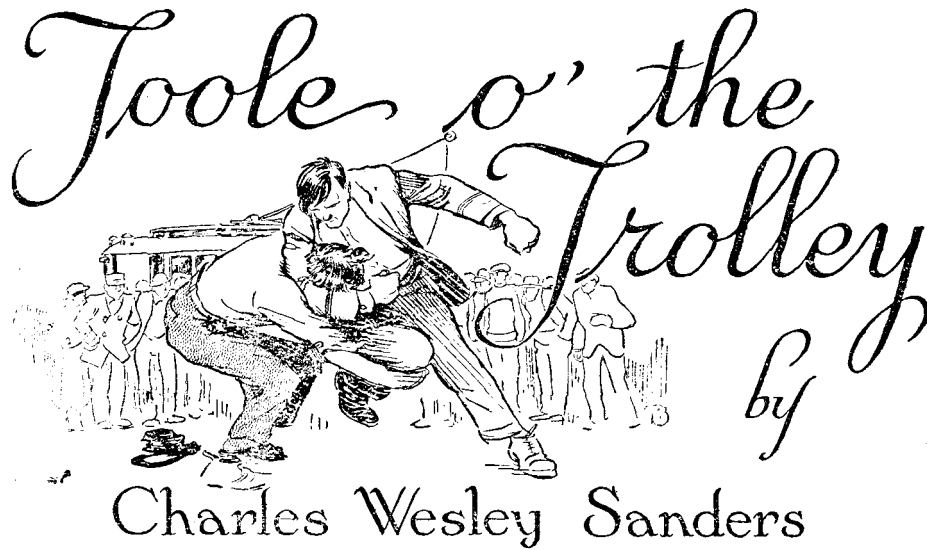


Toole o' the Trolley



by Charles Wesley Sanders

UNDER the general title, "Toole o' the Trolley," we are opening a new series of stories by Charles Wesley Sanders. Here is the first of these tales, which are jammed full of human interest and sizzling with action. Toole is bound to prove a popular character, and "Fares, Please!" will give you a close-up of this red-headed fellow who is as refreshing as he is powerful.

"**H**O, hum! has it come to this?" said Toole to himself.

He stood in the entrance to the building which housed the offices of the suburban street railroad company. He was going up-stairs to ask the super for a job. He was thirty-four years old, and for sixteen years he had worked on railroads—not short-line railroads which used festive bug-juice, but railroads where you had to keep 'em hot with bituminous.

Now he was in disgrace, and he had to have a job. He had always been an easy liver, and when he had found himself out in the cold, cruel world, there wasn't a paying-teller in any bank anywhere who would have greeted him with anything but a blank stare.

"I reckon it has." He therefore answered his own question.

So he mounted the steps to the long hall and went up in the elevator. A fluffy young woman in the super's outer office guessed maybe he might see the super. He had to wait fifteen

minutes, and he waited in growing disgust with his situation. Wouldn't he look nice turning the crank on the front end of a trolley car, holding himself in readiness to stop every time any sod-buster waved a horny hand at a road-crossing?

When fluffy femininity said the super would see him, he entered belligerently.

He had expected to see a frail pencil-pusher behind a mahogany desk, so that he was not prepared to confront the wide-shouldered person who glanced at him over the top of a perfectly flat desk.

"Looking for a job?" the super asked.

He needed men badly, but he didn't permit his tone to be hopeful. His system was to make the men who applied to him think that he would be doing them a personal favor even to consider an application.

"That's me," said Toole.

"Railroad man?"

"Yeh," Toole answered with a grin.

"Why the merriment?" the super inquired.

"It always seems funny to me to hear you

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trolley folks talk about railroadin’,” Toole replied.

“What were you fired for?” the super flashed out at him.

Toole was taken aback. How the deuce did this guy know he had been fired? He would not have been startled if an official of a steam road had flung the question at him, but he hadn’t supposed that the trolley folks kept cases on real rails.

“Fightin’,” he answered.

