★ Beneath a Meth Moon

Jacqueline Woodson. Penguin/Paulsen, $16.99 (192p) ISBN 978-0-399-25250-1

Fifteen-year-old ex-meth addict Laurel is writing an "elegy to the past" in an attempt to recover her life. After her mother and grandmother die in Hurricane Katrina, Laurel, her father, and her younger brother, Jesse Jr., move from their temporary new home in Jackson, Miss., to Galilee, Iowa, for a fresh start. Laurel makes a new friend, joins the cheerleading squad, and begins dating star athlete T-Boom, but she is still bereft over her lost family. When T-Boom offers her a taste of "the moon" (meth), her sadness evaporates. "Thing about the moon is—it takes you deeper," Laurel says. "Deeper than you'd go on your own." She quickly becomes addicted, neglects her friends and family, and winds up begging on the street in pursuit of more. Woodson's (*Peace, Locomotion*) dreamlike story is constructed of Laurel's patchy memories peppered with the voices of expertly sketched characters and rich with writerly observations. While readers know that Laurel survives, Woodson maintains tension throughout, making it abundantly clear how easy it is to succumb to meth and how difficult it is to recover from it. Ages 12–up. *(Feb.)*

Arcadia Awakens

Kai Meyer. HarperCollins/Balzer + Bray, $17.99 (464p) ISBN 978-0-0620-0606-6

In the lethargic first book in a planned trilogy from Meyer (the Dark Reflections trilogy), 17-year-old Rosa Alcantara leaves Brooklyn to join family in Sicily, uncertain whether she's running away from her problems or trying to find herself. After meeting Alessandro Carnevare, the two explore their attraction, even though the Alcantaras and the Carnevares are rival Mafia families. But this Romeo and Juliet story has a paranormal twist: the clans are shape-shifting predators descended from the legendary Greek Arcadians, making the politics downright bloodthirsty. As Rosa and Alessandro find a potentially game-changing clue to their families' history, the truce between their factions explodes. Despite the fresh premise, Meyer's characters aren't engaging—Alessandro is a cipher, and even with an ugly backstory and a bruised psyche that have turned Rosa into a passive-aggressive risk junkie, she is short on depth. The Mafia aspects of the story are realistically ugly, and mature themes (rape, abortion, human trafficking) run through the plot, but Meyer's flat story unfolds slowly before finally sparking late in the book, leaving threads hanging for the second installment. Ages 14–up. *(Feb.)*

Dead to You

Lisa McMann. Simon Pulse, $16.99 (256p) ISBN 978-1-4424-0388-8

This intriguing but slight character study is built around the first-person account of a teenager returning to his family nine years after strangers lured him into the backseat of a car and drove away. It's emotionally rich territory, but the setup is highly improbable. Authorities reunite 16-year-old Ethan De Wilde with his family mere hours after he makes his claim, forgoing background and DNA checks. Ethan is enrolled in school the following week without placement testing or counseling. Presumably, McMann (*Cryer's Cross*) has confirmed that such casual handling of a victimized family is possible, but the impression remains that the unlikely scenario has been created to suit her plot twists. Ethan's voice is convincing, even compelling at times, but too many opportunities arise over the course of the novel for readers to notice what McMann is not letting Ethan say. In a work of short fiction, these elements could have succeeded or been ignored. As is, though, the ending feels a bit deceptive. Ages 14–up. *Agent: Michael Bourret, Dystel & Goderich Literary Management. (Feb.)*

Nonfiction

★ We've Got a Job: The 1963 Birmingham Children's March

Cynthia Y. Levinson. Peachtree, $19.95 (176p) ISBN 978-1-56145-627-7

This chronicle of a pivotal chapter of the civil rights movement weaves together the stories of four black children in Birmingham, Ala., who were among some 4,000 who boycotted school to participate in a march to protest segregation. Before recounting that event, during which almost 2,500 young people were arrested and jailed, first-time author Levinson opens with intimate profiles of the four spotlighted children (drawn from interviews she conducted with each of them), along with descriptions of Birmingham's racist laws, corrupt politicians, antiblack sentiment—and activists' efforts to fight all of the above. Readers also get an up-close view of such leaders as Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, who founded the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights; Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who advocated a nonviolent response; and James Bevel, a preacher who rallied the city's children and teens. Yet the most compelling component is Levinson's dramatic recreation of the courageous children's crusade and the change it helped bring about in the face of widespread prejudice and brutality. Powerful period photos and topical sidebars heighten the story's impact. Ages 10–up. *Agent: Erin Murphy, Erin Murphy Literary Agency. (Feb.)*

First Girl Scout: The Life of Juliette Gordon Low

Ginger Wadsworth. Clarion, $17.99 (224p) ISBN 978-0-547-24394-8

In a biography as engaging as it is comprehensive, Wadsworth (*Camping with the President*) documents the life of Juliette Gordon Low, who founded the Girl Scouts in 1912. Headstrong, artistic, and boundlessly energetic, Georgia native Low spent many years living in Britain, where her involvement in the Girl Guides organization sparked the idea of launching a similar group in the U.S. Neatly framed photographs and other period documents related to Low are smoothly incorporated into the book's overall clean design, appearing against pale green pages sometimes printed with a fabric texture that nods toward the Scouts' uniforms. The narrative moves briskly, despite the copious details Wadsworth includes (Low's style of entertaining, numerous trips to visit family, marital woes, and the minutiae of starting and running the Girl Scouts). The author skillfully sets Low's life story against historical backdrops: during the Civil War, Low's father joined the Confederate army while her Chicago-bred mother's brothers fought for the Union. Numerous quotations from Low's correspondence and glimpses of her artwork lend further dimension to this well-rounded portrait. Ages 9–12. *Agent: Lynn Bennett, Transatlantic Literary Agency. (Feb.)*