heir,  
 So buxom, blithe and full of face  
 As heaven had lent her all his grace;

- With whom the father liking took,  
 And her to incest did provoke.  
 Bad child, worse father, to entice his own  
 To evil should be done by none.  
 But custom what they did begin  
 30 Made with long use account no sin.  
 The beauty of this sinful dame  
 Made many princes thither frame,  
 To seek her as a bed-fellow,  
 In marriage-pleasures play-fellow;  
 Which to prevent he made a law,  
 To keep her still and men in awe,  
 That whoso asked her for his wife,  
 His riddle told not, lost his life.  
 So for her many a wight did die,  
 40 As yon grim looks do testify.     [*pointing to the heads*  
 What now ensues, to the judgement of your eye  
 I give my cause, who best can justify.     [*he goes*

[I. I.] 'Enter *ANTIOCHUS, PRINCE PERICLES*  
*and followers*'

*Antiochus.* Young Prince of Tyre, you have at  
 large received

The danger of the task you undertake.

*Pericles.* I have, Antiochus, and, with a soul  
 Embold'ned with the glory of her praise,  
 Think death no hazard in this enterprise.

*Antiochus.* Bring in our daughter, clothéd like a bride,  
 For the embracements even of Jove himself;  
 At whose conception, till Lucina reigned,  
 Nature this dowry gave: to glad her presence,

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The senate-house of planets all did sit, To knit in her their best perfections.		10
<i>Music. 'Enter Antiochus' Daughter'</i>		
<i>Pericles.</i> See where she comes, apparelled like the spring, Graces her subjects, and her thoughts the king Of every virtue gives renown to men! Her face the book of praises, where is read Nothing but curious pleasures, as from thence Sorrow were ever razed, and testy wrath Could never be her mild companion. You gods that made me man and sway in love, That have inflamed desire in my breast		20
To taste the fruit of yon celestial tree Or die in the adventure, be my helps, As I am son and servant to your will, To compass such a boundless happiness!		
<i>Antiochus.</i> Prince Pericles—		
<i>Pericles.</i> That would be son to great Antiochus.		
<i>Antiochus.</i> Before thee stands this fair Hesperides, With golden fruit, but dangerous to be touched; For death-like dragons here affright thee hard. Her face, like heaven, enticeth thee to view		30
Her countless glory, which desert must gain; And which without desert because thine eye Presumes to reach, all the whole heap must die. Yon sometimes famous princes, like thyself, Drawn by report, advent'rous by desire, Tell thee, with speechless tongues and semblance pale, That without covering save yon field of stars, Here they stand martyrs, slain in Cupid's wars; And with dead cheeks advise thee to desist For going on death's net, whom none resist.		40

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*Pericles.* Antiochus, I thank thee, who hath taught  
 My frail mortality to know itself,  
 And by those fearful objects to prepare  
 This body, like to them, to what I must;  
 For death remembered should be like a mirror,  
 Who tells us life's but breath, to trust it error.  
 I'll make my will then, and, as sick men do,  
 Who know the world, see heaven, but feeling woe  
 Gripe not at earthly joys as erst they did,  
 50 So I bequeath a happy peace to you  
 And all good men, as every prince should do;  
 My riches to the earth from whence they came;  
 But my unspotted fire of love to you. [*to the princess*]  
 Thus ready for the way of life or death,  
 I wait the sharpest blow, Antiochus.

*Antiochus.* Scorning advice, read the conclusion then:  
 Which read and not expounded, 'tis decreed,  
 As these before thee thou thyself shalt bleed.

*Daughter.* Of all 'sayed yet, mayst thou  
 prove prosperous!  
 60 Of all 'sayed yet, I wish thee happiness!

*Pericles.* Like a bold champion I assume the lists,  
 Nor ask advice of any other thought  
 But faithfulness and courage.

*He reads 'the riddle'*

'I am no viper, yet I feed  
 On mother's flesh that did me breed.  
 I sought a husband, in which labour  
 I found that kindness from a father.  
 He's father, son, and husband mild;  
 I mother, wife, and yet his child.  
 70 How this may be, and yet in two,  
 As you will live, resolve it you.'  
 [*aside*] Sharp physic is the last: but, O you powers

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That gives heaven countless eyes to view men's acts,  
 Why cloud they not their sights perpetually,  
 If this be true, which makes me pale to read it?  
 Fair glass of light, I loved you, and could still,  
 Were not this glorious casket stored with ill.  
 But I must tell you, now my thoughts revolt;  
 For he's no man on whom perfections wait  
 That, knowing sin within, will touch the gate. 80  
 You are a fair viol and your sense the strings,  
 Who, fingered to make man his lawful music,  
 Would draw heaven down and all the gods to hearken,  
 But being played upon before your time,  
 Hell only danceth at so harsh a chime.  
 Good sooth, I care not for you.

