

## I Am Guilty!

*Foul deeds have been done under the most hospitable roofs,  
terrible crimes have been committed amid the fairest scenes,  
and have left no trace upon the spot they were done. . . .  
I believe that we may look into the smiling face of a murderer  
and admire its tranquil beauty.*

—M.E. Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*

For a moment, Hilda Blake stood in the sun. Despite her low status, she was suddenly thrust onto centre stage and could almost hope to inherit Mary Lane's former position in due time. To the powerful and arbitrary and evil force at work in Brandon she had given the names 'tramp' and 'foreigner', but she knew that the names were false. Soon other people, spurred by the failure of authorities to capture the assailant and by word of police investigations into Blake's claims, began slowly to mistrust the neatness of the tramp story.

The second stage in the reaction to the murder was initiated by Police Chief Kircaldy, whose duty it was to exonerate the harried tramps fleeing Brandon and to accuse a British-born, live-in domestic of murder. Kircaldy was a handsome man in his early thirties, raised in Fifeshire, Scotland, on 'oatmeal, the Shorter Catechism and the Ten Commandments'. As a boy, he was apprenticed to a horticulturist but wanted to join the military, so he knotted a piece of string at 34 inches, and when he could expand his chest to that span 'he threw aside his gardening tools.' After a stint in the famous Black Watch regiment and a time as a staff instructor at the Hythe School of