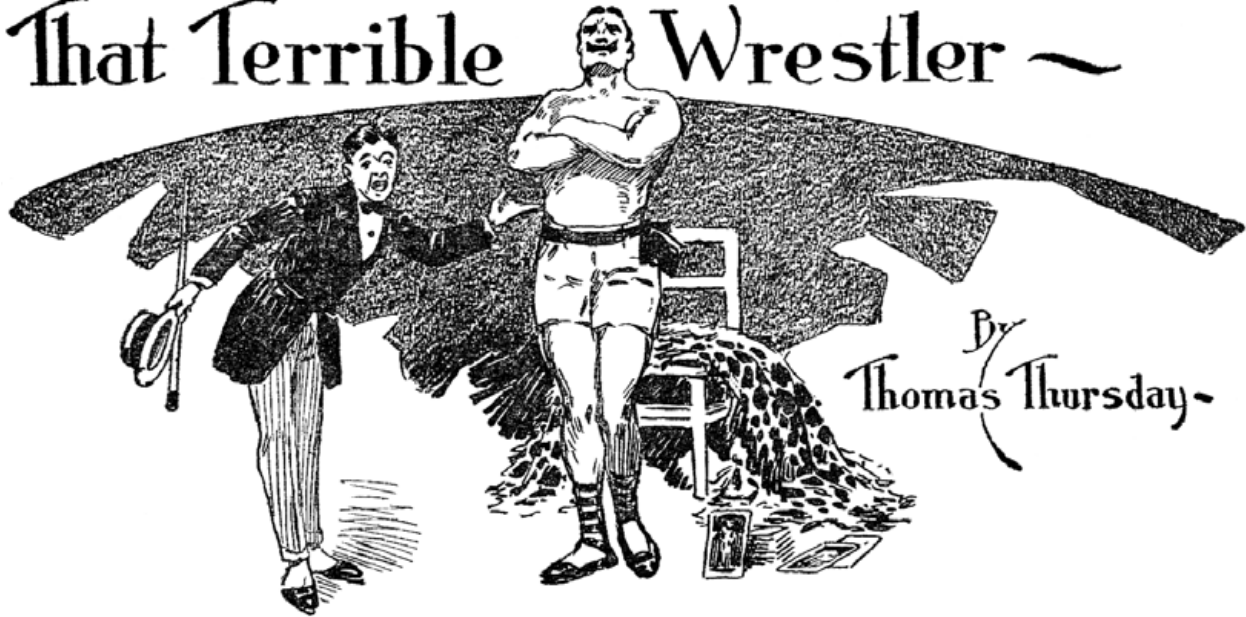


That Terrible Wrestler ~



(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I. HUSKY AND ROUGH.

IN round numbers, his name was "Moogoo, the Terrible," and he claimed to be no less than the champion of Indo-Palooka, which you may look up in your geography—without success. If you do find it, drop me a radio; I've got a complete set of headaches from looking up other stuff concerning the chap. However, speaking of fried trout—as we wasn't doing—Mr. Moogoo turned out to be a fast male in more pays than one. Kindly adjust your headphones for a moment while I broadcast the plot.

The World of Joy Carnival pulled into a slab named Pokerpan, Kansas, the third stop of the season. I was mismanaging the side show, also known as the kid show, and business was great—for somebody. Well, as the oil-stock salesman remarked, business was so bad around the midway that Tim Mackensie, the bird who paid the bills—when he felt like it—walked around the lot with his face registering assorted disgust. If you care to observe a sad-looking piffo, never mind studying the artistic line of the late Dante's pan; take a peek at the average carnival "Old Man" when business is punk.

"Doc," he growled to me, with his hands behind his back and a fat cigar clinched in his trap, "your show has ten high-class attractions. Why ain't we

getting the money?"

"Why?" I echoed. "Try and keep your brain awake for a few minutes and I'll tell you. The so-called freaks you booked for this outfit are stale, timeworn, and altogether not! The sooner we get the idea out of our thick heads that all the folks out here in the sticks are grade-A dumbbells, the sooner we'll gather the golden moss. What we need is something romantic, something foreign, with a touch of mystery surrounding it.

"For example, take a look at the pugilistic trade. Remember when a gent entitled Señor Firpo landed on our shores with a complete outfit of nothing? A short time later, take a peek at the jovial señor. Had his name been 'Batling' O'Goldberg or 'Fifty-six Round' McSnyder, why, he probably still would have been battling around the sticks. In other words, Mr. Mackensie, what we need is something odd. You know darn well that the late Mr. Barnum was all wrong when he said: 'The people like to be humbugged.' Only idiots like that sort of thing. Give 'em something real, and they'll flock into our tents!"

