

GREATREX

Written by

Stephen Hall

shsc21441@gmail.com

EXT. PORT PHILLIP - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: 1845

Under a merciless sun, the convict ship *MAITLAND* sits at anchor. Shackled prisoners are marched down the gangway into the chaos of PORT PHILLIP.

Among them: JOHN HENRY GREATREX [19] - tall, broad-shouldered, filthy, but alert. His eyes never stop moving.

A line of wooden tables. Officers and medics process convicts with bureaucratic efficiency.

EXT. PORT PHILLIP/PROCESSING TABLE - CONTINUOUS

The CONVICT PROCESS FOREMAN paces the line.

CONVICT PROCESS FOREMAN
You are now property of the British
Government. Any man with a skill
may state it now. Otherwise, you'll
take what you're given. Any crime -
any - will be answered with hard
labour. Understood?

A low murmur of assent.

CONVICT PROCESS FOREMAN (CONT'D)
Then line up and we shall begin.

Greatrex watches as the man ahead steps forward.

CONVICT PROCESS OFFICER
Trade?

PROCESS CONVICT
Shoemaker.

A slip is stamped and handed over.

CONVICT PROCESS OFFICER
Wagon Four.

Greatrex steps up, chains clinking.

CONVICT PROCESS OFFICER (CONT'D)
Name?

GREATREX
John Henry Greatrex

The officer's pen scratches his name.

CONVICT PROCESS OFFICER
Trade?

Greatrex straightens.

GREATREX
Actor.

The officer peers at him – sceptical.

CONVICT PROCESS OFFICER
Actors in Birmingham?

The young man continues to smile confidently.

GREATREX
Even Shakespeare learned his craft
there.

A flicker of amusement. A stamp SLAMS down.

CONVICT PROCESS OFFICER
Wagon ten.

Greatrex takes the slip.

EXT. PORT PHILLIP/WAGON - LATER

The wagon lurches forward. Convicts sway.

A WAGON CONVICT leans toward Greatrex.

WAGON CONVICT
What brought you to this god
forsaken place?

GREATREX
Theft. Though I only took what I
was owed.

WAGON CONVICT
Aye, they all say that.

Greatrex turns to him.

GREATREX
You call me a liar?

The Wagon Convict gives a dismissive snort.

WAGON CONVICT
How long?

GREATREX
Seven years.

WAGON CONVICT
Men have met their maker in less.

Greatrex raises his chained hands.

GREATREX
Long enough to right the wrong.

WAGON CONVICT
They say no one leaves this land.

GREATREX
Then they have not met me.

The convict chuckles.

WAGON CONVICT
You're a cocky bastard. I'll give
you that.

Greatrex leans over and taps his temple.

GREATREX
(whisper)
Smart.

The convict grins, displaying rotten teeth.

WAGON CONVICT
Smart enough to get caught.

Greatrex leans back.

GREATREX
That was the mistake.

Greatrex stares out — already calculating.

EXT. QUEEN'S THEATRE/STREET - LATER

The wagon stops outside the grand wooden building that
stands out in the dusty street.

Faded drapes flutter in the breeze.

The WAGON DRIVER'S ASSISTANT reads from a list.

WAGON DRIVER ASSISTANT
Greatrex.

Greatrex jumps down, chains clanking.

WAGON DRIVER ASSISTANT (CONT'D)
Follow me.

Greatrex shuffles behind as they advance towards the theatre.

INT. QUEEN'S THEATRE/FOYER - DAY

Red carpet. Gilded stairs. A different world.

MR CHAMBERS [42], theatre manager, studies Greatrex as the shackles are removed.

WAGON DRIVER ASSISTANT
Your new dogsbody.

He leans in close to Greatrex.

WAGON DRIVER ASSISTANT (CONT'D)
You run - you break rocks.

Chambers examines the slip.

MR CHAMBERS
Actor?

WAGON DRIVER ASSISTANT
So he says.

GREATREX
I learn quickly.

MR CHAMBERS
Follow me.

The driver's assistant leaves as the manager and Greatrex head down one of the side passageways.

INT. QUEEN'S THEATRE/GREATREX'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A cramped hovel. Bed. Table. BARRED WINDOW.

MR CHAMBERS
Three meals. One shilling a week.

As Chambers wipes sweat from his brow, a BANK NOTE slips from his pocket.

Greatrex notices. Instinctively he slides his boot over it.

MR CHAMBERS (CONT'D)
The heat is unbearable in this land
but you will get accustomed to it.

Chambers turns. Studies him.

Greatrex keeps his boot over the note.

His mouth twists.

MR CHAMBERS (CONT'D)

Sign here.

Greatrex rises and adds his signature below Chamber's.

MR CHAMBERS (CONT'D)

Good. Let's get you started.

INT. QUEEN'S THEATRE/AUDITORIUM - NIGHT (WEEKS LATER)

Four actors on stage, two men and two women, rehearse.

Greatrex works nearby, listening.

ACTOR #1

Wouldst thou profit from another
man's misfortune?

ACTOR #2

Or shall thy heart be laden with
guilt?

Greatrex watches the performers.

His jaw tightens.

He studies a vial in his hand. Releases it into the bin.

Silence.

The sound of a cough.

ACTOR #3

We should be gone from here...

