

## STANLEY

Six months ago, you wouldn't have seen me here. Five minutes ago, I didn't think I'd see myself here. I went out to the road just now, and if a car had come by, I'd-a been in it.

*(To BURL)* I know what beer smells like. *(To congregation.)* And I like it. Some of the most accepting people I've ever come across have been sitting in bars. Talking, laughing, listening. If somebody casts a stone in a bar, they're looking for a fight.

For the past eighteen months, I've been dangling over the Yadkin River popping rivets into bridges. It's called hard labor.

Doing that kind of work gives a fella a lot of time to think.

I got an idea about sin. I think a lot of times bad things are slung at unsuspecting folks. All those men out there with no job – their families are hungry, got no roof over their heads.

The crew on the Yadkin was made up of the roughest bunch of men I've ever knowed. I was friendly with a fella name o'Leighton. Arms as big as my leg. Mean.

One day we were sitting under a shade tree waiting for our dinner. That sounds nice, don't it? There was a fellow with a shotgun twenty yards down the line. *(To BURL)* They didn't want us running off. The foreman's wife would bring us a plate. She had to feed the mess of us – and look after a little daughter, too. Sweetest little girl. Reminded me of June when she was a baby.

But this little girl had no fear. She's a-toddling along behind her Mama when she fixes her eyes on ole Leighton. Walks right over, crawls up on his lap, stretches out her little baby arms, and hugs Leighton's neck. Her little cheek up there next to his. Now, you don't want to get near him. So, I turn easy-like to pull her off him, and I see a big ole tear roll down his ugly face. Leighton turns to me and says, "What you looking at?" And he squeezes that baby with those big ole ham hands of his and sends her back to her Mama.

We eat our dinner. Leighton's chewing on an old cold biscuit and says, "That's the first hug I've had since I was twelve."

When the Lord looked out over the five thousand, he was moved to feed them. And that multitude included the likes of Leighton and me. I wanted to come home. And I'm gonna try to stick it out. *(to BURL)* My brother here just said come home.