“Ah,” said the super, and his big eyebrows were lifted, “tell me about that.”

Toole leaned toward him rather eagerly. He had felt that injustice had been done him when he had been dismissed, and he wanted to show this super that he had acted only as any red-blooded man would act in such a situation. The super somehow looked as if he might be a fighting man himself.

“I was engineer on a yard engine on a pike over west of Chi,” Toole said. “For conductor I had a red-headed Irishman that we called Rainbow. We called him that because he had red hair, green eyes, and a yellow streak up and down his back. He thrun a piece of coal at me one day when I didn’t back down to a drag as fast as he wanted me to. The piece of coal hit me in the back of the head and made it bleed. I guess I seen as red as his hair for a minute.”

Toole paused.

“What did you do to Rainbow?” the super asked.

“That guy caused me a lot of worry,” Toole answered with a soft sigh. “But at that I think them docs at the hospital was kiddin’ me. Why, for a week they said Rainbow hadn’t no chance of gettin’ better. They said they expected each minute would be his last. But he finally pulled through.”

“What did you use on him?” the super asked.

“Why,” said Toole, “just my hands. I smashed him a few, and then I picked him up

and thrun him down on the grit. I thrun him harder than I meant to.”

The super passed his hands across his mouth. Toole couldn’t see that the hand hid a grin. The super spoke severely:

“You have no recommend of any sort?”

“I took a trip over your road yesterday,” Toole answered, “and it seemed to me that what you needed was a few real men on it. It seemed to me that you had about as many recommends runnin’ cars as any road—even a trolley road—ought to be asked to stand for.”

“Oh, you mustn’t knock our crews,” the super said, and this time he failed to put up a hand to hide the grin which came to his lips.

“I wasn’t knockin’,” Toole assured him. “I was just tellin’ you how things seemed to me.”

“You’re refreshing,” the super said.

“That’s one thing about me,” Toole said. “I don’t drink a drop. Never did.”

“Drink?” the super repeated. “Who said anything about drink?”

“I thought—you mentioned refreshments,” said Toole.

The super laughed.

“I’ll give you a job,” the super said. “But, of course, you couldn’t expect me to put you on the main line at once. We have a branch line that runs over to a village called Mansion. There is a stone quarry at Mansion. A lot of foreigners work out there. Nights they come into the city. Mansion is dry.”

“Come in to get a snootful,” said Toole.

“I don’t know what they come in for,” the super said. “Your business will be to see that each and every one of them pays his fare.”

“I’m no conductor,” Toole objected. “If I work for you at all, it’ll be on the front end, and the Lord knows that will be bad enough.”

“Certainly,” the super said. “I wouldn’t expect an engineer to become a conductor on a trolley line. But sometimes the conductor needs assistance to collect his fares.”

“It’s a short run, and the car gets crowded

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with these here hunkies," Toole said, to show the super that he was rapidly catching on to the intricacies of bug-juice railroading.

"Well, something like that," the super assented gravely.

He wrote a note on a sheet of paper that lay on his desk, put it into an envelope, sealed the envelope carefully, addressed it, and pushed it across the desk to Toole.

"You take that note out to Mr. Green at the power-house," he said. "This is Friday. He'll want to break you in to-day, and probably he'll put you to work to-morrow. The power-house is at Gordon, where the branch line forks off from the main line. You'll go right out there, will you?"

"Right this minute," Toole answered.

He rose and started for the door. He heard the super cough.

"You understand, Mr. Toole," the super said, "that *positively* we allow no fighting on our railroad."

Toole looked back with his hand on the knob.

"Positively, mister," he said, "your recommends and all the people that patronize your lines will think that the original peaceful William is at the front end of my car. An armless Quaker will look like a riot alongside of me from now on."

"Good day," the super said.

"So-long," said Toole.

He walked down to the public square and boarded a main-line car and rode out to the power-house. Mr. Green was among those present there, and he read the super's note to him with an odd expression on his face. He even shook hands with Toole with a cordiality which Toole could not understand.

