In The Midst of Winter by Isabel Allende

★ 08/28/2017  Grief and loss are transformed into a healing friendship in this fantastic novel from Allende (Zorro). Sixty-year-old scholar Richard Bowmaster and his coworker and tenant, 62-year-old Lucia Maraz, who is a visiting professor at NYU, are faced with a shocking dilemma when a young Guatemalan refugee enters their lives. Set primarily in Brooklyn and upstate New York, the book opens with a minor car collision between Richard and Evelyn Ortega—an undocumented immigrant working for an overbearing employer. Shaken and terrified because she borrowed her employer’s Lexus without his permission, Evelyn comes to Richard’s apartment. Unable to calm her, Richard solicits Lucia to come help and, with a snowstorm raging outside, the three nibble on pot brownies and share stories: Evelyn’s harrowing, tortured childhood at the hands of the MS-13 gang, Lucia’s youth amid the violence of the 1973 Chilean coup. Upon sobering up, Evelyn explains that she cannot return the Lexus, and that there is a dead body in the trunk, presumably murdered by her employer. Richard, having grown up hearing of his father’s escape from the Nazis, has “the idea etched on his mind that to help the persecuted is an inescapable duty.” With the threat that Evelyn could be deported if they notify the authorities, the three quickly plan to dispose of the body in upstate New York, launching a suspenseful, icy adventure. Filled with Allende’s signature lyricism and ingenious plotting, the book delves wonderfully into what it means to respect, protect, and love. (Oct.) Publishers Weekly

11/01/2017  Chilean Lucia Maraz, 61, is a visiting professor at New York University, living half-frozen in the chilly basement apartment owned by her boss Richard Bowmaster, the son of Holocaust survivors. For Richard, who has barely survived a triad of horrible family tragedies, sobriety is one fear-filled day at a time. During a three-day blizzard at the beginning of 2016, Richard accidentally rear-ends the car driven without permission by Evelyn Ortega, a young, undocumented nanny who fled Guatemala after an unspeakable attack. The damage exposes a dead body in the trunk. Wanting to help Evelyn, Richard enlists Lucia's help. The three concoct a mad road trip to an isolated cabin where they plan to dispose of the body, using the bitter cold and snow as cover. In internationally renowned author Allende's latest novel (after The Japanese Lover), three wounded souls, thrown together by a literal and metaphorical collision of events, embark on a journey of self-discovery, emerging love, and the power of learning to trust. VERDICT Allende puts a human face on the realities of illegal immigration, broken hearts, courage, and healing with her signature heart. [See Prepub Alert, 5/15/17.]—Beth Andersen, formerly with Ann Arbor Dist. Lib., MI Library Journal

2017-08-06  Thrown together by a Brooklyn blizzard, two NYU professors and a Guatemalan nanny find themselves with a body to dispose of. "Blessed with the stoic character of her people, accustomed as they are to earthquakes, floods, occasional tsunamis, and political cataclysm," 61 year-old Chilean academic Lucia Maraz is nonetheless a bit freaked out by a snowstorm so severe that it's reported on television "in the solemn tone usually reserved for news about terrorism in far-off countries." Her landlord and boss, the tightly wound Richard Bowmaster, lives right upstairs with his four cats, but he rebuffs her offer of soup and company. Too bad: she might have a crush on him. Enter Evelyn Ortega, a diminutive young woman from Guatemala Richard meets when he skids into her Lexus on the iced-over streets. Evelyn's hysterical reaction to the fender bender seems crazily out of proportion when she shows up on his doorstep that night, and he has Lucia come up to help him understand why she's so upset. The Lexus, it turns out, belongs to her volatile, violent employer…and there's a corpse in the now-unlatchable trunk. Once Lucia gradually pieces together Evelyn's story—she was smuggled north by a coyote after barely surviving gang violence that killed both of her siblings—the two professors decide to help her, and the plan they come up with is straight out of a telenovela. While that's getting underway, Allende (The Japanese Lover, 2015, etc.) fills in the dark and complicated histories of Richard and Lucia, who also have suffered defining losses. The horrors of Evelyn's past have left her all but mute; Richard is a complete nervous wreck; Lucia fears there is no greater love coming her way than that of her Chihuahua, Marcelo. This winter's tale has something to melt each frozen heart. Kirkus Reviews