“Eve of St. Agnes in the High School Gym”

The saint's been dead too long; no young girl keeps her vigil. Not one fasts or prays tonight, for a vision of the one she'll marry.

A band plays—too loudly—popular tunes a few years out-of date. Young men emerge from a huddle of teammates, cheerleaders, fans. They run onto the court, howling, slapping hands.

Men just a few years older stand smoking by the door; their windbreakers advertise a local bar. Others sit in the stands, holding sleepy children; the women with them look worried and tired.

Snow falls silently, snaking through the streets, while in the gym, done up like spring in a pale yellow skirt and lavender sweater, a pretty girl sleepwalks on high heels. She carries herself to a boy on the bench who doesn't look up; and old men sigh.

When the game is over they flee on the storm. The saint sits in heaven, and if anyone's praying on this chilly night, let it be for love.

© 1995 Kathleen Norris from *Little Girls in Church*