

Stocking for the storm

by [Jeanne Murray Walker](#) in the [December 27, 2011](#) issue

I can hear thunder grind against the earth,
vibrate with imprecations. Nature's
tossing down her gauntlet,
promising extended sieges,
threatening to lock us in tragedy
the way she locks a fly in amber,
so I flee to the store, wanting to lay in
plenty. Entering the bright
delirium, I harvest cans of gumbo
and chowder, embrace beets
and turnips who've repented living
as fanged roots. I gather wheat
in tiny wheels of pasta, while a stock boy
wipes his hands on his blue apron
and reaches crackers for a child,
and the scarf lady summons me
to read a label. Mark this,
the inauspicious aisle where
we have met. I say, build an altar.
Let the sideshow of breads praise
our communion. Let chèvre
and camembert commemorate
the place where we say to one another,
Three inches! We're in for it now!
and other liturgies of festive panic.
Because soon enough the thunder
will take back its fulminations,
black clouds break from their huddle,
wheel and gallop off, leaving us shy
and silent, wondering what that holy
moment meant, what this altar signifies,

the brief joy strangers gave to one another.