

2007

Down the Dublin Road

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Repository Citation

Waldron, K. A., Brazil, J., & Labatt, L. M., Eds. (2007). *Risk, Courage, and Women: Contemporary Voices in Prose and Poetry*. Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press.

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Down the Dublin Road

Karen Waldron

Judged sinners by the Church, thousands of Irish women were locked behind the walls of the Magdalen Laundries for bearing children out of wedlock, leaving abusive homes, or just living in poverty. Most had their children taken away forever, spending their own lives in harsh, spartan conditions, laundering for often-abusive Sisters of Charity.

The child inside her young body
shakes in violent fear,
borne as woman's grim burden
to a Laundry down the Dublin Road.

Her feet carvery-sliced and bleeding,
at last numbed to chiseled rocks,
swollen belly and sickled-back crushed together,
her unborn's awakening to hatred's scorched flesh.

Behind, she drags childhood and shattered heart
in a tattered, dirt-clogged sack.
Mum's tired frown and Da's grave sigh abandoned,
as must be this quaking globe inside.

Rosaries in hand, strangers will tear it from her sullied body,
weeping eyes and leaking breasts denied their painful prize.
Both orphans, she to cleanse raw in a laundry of abuse
and her child to know no Magdalen Mother.

As powerful kicks alert to the solemn gate ahead,
muted resolve awakes a Druid chill.
Her unseasoned hand pensively circles taut belly-skin,
a mother-child song surprising hoarse lips.

*Sing hush-a-bye loo, la loo, lo-lan,
Sing hush-a-bye loo-la-loo.*

*Bring no ill-wind to hinder us,
My helpless babe and me,
Dread spirits of the Blackwater,
Clan Owen's wild banshee,
And Holy Mary pitying us
In heaven for grace does sue.*

*Sing hush-a-bye loo, la loo, lo-lan,
Sing hush-a-bye loo-la-loo.**

Spitting rain sinks into impending dark,
as she rips skirt-rags for bloodied feet.
Two mortal sinners slipping silently to Life or Death,
past a Laundry down the Dublin Road.

*"October Winds" (traditional Irish song)