

## In Purple and Fine Linen

*I knew I was common, and . . . I wished I was not common.*

—Pip in Dickens, *Great Expectations*

*Don't overdress yourself. . . . The street dress of a lady should be simple and without display. To dress conspicuously or in brilliant colors for the street is a sign of bad breeding.*

—Grandma Nichols,  
*The Great Nineteenth Century Household Guide*

That sexual jealousy was partly to blame for the murder we have already argued; but also important were motives related to social class and femininity. Hilda Blake's tears shed over the Lane children were probably genuine—she does seem to have loved the children sincerely—but tears also allowed her to downplay sexual jealousy and to emphasize her own maternal sensibility: 'If the man whom you take as your husband has children,' advised Letitia Youmans, 'be sure there is room in your heart for them, as well as for him.'<sup>1</sup> How much more so, if the man were of a higher class. Blake's claim that she was jealous of the children hints that she wanted not only Robert's exclusive love but also Mary's *role*—wife of a prominent citizen and mother of his children. The second stage after the killing—the revelation of the tramp's innocence—was in many ways more confusing than his guilt had been, not because citizens of Brandon suddenly had to revise the events and details of a story they thought they knew—a relatively easy task—but because the story