

Doing Time · Sara Miles

for Michael Fury

Too tough
too tough
I must have tugged at your thumb wincing
for half an hour as the splinter worked loose. It's
nothing you said, and told me
stories: romances: how the girl
screamed get away get away from me down
on Delancey Street last Christmas how the snow came
then the cops came: to tell me how
the redhead inbred islanders
backed off in St. Croix when you broke the bottle on the bar
to tell me stories
how they rode you late one night ("two other
Irish guys but big")
from the lobby to the fourteenth floor
of the projects up and back up and back beating
you senseless against the walls of the elevator "yeah I
was drunk but swear to God" you leaned closer, confiding, "all
I said getting in was don't
start anything jack": romance
romance means time makes
telling it better
than living it was.
You turned forty in a Louisiana jail
in the perpetual present tense of prison
you turned too tough with six
bullets in your knees and lungs to tell me over
the station house phone anything
resembling a blaze of glory: just how
it hurt.
How it hurts. "I'm sitting here speeding
my brains out on coffee" you wrote, "once again watching
the Yankees blow it as they come down to the wire.

All I ever wanted was a woman to love and a job
I didn't hate. So two of my biggest problems—oops
the Yanks just went down well fuck 'em—have been lust
and fear. These are my constant companions. And armed
robbery but I have been a thief as long
as I can remember.”

As long as I can remember you
have been a liar.

Too scrupulous to say you've been unlucky
too sentimental not to say
you've been unloved

too tough

too tough

you must have known romance means doing time, makes
living it
a better deal.