*Antiochus.* Prince Pericles, touch not, upon thy life,  
 For that's an article within our law,  
 As dangerous as the rest. Your time's expired:  
 Either expound now or receive your sentence. 90

*Pericles.* Great king,  
 Few love to hear the sins they love to act;  
 'Twould braid yourself too near for me to tell it.  
 Who has a book of all that monarchs do,  
 He's more secure to keep it shut than shown;  
 For vice repeated is like the wand'ring wind,  
 Blows dust in others' eyes, to spread itself;  
 And yet the end of all is bought thus dear,  
 The breath is gone, and the sore eyes see clear  
 To stop the air would hurt them. The blind mole casts 100  
 Copped hills towards heaven, to tell the earth  
 is thronged

By man's oppression; and the poor worm doth die for't.  
 Kings are earth's gods; in vice their law's their will;  
 And if Jove stray, who dares say Jove doth ill?  
 It is enough you know; and it is fit,

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What being more known grows worse, to smother it.  
 All love the womb that their first being bred,  
 Then give my tongue like leave to love my head.  
 (*Antiochus*. Heaven, that I had thy head! He has  
 found the meaning)

- 110 But I will gloze with him. [*aloud*] Young prince of Tyre,  
 Though by the tenour of our strict edict,  
 Your exposition misinterpreting,  
 We might proceed to cancel of your days;  
 Yet hope, succeeding from so fair a tree  
 As your fair self, doth tune us otherwise.  
 Forty days longer we do respite you;  
 If by which time our secret be undone,  
 This mercy shows we'll joy in such a son;  
 And until then your entertain shall be
- 120 As doth befit our honour and your worth.

[*all but Pericles go*

- Pericles*. How courtesy would seem to cover sin,  
 When what is done is like an hypocrite,  
 The which is good in nothing but in sight!  
 If it be true that I interpret false,  
 Then were it certain you were not so bad  
 As with foul incest to abuse your soul;  
 Where now you're both a father and a son,  
 By your uncomely claspings with your child,  
 Which pleasures fits a husband, not a father;
- 130 And she an eater of her mother's flesh,  
 By the defiling of her parents' bed;  
 And both like serpents are, who though they feed  
 On sweetest flowers, yet they poison breed.  
 Antioch, farewell! for wisdom sees, those men  
 Blush not in actions blacker than the night,  
 Will shun no course to keep them from the light.  
 One sin, I know, another doth provoke;



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Murder's as near to lust as flame to smoke.  
 Poison and treason are the hands of sin,  
 Ay, and the targets, to put off the shame. 140  
 Then, lest my life be cropped to keep you clear,  
 By flight I'll shun the danger which I fear. [*he goes*]

*Re-enter ANTIUCHUS*

*Antiochus.* He hath found the meaning,  
 For which we mean to have his head.  
 He must not live to trumpet forth my infamy,  
 Nor tell the world Antiochus doth sin  
 In such a loathéd manner;  
 And therefore instantly this prince must die;  
 For by his fall my honour must keep high.  
 Who attends us there? 150

*'Enter THALIARD'*

*Thaliard.* Doth your highness call?  
*Antiochus.* Thaliard, you are of our chamber, Thaliard,  
 And our mind partakes her private actions  
 To your secrecy; and for your faithfulness  
 We will advance you, Thaliard.  
 Behold, here's poison, and here's gold;  
 We hate the prince of Tyre, and thou must kill him:  
 It fits thee not to ask the reason why;  
 Because we bid it. Say, is it done?

*Thaliard.* My lord, 'tis done.

*Antiochus.* Enough. 160

*'Enter a Messenger'*

Let your breath cool yourself, telling your haste.  
*Messenger.* My lord, prince Pericles is fled. [*he goes*]  
*Antiochus.* As thou wilt live, fly after; and like an  
 arrow shot from a well experienced archer hits the

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mark his eye doth level at, so thou never return unless  
 thou say 'Prince Pericles is dead.'

*Thaliard.* My lord, if I can get him within my pistol's  
 length, I'll make him sure enough: so, farewell to your  
 highness.

170 *Antiochus.* Thaliard, adieu! [*Thaliard goes*] Till  
 Pericles be dead,  
 My heart can lend no succour to my head. [*he goes*]

[I. 2.] *Tyre. A room in the palace*

*Enter PERICLES*

*Pericles.* [*to lords without*] Let none disturb us.

Why should this change of thoughts,  
 The sad companion, dull-eyed melancholy,  
 Be my so used a guest as not an hour  
 In the day's glorious walk, or peaceful night,  
 The tomb where grief should sleep, can breed  
 me quiet?

Here pleasures court mine eyes, and mine eyes  
 shun them,

And danger, which I feared, is at Antioch,  
 Whose arm seems far too short to hit me here;  
 Yet neither pleasure's art can joy my spirits,

10 Nor yet the other's distance comfort me.

Then it is thus: the passions of the mind,  
 That have their first conception by misdread,  
 Have after-nourishment and life by care;  
 And what was first but fear what might be done,  
 Grows elder now and cares it be not done.

And so with me: the great Antiochus,  
 'Gainst whom I am too little to contend,