"Doc," said the Old Man, "I think you're right! I gotta letter this morning from a flipper named J. Stockbridge Callahan. He says he's a explorer, and while he was in a joint called Indo-Palooka—did you ever hear of that slab?—he discovered a chump labeled Moogoo, the Terrible."

"Well," I urged, "what's the rest of the plot?"

“Mr. Callahan says in his letter that Moogoo is the champeen wrestler of the world, though he never had a chance to try out birds like ‘Strangler’ Lewis and Frank Gotch and the like, because they would all ignore his challenges. So he wrote to ask if he could book out with our trick and challenge all comers from the platform. What d’yer say, Doc?”

“Grab ‘im!” I yelled promptly. “From where I sit, I think our press agent—dumb wonder that he is—could play up a name like Moogoo, the Terrible to a fare you well. He may be a large portion of applesauce, but even applesauce is better than the raspberry, and that’s exactly what we’re getting now.”

“I think I’ll take a chance,” said the Old Man.

“Do that!” I begged.

He did.

Three days later I noted the Old Man and two other chaps ambling down the midway toward the kid show. As they loomed—whatever that means—nearer, I had little difficulty in picking out Mr. Moogoo, the Terrible. More, I began to understand the “Terrible” part of the name.

Take a look at this make-up: Weight, two-ninety; face, as swarthy as a ton of coal; a collection of mustachios that would have made any walrus do a high dive off the cliff from pure envy; eyes, piercing black; and a nose that must have been drafted off a pug dog. He was considerable man, what?

“Doc,” opened up the Old Man, “meet Mr. J. Stockbridge Callahan.”

“Charmed to meet you,” I returned, using my best drawing-room etiquette, not that I’m a riot in drawing rooms. “Who’s your little boyfriend?”

“Moogoo doesn’t speak much English,” reported Callahan.

“Where does he hail from?” I wanted to know.

“He’s a native of Indo-Palooka,” he replied. Then, turning to the big slice of manhood, he said: “Omm-ti-gar wahtum?”

Moogoo stuck out his hairy hand and I shook it. When he let it go, I got the notion that a truck had just run over my fingers. Boy, what a grip that piffo had!

“Moogoo is very strong,” warbled Callahan with a grin. “Back in far-off Palooka, he used to bend trees for his morning exercise. He can take a coconut and split it open between his thumb and pinky. Is it any wonder that all the professional wrestlers ignore his challenges? Of course, I admit

that Moogoo’s wrestling is rather crude, but when he gets a little polish, he’ll be the champion of champions. Just now he prefers to wrestle in his own peculiar style which, by the way, is rather rough.”

“Let’s get down to business,” mumbled the Old Man. “A act like this may not go over well, and—er—therefore, the salary to start will be not so good. How much was you figgering on asking, Mr. Callahan?”

“I’ll go easy on you, Mr. Mackensie.” The dapper manager beamed. “The main idea, to be sure, is to give Moogoo a chance to test his strength against all comers. As to the—ah—stipend, would five hundred per week be about right?”

Hot cocoa!

“No,” purred the Old Man; “it wouldn’t be too much—for Napoleon or ‘Babe’ Ruth. What are you trying to do—give me a pushing around? I guess you better book your man-mauler in a bank!”

“Perhaps you’re right, my dear Mr. Mackensie,” conceded Callahan. “Anyway, I prefer not to quarrel over mere money matters. Suppose you start us off at only two hundred a week? Then you can see for yourself how Moogoo draws in the crowds. I’m positive he’ll be the biggest hit since Barnum cleaned up with Jumbo and General Tom Thumb!”

“All right,” agreed the Old Man. “I’ll start you off at fifty per week. Take it or blow off the lot.”

Callahan took it.

CHAPTER II.

ALL HOLDS PERMITTED.

DURING the next few days our nimble-brained press agent was busier than a one-armed riveter working for a bonus. He called to see the editor of *The Pokerpan Daily Journal and Home Pal*—that’s a peach, what?—and placed at least nine pounds of copy in the dazed gent’s hand, including assorted photographs of Moogoo. According to the write-up, Moogoo was the mule’s heehaw.

It told of his discovery by Monsieur Callahan in far-off and long-ago Indo-Palooka—and I bet many a school kid busted his eyesight looking that up in his geography. Then it told how the great wrestlers of the world had repeatedly ignored his challenges, all being afraid of his great strength. Then it went on to say that the management offered five hundred

dollars to any man who could remain five minutes against him without being knocked flat on his shoulder blades.

