

ONE-PAGE SYNOPSIS – *GREATREX*

In 1846, **John Henry Greatrex**, a clever, charismatic young Englishman, arrives in colonial Australia as a transported convict. Convicted of theft but convinced of his own superiority, Greatrex quickly proves himself adaptable, manipulative, and fearless. Claiming to be an “actor,” he secures work at a theatre, where his intelligence and charm allow him to rise rapidly. Behind the scenes, however, Greatrex reveals his true nature: a habitual liar and opportunist who steals money, forges documents, and exploits those around him. His first significant fraud leads to imprisonment and hard labour, but even there he engineers an injury to gain clerical duties and forges paperwork to escape custody, proving incarceration is merely another obstacle to overcome.

Reinventing himself repeatedly, Greatrex builds a respectable façade as a shop owner, performer, and later a photographer. He marries Jessie, fathers children, and cultivates the image of a devout family man—while secretly gambling, drinking, and conducting affairs. Financial pressures mount as his businesses falter, creditors close in, and his appetite for luxury grows. When a visit from a bank clerk sparks the idea of counterfeiting, Greatrex seizes upon it as the perfect solution. He recruits skilled engravers, **the Grimshaw brothers**, manipulating their desperation and technical expertise to forge high-quality banknotes in Glasgow.

As the operation expands, Greatrex’s duplicity intensifies: he deceives his wife, seduces his assistant, discards loyal employees, and tightens his control over the brothers. Their criminal enterprise attracts the attention of **Superintendent Alexander McCall**, a principled and relentless detective whose reputation for capturing sophisticated criminals makes him Greatrex’s most formidable adversary. While Greatrex believes himself untouchable—protected by intellect, charm, and audacity—McCall methodically follows the trail of forged notes across cities and continents.

The story culminates in a tense pursuit as Greatrex’s world begins to fracture. Trust erodes among his accomplices, personal betrayals surface, and the weight of his accumulated lies threatens to crush him. What began as a convict’s struggle for survival becomes a sweeping historical crime drama about ambition, greed, and self-delusion, charting the rise and fall of a man who believes intelligence alone places him above morality—and above the law.