

# 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.