Actor 3 stops his reciting to cough again.

ACTOR #3 (CONT'D)

Excuse me.

ACTOR #1

Would you care for some water?

Actor 3 nods as the coughing becomes uncontrollable.

Actor 1 rushes past Greatrex and grabs a ladle of water.

Greatrex remains still. Watching.

The legs of Actor 3 begin to buckle.

Actor 2 grabs him for support.

ACTOR #1 (CONT'D)
We need a doctor!

Greatrex remains still.

INT. QUEEN'S THEATRE/AUDITORIUM - MOMENTS LATER

The ill actor is led away.

ACTOR #2
We need someone else.

Silence.

From the wings -

GREATREX (O.S.)
Beware, behind that facade stands a
man intent on trouble.

Silence.

The actors are taken by surprise. Everyone turns.

MR CHAMBERS
Boy! Come here.

INT. QUEEN'S THEATRE/AUDITORIUM - CONTINUOUS

Greatrex steps forward - confident.

Chambers is grim-faced.

MR CHAMBERS
You eavesdrop?

Greatrex raises his hands in defence.

GREATREX
Only to learn.

Chambers turns to the actors.

Actor 1 raises an eyebrow.

ACTOR #1
Try him.

Chambers grinds his jaw.

MR CHAMBERS
Let me down and you'll be breaking
rocks.

Greatrex glances at the actors. Actor 1 nods.

GREATREX
Yes, sir.

MR CHAMBERS
One shilling. No more.

Greatrex smiles.

INT. QUEEN'S THEATRE/AUDITORIUM - NIGHT (MONTAGE - BRIEF)

- Greatrex on stage, minor role.
- Posters change: 1847. "John Greatrex" in large print.
- Greatrex stands in the foreground as the cast bow to applause. He raises his arms to acclaim.

END MONTAGE

INT. DRESSING ROOM - LATER

Greatrex sits at a table writing a cheque as the door opens to reveal Mr Chambers.

MR CHAMBERS
A resounding performance, John.

GREATREX
It was, wasn't it?

Mr Chambers is about to leave.

GREATREX (CONT'D)
Mr Chambers. May I have a moment?

MR CHAMBERS
Of course.

He approaches as Greatrex produces some documents from a bag.

GREATREX
Despite my chequered past, I have
come into some good news.

He shows Mr Chambers the documents.

GREATREX (CONT'D)

A generous benevolence has come my way in the form of these shares.

MR CHAMBERS

So I see.

GREATREX

But I am in desperate need of some funds for my business.

Mr Chambers listens with interest.

GREATREX (CONT'D)

If I should sign these over to you for a sum of one hundred pounds, would it be of interest?

MR CHAMBERS

Shares?

GREATREX

You would be making a sizeable profit for your trouble.

MR CHAMBERS

Are you sure? What about the bank?

GREATREX

They will not accommodate someone of my standing.

Chambers thinks.

MR CHAMBERS

You have proven yourself, John.

GREATREX

You won't regret it.

Mr Chambers retrieves a wad of money from his pocket.

He counts the notes. He offers it.

Their eyes meet. Greatrex smiles.

GREATREX (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Mr Chambers departs. The door closes.

Greatrex blows on the cheque.

He studies it, raising an eyebrow then slips it into his wallet.

EXT. GREATREX'S SHOP/STREET - NIGHT

He steps on to the sidewalk in front of his shop as his landlord JAMES NEWBERRY [46], approaches alongside his wife ELEANOR NEWBERRY [42].

JAMES NEWBERRY
An excellent performance, Mr
Greatrex.

GREATREX
Thank you, Mr Newberry.

He glances at Eleanor.

GREATREX (CONT'D)
Good evening, Eleanor.

Eleanor smiles stiffly.

ELEANOR NEWBERRY
And you, Mr Greatrex.

JAMES NEWBERRY
May I remind you that the shop rent
is outstanding for last week.

GREATREX
I am aware, Mr Newberry.

Greatrex retrieves the cheque and hands it to him.

Newberry brightens.

HENRIEN [25] steps out from the shop.

GREATREX (CONT'D)
Is that sufficient?

JAMES NEWBERRY
Indeed.

Eleanor's demeanour relaxes.

ELEANOR NEWBERRY
The ladies of the Guild have
enquired whether you might make an
appearance.

GREATREX
I would be most delighted to come.

Eleanor smiles appreciatively.

JAMES NEWBERRY
It can wait for another day, dear.
Mr Greatrex must be tired.

GREATREX
Yes.

JAMES NEWBERRY
We shall bid you goodnight.

Greatrex and Henrién watch the Newberrys enter the adjacent building.

GREATREX
How sells the tobacco from the
McEnroe brothers?

HENRIEN
There are only two sacks left.

GREATREX
Excellent.

Greatrex gestures for Henrién to follow him.

INT. GREATREX'S SHOP - MOMENTS LATER

The shop is filled with sacks and tinned foods on the shelves.

HENRIEN
Is everything alright, sir?

GREATREX
I have some news.

Beat.

GREATREX (CONT'D)
I will be leaving this place at the
end of the month.

HENRIEN
Mr Greatrex?

Greatrex raises a hand.

GREATREX
One cannot make a life merely
holding on to what one has.