

CONCLUSION

Some six years after the Criminal Law Amendment Act became law, the fate of one survivor of child sexual abuse was revealed before Dublin's Central Criminal Court. The judgment, delivered on 16 June 1941, demonstrates how Ireland's containment culture operated.⁸⁴ The court determined that the girl, who had been raped repeatedly by her father when she was between the ages of eleven and fourteen, was "living in circumstances calculated to cause or encourage . . . prostitution or seduction." Under the terms of section 21 of the Children Act (1908), she was removed from her home and committed to High Park Convent, the location of one of the largest Magdalen asylums in the country. In a letter to the county registrar, Elizabeth Carroll, the probation officer handling the case, explained that Ireland's industrial and reformatory school system refused to admit the girl, fearing that her mere presence would contaminate her young peers. Moreover, Carroll admitted to being "sorry" that "we could not fix the girl in a better Home" and quickly moved to explain, "But you know our difficulties, and in any event she is better where she is than at home."⁸⁵

Although the young girl was the victim of a crime, the various authorities initially regarded her as a threatening embodiment of sexual deviancy. In the absence of an acceptable alternative, she was abandoned to High Park and its population of adult women and routine of hard labor, incessant prayer, and submission to a religious rule focused on cleansing the body of sexual impurity. Questions regarding her release persist, as they do for all women who entered the Magdalen: the committal order stipulates a six-month stay, but it is not clear when or whether she was eventually released.