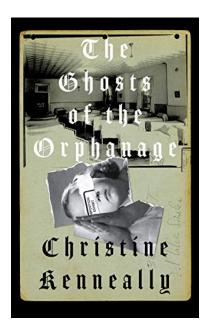
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Millions of American children were placed in orphanages. Some didn't make it out alive. After hearing whispers that seemed almost too awful to believe, BuzzFeed News investigative reporter Christine Kenneally embarked on a years-long journey to find out what really went on in these institutions. What she discovered was even more horrifying than the legend: the systematic abuse and even the alleged murder of children by nuns. Her searing report, which is part investigation, part true crime drama, part ghost story, cracks open a secret history of American life — and adds a vast new dimension to the Catholic church's mistreatment of children. From a world shrouded in secrecy, Kenneally tells the story of St. Joseph's Orphanage in Burlington, Vermont, and of Sally Dale, the plucky redhead who was the apple of the nuns' eyes. Until they decided to make an example of her, administering daily torments, isolating her from the rest of the world, and convincing her that she would never escape. Of all the children who passed through St. Joseph's, she may have been there the longest. The horrors she suffered and the deaths she said she witnessed did not come into full view until the day, decades later, when she attended a St Joseph's reunion. Then the past came flooding back like a torrent. Along with scores of other survivors, and guided by an idealistic young lawyer, Sally somehow found the courage to come forward and tell the world what she had experienced. She wanted more than anything else to be heard and believed. But she was going up against one of the most powerful institutions in the world, and she was in for the fight of a lifetime. The legal battle that ensued upended every assumption that the people of Burlington had. Could memory be trusted? Could forgetting be forgotten? Could a pleasant community turn a blind eye to evil? And could nuns, the very women charged with protecting these most vulnerable members of society, have instead tortured or even killed them? The Catholic sex abuse scandal – which most recently yielded a grand jury report on how the church hid the crimes of hundreds of priests — shattered the silence that for so long had protected the church. But the truth about what went on inside its orphanages has somehow remained all but unspoken, even as other countries have undertaken huge national inquiries. In the US, there has been no reckoning. The orphanages' dark secrets, like the dead children who haunt survivors' dreams, still lay buried. Until now. Through painstaking reporting, based in thousands of pages of documents — many of them secret — and interviews with survivors, Kenneally connects what happened at St. Joseph's to similar accounts that emerged from seven countries across three continents, revealing a terrible matrix of corroboration.

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