and physical relationship. A true treat for readers!

sends Frances a letter that begins an intense philosophical, spiritual, and emotional journey. The main character is left wondering and questioning her own existence, slowly revealing their collective past, present and future. Frances and Bernard, two women, one old and white, one young and black, make a cross-country journey that will create a bond between them stronger than age or race. In A Constellation of Vital Phenomena, Marra expertly balances the pain and suffering of the Chechen conflict with exquisite moments of loyalty, sacrifice, humanity, and endurance. Marra intricately connects the lives of eight unforgettable characters in wholly unexpected ways, slowly revealing their collective past, present and future. But as their breathtaking stories compel you forward, slow down and savor the vivid imagery and lyrical prose on each and every page. A Constellation of Vital Phenomena is the best kind of historical fiction. Vivid characters and complex narratives bring to life a distant time and place, while the themes and issues explored are completely relevant to our time. The interwoven perspectives of the three generations of the McCullough family create a counterpoint to each other, their mores, and their expectations as they face change and adaptation.

Kind of Kin
A Novel, by Rilla Askew
(Ecco, 9780062198808, $14.99)

The nature of this wonderful novel set in small-town Oklahoma is like its characters—raucous, messy, uncertain, and foolishly brave. After a surprise immigration raid on Mexicans that scoops up even some respected citizens, everyone struggles to understand and how to act. This is a large, kind-hearted story of less than perfect folks caught in a maelstrom while still trying to abide by their ethical and spiritual beliefs. Askew’s story is a timely look at who we are as a mixed race society and how we express compassion even when times are tough and language is a barrier.

—Sheryl Cotler, Copperfield’s Books, Sebastopol, CA

The Love Song of Jonny Valentine
A Novel, by Teddy Wayne
(Penguin, 9781476760586, $15)

“A bitersweet, frank, and funny take on modern celebrity, this novel introduces a young pop phenomenon whose career and every move is managed by his mother who has her own set of problems with drugs and men. Jonny who is haunted by the memory of his missing father, is both wise and unapologetically naive as he deals with his newfound fame, the business of pop music, and the users and hangers-on of the celebrity world. A touching, funny, and moving view of stardom, small-town Oklahoma is like its characters—raucous, messy, uncertain, and foolishly brave. After a surprise immigration raid on Mexicans that scoops up even some respected citizens, everyone struggles to understand and how to act. This is a large, kind-hearted story of less than perfect folks caught in a maelstrom while still trying to abide by their ethical and spiritual beliefs. Askew’s story is a timely look at who we are as a mixed race society and how we express compassion even when times are tough and language is a barrier.”

—Ellen Burns, Books on the Common, Ridgefield, CT

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A Novel, by Edward Kelsey Moore
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—Linda Bond, Auntie’s Bookstore, Spokane, WA

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—Gavie Shanks, Changing Hands Bookstore, Tempe, AZ

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—Jill Hendrix, Fiction Addiction, Greenville, SC