"Mr. Reynolds tells me you were discharged for fighting, Mr. Toole," Green said. "Of course, you know this is peaceful valley out here, especially on the branch line. Our passengers wouldn't know what to make of

fisticuffs. You have a fighting eye, Mr. Toole."

"I'll keep my eyes peeled straight ahead," Toole promised. "I've got to have board-money pretty darned soon, just between you and me."

"Quite so," said Green. "Being busted is a great incentive to good behavior. Here comes the car from Mansion now. Come over and I'll introduce you to Cap'n Goodyear, the conductor."

"Cap'n," said Toole to himself, "you'd think this was a shipyard—or mebbe a dry-dock."

Green was a little, bustling man, and Toole had not liked him. He had particularly not liked him because Green had called him "Mr. Toole." But the cap'n was a different proposition. He was perhaps forty, and he could not be called a handsome man. But the hand which he extended to Toole was a good deal like what is known in the meat trade as a picnic ham. The ham was suspended from a long, heavy arm, and the arm was attached to a shoulder that an ox might not have been ashamed of.

"Oh, so you was fired off en a steam road for fightin'?" the cap'n said. "Well, well! Youngsters will get into scraps. I'm a deep-sea man myself. Used to command a schooner till I settled down. I been in a few mixups myself. But no more, no more. I hope if you get riled, Toole, old horse, that you'll take it out on somebody else."

"You ain't in a mite of danger from me, cap'n," Toole assured him. "You must weigh in at about three hundred, don't you? I'm a lightweight myself—only a hundred and eighty."

"Two hundred forty, stripped, is mine," the cap'n said immodestly. "Well, we're ready to go over to Mansion. I see the motorman is on board. Come along, Toole."

When the cap'n spoke the motorman had been on board, but he was not on board by the time the cap'n and Toole reached the car. He had stepped nimbly down, and he now faced the cap'n with a hopeful look on his face.

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"Got a new man, have you, cap'n?" he asked.

"Yeh," the cap'n said, "but he ain't broke in yet. He's a steam engineer. You got to take him one trip, at least, to show him how to handle the juice."

"Not me," the motorman said. "I'm done. I'm sick. I'm dyin'. I got typhoid, dip'thery, measles, mumps, and a touch of the pip."

"And a general disinclination to continue on this here run," the cap'n said.

"After last night I—"

"Never mind last night," the cap'n interrupted. "Last night is gone away on the wings of darkness. You climb into that there cupola and run this here car out about two miles, as far as the first stop, and show Toole how to manipulate the machinery. He'll tumble fast. Then you can hop down and walk back."

"Very well," the motorman agreed, "but two miles only. No more."

"This is the original T. S. R. and R. W. Railroad, ain't it?" Toole asked when they had bumped a mile into open country.

"What's that?" the motorman asked.

"Two streaks of rust and a right-of-way," Toole answered. "Where's the whistling-post you want to hop down at. I guess I've got the notion of this juice-handle right now."

"The sooner I hop down the less I'll have to walk," the motorman said. "That'll be right here, if you don't mind."

Toole stopped the car. The stop juggled the cap'n about the rear platform, and the cap'n almost tore out the bell-rope in giving Toole the go-ahead. Toole answered the signal with such celerity that the cap'n was half-way out the rear window before he caught himself.

"If he's givin' an imitation of real railroadin', leave me in peace on a trolley line," the cap'n grumbled.

Between this and Mansion, Toole had to make only two stops. Once he ran a hundred yards beyond an aged woman who waved an

umbrella at him and spoke rapid words he could not hear. The second time he halted right at the crossing for a red-cheeked country girl. He looked back at her, and she smiled at him.

For the next five miles all he had to do was to let 'er slide. All about him were the sunny fields of early summer. The air was heavy with sweet smells. Toole almost drowsed.

"It's a shame to take money for this," he said.

He was confirmed in that opinion all through the warm afternoon. He made six round-trips, and had to stop no more than twice to a trip, on an average. On the rear platform the cap'n dozed on his stool.

