

GREATREX

Written by

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EXT. PORT PHILLIP - DAY

Under the burning sun, the convict ship Maitland is
harboured at the busy Port Phillip with shackled prisoners
being led down the gangway on to land. *

At six foot in height and broad-shouldered, the dishevelled
figure of JOHN HENRY GREATREX [19], his tattered clothes
hanging loosely from his filthy body, stands out among the
motley crowd of men being led towards a line of wooden
tables where uniformed officers and medics process each
criminal before being dispatched to waiting wagons which
will deliver them to their place of work.

EXT. PORT PHILLIP/PROCESSING TABLE - CONTINUOUS

The foreman of the Process walks up and down the line of
convicts.

CONVICT PROCESS FOREMAN

You are now in the employ of the
British Government. Any of you men
have skills of use then now is your
chance to state your worth,
otherwise you take whatever job is
given. From this moment on till the
end of your sentence, should any
man be convicted of any crime, no
matter how small, the punishment
will be hard labour. Do you
understand? +

The men mumble their understanding.

CONVICT PROCESS FOREMAN (CONT'D)

Then line up and we shall begin.

The young convict stands in line and watches the processing
of an accompanying criminal ahead of him.

CONVICT PROCESS OFFICER

Trade?

PROCESS CONVICT

Shoemaker.

The Process Officer hands a slip of paper to the convict.

CONVICT PROCESS OFFICER

Wagon Four. Give this to the
driver.

Greatrex shuffles with clanking leg chains to the table. An officer sits behind the table, a large ledger book open in front of him, ready to document each incomer. *

CONVICT PROCESS OFFICER (CONT'D)
Name?

GREATREX
John Henry Greatrex

The officer begins to write in the ledger.

CONVICT PROCESS OFFICER
Trade?

GREATREX
Actor.

The young convict pulls back his shoulders and puffs his chest out confidently with a cheeky smile as the officer studies the bedraggled teenager who speaks with an accentuated English brogue.

CONVICT PROCESS OFFICER
They have such in Birmingham?

The young man continues to smile confidently.

GREATREX
They do. Even the great bard
Shakespeare honed his skills in
those parts.

The officer looks up quizzically then chuckles.

CONVICT PROCESS OFFICER
Is that so?

GREATREX
As God is my witness.

The officer returns stamps a document authoritatively and hands it over to the boy.

CONVICT PROCESS OFFICER
Wagon ten.

He points towards the line of numbered wagons.

CONVICT PROCESS OFFICER (CONT'D)
Give it to the driver.

GREATREX
Aye sir.

The boy shuffles among the other convicts towards the wagon leaving the officer to process the next criminal.

EXT. PORT PHILLIP/WAGON - MOMENTS LATER

Greatrex sits bracing himself among the group of prisoners as they begin to depart the port, the wagon bumping along the uneven dirt road. A fellow convict, sitting by his side, turns to him.

WAGON CONVICT

What brought you to this god forsaken place?

GREATREX

Theft...though it was money I was due.

WAGON CONVICT

Aye, they all say that. How long?

GREATREX

Seven years.

WAGON CONVICT

Eighteen fifty-three will be a long time coming. Still, there are others that will likely die in this land before they see England again.

Greatrex silently looks around at the sad miscreants as the wagon begins to move. +
+

FADE TO:BLACK

FADE IN

EXT. QUEEN'S THEATRE/STREET - LATER

The large, impressive wooden building that can accommodate one thousand customers, dominates the town that is bustling with transportation across the dirt road of the main street in the stifling heat. *

The driver's accomplice jumps down off the wagon and advances towards the rear. Holding a slip of paper, he looks up at the convicts.

WAGON DRIVER ASSISTANT

Greatrex.

The young man rises awkwardly to his feet and manoeuvres himself to the end of the wagon before jumping down on to the road.

WAGON DRIVER ASSISTANT (CONT'D)

Follow me.

The two men advance towards the theatre.

INT. QUEEN'S THEATRE/FOYER - DAY

A rich red carpet blankets the floor that leads towards a central staircase. A stout, balding MR CHAMBERS [42] wearing a dark suit and white-collared shirt converses with a young girl. He watches the driver and prisoner advance.

