

THE THREEPENNY OPERA - PLOT SUMMARY

Macheath (aka Mack the Knife) and his gang rule the lower class world of nineteenth century London. They steal, murder and rape, partially for profit and partly because they can. Mr. J.J. Peachum has “unionized” the beggars of London at his shop, The Beggar’s Friend. In exchange for a portion of their take, he gives advice on begging, an outfit, often complete with disability, and a license to beg on a particular corner. Without this license, any interloping beggar will be beaten by members of the guild.

These two underworld leaders come into conflict when Macheath seduces and marries – the legality of the ceremony is suspect - Polly, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Peachum. The Peachums arrange to have Macheath arrested for some of his multitude of crimes. This is more difficult than it seems, because Macheath is an old army buddy of Tiger Brown, the Chief of Police. Nevertheless, with the aid of Macheath’s old lover, the prostitute Jenny, Macheath is taken in charge and brought to jail.

Mack gets a brief respite when he persuades his other mistress, Lucy Brown, to help him to escape. The Peachums, senior, outraged by Tiger Brown’s incompetence, threaten that, if he does not recapture Mack, the coronation will be disrupted by hoards of disgusting, dirty beggars, singing at the top of their lungs. Brown has no choice but to go along, and Mack is taken from the house of Sukey Tawdry, in whose arms he has taken comfort after Jenny’s betrayal.

The last hour has struck. Lacking the cash in hand to bribe the guards, Mack has resigned himself to his fate. The Peachums, the Browns, Jenny and the other whores, the beggars and the gang members all arrive to see Mack off. Each is hoping to rub off a little of his celebrity. Mack is marched to the gallows, when...

“Victoria’s messenger riding comes!” In honor of her coronation, Victoria has pardoned Macheath and made him a Peer of the Realm. She sends her congratulations to Mack, and to all of his wives – Polly, Lucy, and Jenny.