"A man could save his money, buy a little farm along here some place, and live on easy street the rest of his life," Toole said.

By seven o'clock that evening, while they were pulling into Mansion, he had figured out how much he would have to save to buy five acres of land. The cap'n said it could be bought for three hundred dollars an acre. In his mind Toole had erected a snug bungalow on a spot which he had picked out as the car passed it.

As they neared Mansion he looked ahead. He rubbed his eyes to make sure that this was not a distortion of his day-dream. Two-score men were in front of the Mansion station. They were elbowing each other about and talking loudly.

Before the car stopped the cap'n came to the front end and locked Toole's door. Then he locked the door leading into the car.

"For why?" Toole asked.

"They're going to the city," the cap'n said. "I told you Mansion was dry. So are they. Let 'em herd in the back door. When they get inside I'll swing the trolley around, and you can come to the other end and pull out."

Toole heard the mob fight its way into the car. When the last man had climbed up from the platform the cap'n unlocked the door, and he and Toole went to the other end, the cap'n

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carrying the trolley pole with him.

Half a dozen men were on the platform. They seemed to be good-natured enough. They grinned down at Toole. The cap'n stepped back.

"Get inside the car," Toole yelled up at them. "You can't ride on the platform."

The men continued to grin. Toole felt himself getting mad. For a moment he forgot the super's injunction that there should be no fighting. He sprang lithely up on the platform.

"Get inside, you," he told the man nearest him.

He took the man by the shoulder. The man seemed inclined to resist, but as he pushed back against Toole he looked up and caught the expression in Toole's blazing eyes. He edged inside the car. His companions followed suit. Toole let his baleful glare follow them for a moment, and then he turned toward the cap'n. The cap'n was rubbing his picnics with, a look of satisfaction on his face.

"Right," he said, and climbed up beside the new motorman.

"Gee," Toole said, "if that guy had resisted me, I'd have been in a scrap again, most likely. I clean forgot what the super said."

The cap'n laughed aloud. Toole looked at him. There was a queer expression on the cap'n's face now. But Toole had the car under way, and he had to give it his attention. The sun had set, and he would soon be plowing along in darkness.

They arrived at the other terminal in good order. The cap'n had pushed through the mob and had collected the last fare. He stood beside Toole, wiping sweat from his big face.

"We lay over here for thirty minutes," he said. "This is the last trip to-night, you know."

"We get that gang going back?" Toole asked.

"We get 'em," the cap'n answered. "We do get 'em."

And they sure did. The gang arrived in a bunch about a minute before the car was due to

leave. The cap'n and Toole were on the ground. The front doors were locked. The crowd fought its way into the car again.

Toole sensed a change in the mood of his passengers. He judged the firewater sold hereabouts must have been especially potent. Some of the men had acquired rousing jags in the few minutes they had had. Almost all of them had bottles under their arms or sticking from their coat-pockets.

"That's sickenin'," Toole told the cap'n. "I never could see the sense in that kind of business. They're sure hawgs for redeye."

The cap'n made no answer. He seemed suddenly to be full of business. As the car started he took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves. He disengaged a big watch-chain from his vest and slipped watch and chain into his pants' pocket.

"What's comin' off?" Toole asked.

"Our undershirts mebbe before we get through," the cap'n answered. "You never can tell."

He unlocked the front door and threw it back.

"Fares!" he yelled.

The men nearest the door paid quietly. The cap'n pushed his way into the reeking mob. Toole pricked up his ears. He was getting wise. He slackened the car's speed and turned his head so that he could hear the first disturbing sound from within the car.

"Pay or get off!"

The cap'n's voice rolled back to Toole thunderously. Toole was sure the cap'n meant just what he said. Toole slowed up a little more.

"Cling!"

The bell above Toole's head snapped out the stop-signal, Toole stopped in two movements, one of which shut off the power and the other of which applied the air. It was as effective as if he had used the emergency on an engine.