WAGON DRIVER ASSISTANT

(to Mr Chambers)

Your new dogsbody. John Greatrex.

As the young girl exits, Greatrex scans the foyer in awe as the accompanying man unlocks the leg cuffs. The manager studies the young man with an air of authority as a slip of paper is handed over.

WAGON DRIVER ASSISTANT (CONT'D)

You fuck this up and you'll be breaking rocks. You understand?

Greatrex nods solemnly. The manager reads the slip of paper then looks at the boy.

MR CHAMBERS

(surprised)

Actor?

WAGON DRIVER ASSISTANT

So he says.

MR CHAMBERS

(to Greatrex)

Follow me.

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

FADE TO:BLACK

FADE IN

INT. QUEEN'S THEATRE/AUDITORIUM - MOMENTS LATER

With no windows, the light is dim as the two men walk down the middle aisle, rows of red-cushioned seats filling the floor space. Ahead, two men and a woman rehearse on the wooden stage in front of a row of gas lamps spreading a soft glow where they stand.

Mr Chambers and Greatrex, his eyes fixed on the actors, pass the front of the stage and enter the rear. +
+

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

Mr Chambers opens a door and enters a hovel of a room containing a single bed and side-table with a solitary oil lamp. A barred window partially hidden by a tattered curtain allows the daylight to expose the basic conditions to the young man. Dust sprinkles in the air of the humid room.

MR CHAMBERS

Your sleeping quarters. Three meals a day. One shilling a week.

As Greatrex sits on the side of the bed, the manager retrieves a pen to write on the slip of paper before pulling a hanky from his right pocket, unaware that a pound note inadvertently slips out and quietly floats to the floor. He wipes his forehead as beads of sweat trickle down his temple.

MR CHAMBERS (CONT'D)

The heat is unbearable in this land but you will get accustomed to it.

He begins to write his signature as Greatrex softly places his boot over the note and draws it under the bed. Chambers turns to the young man. +
+

MR CHAMBERS (CONT'D)

You need to sign this. *

Greatrex rises and adds his signature below Chamber's.

MR CHAMBERS (CONT'D)

Good. Let's get you started.

FADE TO:BLACK

FADE IN

INT. QUEEN'S THEATRE/AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE: Three months later.

The auditorium is empty apart from four actors on stage, two men and two women, while Greatrex stands at the side packing straw. Male ACTOR #1 [37] stands centre stage with the others circled around him. *

ACTOR #1

Thou shall not bequeath such riches in times of trouble, madam?

Female ACTOR #2 [26] sweeps across the floor, her arms waving in the air.

ACTOR #2
Not if you're heart ladens you with
guilt!

Male ACTOR #3 [25] abruptly advances towards Actor #2 and grabs her by the shoulders.

ACTOR #3
We should be gone from here...

Actor 3 stops his reciting to cough.

ACTOR #3 (CONT'D)
Excuse me.

He raises a hand to his mouth and coughs again.

ACTOR #1
Would you care for some water?

Actor 3 nods as the coughing becomes more persistent. *

Female ACTOR #4 [25] passes Greatrex and grabs a ladle of water from a bucket which she offers the coughing actor. +
+

Mr Chambers enters the auditorium and advances. +

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

INT. QUEEN'S THEATRE/AUDITORIUM/BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Greatrex, smiling, drops a small vial into a metal rubbish bin. +

INT. QUEEN'S THEATRE/AUDITORIUM - MOMENTS LATER

The manager and the three remaining actors watch the ill actor being led up the aisle, doubled over and groaning. +

ACTOR #2
What shall become of him?

MR CHAMBERS
He will recover I do not doubt but
we have a performance to deliver
next week and time is of an
essence.

From behind the curtain, the voice of Greatrex bellows out.

GREATREX (O.S.)
 We should be gone from here for
 under that facade reasons a man
 intent on trouble!

The group look around to where the voice is coming from.

MR CHAMBERS
 Boy! Come here.

INT. QUEEN'S THEATRE/AUDITORIUM - CONTINUOUS

The young man confidently smiles as he appears on stage.

MR CHAMBERS
 (angry)
 You eavesdrop on matters not of
 your concern?

