

SOUVENIRS

By Shari L. Horne

I was cleaning house the other day,
And found a piece of me.
A hank of hair pressed in a book,
A nightmare memory.

A memory from the other side
Of that unseen boundary line.
Where madness rules and terror dwells,
That reality became mine.

My love escorted across that line,
Where escape's so rarely possible,
And you're face to face with doom.

He grabbed me from behind,
His hands wound through my hair,
He picked me up and threw me down,
And after me, my hair.

The bloody bits of hair and scalp
He'd ripped out of my head,
"Pick it up" he said "and throw it out".
But I saved one instead.

Down first one cheek then the next-
The blade traced without rest.
Blood was slowly following steel,
Like teardrops down my chest.

Each moment an eternity,
As on and on time rolled.
I kept expecting to feel the blade-
Stab hard and long and cold.

He wanted me to turn around-
To turn my back to him-
I could only stand and cry,
And beg him "why? Oh why?"

He said he was going to kill me,

But he'd said that before.
"If you're going to kill me – kill me now"
"But torture me no more".

I know it wasn't courage,
But the paralysis of fear,
That kept me trapped and hypnotized,
Like headlights to a deer.

He threw the knife down at my feet
And said to pick it up.
"Bitch pick it up and aim to kill,
"Cause if you don't – I will."

I knew then he'd actually kill me,
How could I have been so blind?
No more "ifs" – only 'when',
How long can I survive?

So I said anything he'd want to hear,
Whether truth or lie.
Any admission – any submission,
Just to stay alive.

So much of 'me' was sacrificed.
In those times of lunacy –
Pieces taken – pieces lost,
In the land of insanity.

After a while I lost my 'self',
My independence and my pride,
I couldn't remember how it felt
Before there was nowhere left to hide.

The only thing that made this time
Different from the rest,
Was the souvenir of hair I kept –
To help me not forget.

"Was it really as bad as that?"
I'd asked myself before.
"He really didn't mean it"
"He won't do it anymore,"

It's all the answer that I need,
More eloquent than words.
"yes" it says, "It was that bad"
The worst I'd ever had.

I keep it to remember –
What's not easy to forget.
For what we don't remember,
We may not live to regret.

So hold the memory close, my friend,
Still closer hold the fear –
It's all that stands between your now,
And past violence always near.

If you're still traveling that road to Hell,
Bring a souvenir back with you.
It won't forget or fade away,
As memories often do.

Yes now I have my souvenir
To stand guard at the gate.
The gate between what was and is
Freedom never comes too late.

So when you feel that all is lost,
No matter what you choose,
Until you've lost your life my friend –
There's always more to lose.