Those of the passengers who were on their feet surged toward the front door. Then they

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surged back. There were cries of anger, curses both loud and deep. Toole got softly to his feet, carrying his crank with him. On second thought he dropped the crank. He might kill a man with that.

Toole's heart was singing a battle hymn. Curiously enough he had a swift mental picture of the big-shouldered super sitting at his desk. It dawned on him that the super had been stringing him. He saw quite clearly now why the super had put him on this run, saw why the other motor-man had quit, saw why the cap'n was the permanent skipper.

As Toole faced the door the cap'n was fighting his way toward it. He had one of his picnics twined in the collar of a man. The man had been jerked from his feet either by the cap'n's mighty arm or by the sudden stopping of the car. In any event, the cap'n was dragging him out as if he were a sack of meal.

When the cap'n reached the platform he raised the man with one twist of his hand and hoisted him through the door. The man struck the ground on all fours. The cap'n turned alertly to the door.

"Hey, you, Monk and Hitch, you come out here and take your medicine," he yelled. "You've had it comin' to you for a long time. It'll be a bitter dose, but it'll do you good. Come, now."

The cap'n would have been an eminent psychologist if he had gone in for that sort of thing. He knew that the two, whom their mates called Monk and Hitch, were the trouble-makers. Long ago he had decided that if he could take care of those two he could take care of the others. He had seen how they had bullied the gang. No gang, he argued, likes to be bullied. He believed the gang would stand aside if there was any chance that Monk and Hitch would get what was coming to them.

"Them two," he confided to Toole in a swift aside, "hasn't paid no fare for two months. What could I do alone? I ain't never had a real

he-man on board the ship since I took command. Ah!"

He took his breath sharply, for Hitch had suddenly appeared in the doorway out of the crowd. Monk was at his back. Toole glanced at them, and the muscles on his lean body hardened. His eyes lighted up joyfully.

Hitch and Monk were molded after the cap'n's fashion. Digging stone from the hillsides at Mansion had hardened them. Toole foresaw that he and the cap'n had their work cut out for them.

"'N' what did ye want?" Hitch asked with a mirthless grin on his thick lips.

"I'm hoppin' down, Toole," the cap'n whispered. "Follow me quick. We'll need the room."

He suited his action to his words. Toole's feet hit the ground almost as quickly as the cap'n's own. Up on the platform they heard Hitch laugh. Monk's laugh came like an echo.

The cap'n spoke then. Some of his words were nautical and not understandable to Toole, but there were interjections which any man could understand. Those interjections were not printable, but they seemed to be full of meaning to the two roughnecks up above.

"Is that so?" Hitch bellowed. "We'll see."

He came hurtling to the ground, followed by the redoubtable Monk. The cap'n backed away, drawing Toole with him.

"Just a minute now," the cap'n ordered. "Let the gang get down for the show. It's free."

The gang tumbled out and formed a circle, the four men within it.

"What ye want?" Hitch asked tauntingly.

"Ye haven't paid your fare," the cap'n said.

"It comes to eight-ninety in all. I've kept track of it. Pay up, the both of ye."

Hitch was no language dude. He almost matched the cap'n's own phrases of a moment before.

While he did so Toole had moved cautiously forward, dragging his feet so that Hitch would

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not observe his advance. Then Toole sprang. He knew this was no time for parley. He understood the value of the first punch.

It was a beauty. As he sprang Hitch half turned to him, so that the side of Hitch's jaw was presented to receive the blow. He reeled.

"Tough," said Toole to himself.

He brought his left fist up from his hip and Hitch took it on the mouth. He was bewildered, but he still kept his feet. Toole smashed at him again with a right-hand swing, but missed. Hitch poked one to Toole's eye.

Meantime the cap'n, who was a rough-and-tumble fighter of a day that is gone, had rushed Monk. Monk accepted him with a howl of joy. They closed and went to the ground, the cap'n on top.

