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PREFACE

In his preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth insists that the poet's subject need not come from personal experience, but it must *become* personal experience. In committing to a regimen of repeated witness in the world, the poet's very *impulses* and *habits of mind* are transformed until, over time, the poet's work becomes the poet's life. When parents lose a child to an abduction and murder and then descend into a well of grief, the poet writes as a way to call to them until it becomes clear that she must descend into the well herself—to know the water level there, the damp walls, the underbelly of this abomination.

The poems in this collection are “well poems”—conceived and drafted in a pit of loss and rage, with its shadowy promise of redemption. The story that this book tells is true. No names have been changed to protect the innocent—the innocent have already seen the face of evil, smelled its breath, learned its customs.

This book is offered in memory of Molly Bish and in homage to her mother, Maggie Bish, who encouraged me to “keep talking about this; keep writing.” It is also for Adam Walsh, Amber Hagerman, Levi Frady, Maile Gilbert, and Morgan Chauntel Nick. It is for the roughly 2,000 Mollys and Adams and Ambers and Levis and Morgans that are reported missing daily to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children; it is for Deb Cucanich and for the tireless case-workers at the Department of Children and Families. This book is for three girls held captive and abused for a decade in a house in an American city—but it is especially for the child who has not yet pried open a bolted door, borrowed a neighbor's phone, and announced to a 911 operator, “I've been kidnapped and I've been missing . . . and I'm here.”

M. B. McLatchey