The smile instantly disappears.

GREATREX
 Sorry sir.

The manager advances as if to take a swipe at the young man.

ACTOR #1
 Mr Chambers. Wait!

The manager stops in his tracks and turns to the actors.

ACTOR #1 (CONT'D)
 You have been learning the lines?

GREATREX
 Aye sir but not to cause
 disharmony.

ACTOR #1
 You have performed before?

GREATREX
 On occasion sir.

Actor 1 turns to the manager, raising an eyebrow.

ACTOR #1
 Well?

Chambers looks gruffly at the young man, unimpressed.

MR CHAMBERS
 Try him.

+

+

The manager **departs**. +

MR CHAMBERS (CONT'D)
 (to Greatrex)
 It'll still be a shilling a week. *

FADE TO:BLACK

FADE IN

INT. QUEEN'S THEATRE/AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

A packed audience applaud loudly as the appreciative cast bow before them with Greatrex among them.

MONTAGE:

Poster for a performance showing Greatrex as a small part actor. The poster indicates the year is 1847.

Greatrex bows with the cast to an applauding audience.

Poster for a performance showing Greatrex as a supporting actor. The poster indicates the year is 1848.

Greatrex, now with a beard, performs on stage in a scene with other actors.

Poster for a performance showing Greatrex as leading actor. The poster indicates the year is 1849.

Greatrex stands in front of the cast as they take a bow and he turns and acknowledges them to the applauding audience.

INT. QUEEN'S THEATRE/AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

The curtain falls down in front of the cast to rousing applause. +

GREATREX
 Well done everyone.

MR CHAMBERS +
 Another fine performance John. +

Greatrex pats the manager on the back. +

GREATREX +
 Another full house. +

EXT. QUEEN'S THEATRE/ACTORS ENTRANCE/STREET - **LATER** +

Greatrex exits the theatre and into the main street. +

EXT. GREATREX'S SHOP/STREET - MOMENTS LATER

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

JAMES NEWBERRY
An excellent performance Mr
Greatrex.

GREATREX
Thank you Mr Newberry.

He glances at the landlord's wife.

GREATREX (CONT'D)
Good evening ma'am.

The woman smiles courteously.

MRS NEWBERRY
And you, Mr Greatrex.

JAMES NEWBERRY
By the way, may I remind you that
the shop rent is outstanding for
last week. +

GREATREX
My apologies, sir. I will have it
for you tomorrow. Between the
theatre and running a business,
there is not enough time in the
day.

Greatrex's shopkeeper assistant, HENRIEN [25], a slight, fair-haired individual appears from inside the shop. *

HENRIEN
Good evening Mr Greatrex. A calm
night it is.

He turns to the Newberrys.

HENRIEN (CONT'D)
Evening sir. Ma'am.

The landlord **and his wife** continue on their way. +

JAMES NEWBERRY
Until tomorrow, John. Do not make
me wait any longer.

GREATREX
Fear not, Mr Newberry. +

They watch the couple enter the adjacent building.

GREATREX (CONT'D)
How sells the tobacco from the
McEnroe brothers?

HENRIEN
In less than a week and there is
only two sacks left.

GREATREX
Excellent.

HENRIEN
Will you acquire more?

GREATREX
Once those sacks are sold.

Greatrex retrieves his pocket watch.

GREATREX (CONT'D)
You can lock up now. The evening is
quiet.

HENRIEN
Yes, sir.

Greatrex enters the side door that leads towards the
apartment above.

INT. GREATREX'S SHOP/FLAT/BEDROOM - NIGHT

Nothing stirs in the quiet of the night as Greatrex soundly
sleeps in the one-bedroom flat.

INT. GREATREX'S SHOP/ENTRANCE - LATER

Dressed in tattered, working-class clothing, the
shadowy figure of ARTHUR MCENROE [28], is keeping watch as
his brother HAROLD MCENROE [30] is bent over forcing the
front door open as quietly as possible with a crowbar.

The door prises open to allow the thieves to enter.

INT. GREATREX'S SHOP - CONTINUOUS

In darkness, they cautiously cross the creaky, wooden floor.

HAROLD MCENROE
(whisper)
You look over there.