Toole and Hitch squared away. Toole was astonished to discover that Hitch, in spite of his bulk and his ungainliness, was a good boxer. They began to fight warily.

As they circled about Toole heard a slight snapping sound from the direction of the cap'n and Monk. Monk screamed. The cap'n stood up. Monk lay still.

"Busted his arm above the shoulder," the cap'n said. "I learned that trick in Japan. It's a good one. Lemme give this lad a taste of it."

"If you touch him I'll kill you," Toole said, and for a moment he turned his blazing blue eyes on the cap'n.

The cap'n stepped back.

"You'll have a fine peeper in the mornin'," he observed. "Of course it's your peeper."

Anger, as cold as ice, was in Toole's veins. No man had ever blacked his eye before. He hadn't thought Hitch had it in him.

But he was not in the least bewildered. While the eye was swelling, he could still see out of it.

They continued to circle and feint. Suddenly Toole sent a straight uppercut against Hitch's jaw. Hitch's head snapped back. Toole's left went into Hitch's solar plexus. Hitch swayed,

grunting, and went to his knees.

A murmur of awe came from the sobered crowd. They had thought the man didn't live who could do that to the bully.

"Now," the cap'n howled gleefully. "Now the clock is strikin' the hour. Put it to him. Smash him down and give him the boots. Finish him up clean and neat so's he'll wander in green fields and pick hippocampuses' snouts beside the flowing river. The boots, lad!"

In his eagerness he pressed forward, his big hands outstretched toward the kneeling man.

Toole turned on him. "Leave him be," said Toole. "He's mine. He belongs to me."

The cap'n fell back before the cold fury in Toole's eyes. He had never fallen back before the fury in any man's eyes. But Toole's expression dazed him.

"Th' lad is murderous," he confided to one of those whom he had lately despised, for he had to confide in somebody.

"He's a hell-bender," the quarryman assented grimly. "We been doin' wrong. No more roughhouse on this trolley line for me."

"You've emptied out a mouthful that's needed emptyin' for some time," the cap'n said.

Hitch got slowly to his feet. He stood doubled over for a moment as if he were in pain. Then he suddenly came erect and jumped for Toole.

But Toole had been watching him, and he had seen the preliminary gathering of the man's muscles. He stepped aside, and as Hitch drove past him, he shot his fist against Hitch's jaw again. Hitch spun around. Toole seized his arm and helped him on his way. When Hitch stopped spinning they were facing each other. Hitch was wabbly.

"Here's where you get it," Toole said calmly. "I bet when you wake up, you'll pay your fare. Where'll you have it, ol'-timer?"

Hitch tried to dodge the blow that was coming straight for his jaw, but he only succeeded in throwing up his head, and so got

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the full force of it.

His hands went down to his sides. His big body quivered. Then he slowly sank to the ground.

The cap'n ranged himself alongside Toole.

"Several gentlemen haven't paid their fares," he said. "It was an oversight, prob'ly. Now is the time to remedy it."

They surged about him and dropped their quarters into his hands. Not one failed to pay.

"I've skipped a good many of you in the past," the cap'n said. "This'll just about make you and the company square. All aboard for Mansion!"

They piled on board. Toole and the cap'n carried Hitch and Monk.

"We'll get a doctor for you, Monk," the cap'n said.

An hour later they were returning to town.

The car was empty. Toole caressed his damaged eye.

The cap'n leaned in the doorway. For some time he did not speak. Toole glanced up at him.

"This is the place," Toole said.

"What place?"

"I'm going to buy a bit of land here, build me a nice little cottage, marry one of these rosy-cheeked girls, and settle down," said Toole.

The cap'n stared down at him scornfully.

"Every spring," he said, "the sea calls for me. But I can't go back. I'm fifty, even if you don't think so. I wouldn't last long at sea. I got to get a little nest egg. But you—why, you're only a kid. The steam'll be callin' you within a week, and it'll get you—somehow."

Toole considered that for a space.

"I wonder," he said at last, "who's runnin' that danged old teakettle of mine tonight?"