The next five thousand words were devoted to a description of the habitat of Indo-Palooka. It was all about the various wild animals that Moogoo used to grapple with—just for exercise, I guess. Then it explained how he was discovered by J. Stockbridge Callahan, Ph.D., O.K., and S.O.S., the noted explorer, a Fellow of the Royal Institute of the Liverwurst Islands.

Personally, I saw a laugh in every line, and so should you. The way the natives swallowed that bait, though, was positively wholesome. Take it from me, if the boys who wrote the “Grimm’s Fairy Tales” were alive today, they’d be a press agent for a carnival or a circus. In fact, many an unheralded and unsung copy-pounder has written stuff for his show that would surpass Little Red Riding Hood, Jack and the Bean Stalk, not to mention—though that’s what I’m doing—Alice in Wonderland. No fooling!

Well, Saturday evening came along, as it generally does. The strong boys of the incorporated village of Pokerpan were out in force, the main object being to bat Moogoo for a home run, thus gathering in the nifty sum of five hundred berries. As to the five hundred, why, the Old Man didn’t know anything about that until he had read it in the paper. However, after Callahan had held his ear for a few minutes, the Old Man was sold on the idea, and that was all settled.

“In fact, my dear Mr. Mackensie,” concluded Callahan, “the reward offered should be at least one thousand, instead of a paltry five hundred. Why, if Moogoo knew that such a small amount was offered against his prowess he might get balky and quit! He’s temperamental, that’s what I mean.”

“Temperamental, hey?” echoed the Old Man. “How in the Sam Hill can a stonehead like that get temperamental? Go and cut yourself a slice of prune cake—you amuse me! Anyway, if I lose that five hundred forfeit money, that strong boy of yours might just as well take a quick dive into a manhole.”

“No danger, Mr. Mackensie,” assured Callahan. “When the stars turn green, and the bluebirds turn pink; when the chipmunks wear fins, and the bullfrogs sing mezzo-soprano, then will Moogoo be in danger of defeat!”

“Blah!” remarked the Old Man and blew down

the midway.

The side show was jammed. Joe Sweeney, the famous inside lecturer—he will even admit that Bryan and Mr. Cicero were darn good plumbers, when it came to talking—had prepared a corking special spiel on the merits of Moogoo. What Joseph said consumed forty minutes and a heap of air.

He traced Moogoo’s ancestry from the Isle of Nimrod to the shores of Indo-Palooka. There, the famous explorer, Professor J. Stockbridge Callahan, discovered him in the act of wrestling a flock of lions, panthers, and a few assorted baboons. That, according to the glib Joseph, constituted Moogoo’s training diet. While the customers jammed around the platform, Joseph summed up this way:

“And now, la-dees and gentle-mun-n, if there is a single son of the fair village of Pokerpan in the tent tonight who thinks he would like to wrestle with Moogoo, the Terrible, let that brave son step forward! An-ybodee? An-ybodee? I say, does anybody accept the challenge? Remembah, the risk is all yours. This show, will not be held responsible for broken bones, necks, livers, or what have you? Anybody coming up here to wrestle with Moogoo? An-ybodee?”

There was a pause. Then there was another pause. After that, a large edition of youth pushed his way through the crowd and edged to the platform. From where I stood, he looked like a mixture of Jess Willard and a piano mover. His hair was red, and his face was red, and his lips were thin and mean.

“Can you wrestle?” asked Sweeney, as the person made his way toward the platform.

“I kin,” was the laconic reply.

“Is the hospital any good in this town?” Joe Sweeney asked nobody in particular.

“D’yer figger on having that big stiff going there?” snapped back the husky.

“A wisecracking boy, hey?” mused Joe.

“You and me both,” was the rejoinder.

“Who’d you ever wrestle before?” Joe wanted to know.

“Columbus, Grant, and Andrew Jackson. Anyway, what’s the difference? What do you care who I wrestled before, hey? I believe in the Constitution of the United States, know that the war is over, think that the Statue of Liberty is high enough, and that all pretzels are crooked. Now can I wrestle that big boloney?”

“Think you’re funny?” snapped Joseph.

“Know it,” comes back the fast talker.

“Oh, you do, do you? Well, when Moogoo gets his arm around that thick neck of yours—curtains! Er—are you willing to sign a paper relieving this carnival of all responsibility for your sudden demise, due to an encounter with Moogoo, the Terrible?”

“Will I? Mister, just gimme the pencil and paper!”

He was a game boy, eh? However, many a bright boy has been dimmed in this world, and this dizzy dunce was due for his. Step up a little closer to the platform and watch Moogoo flatten him like the Lincoln Highway.

“Have you gotta name?” asked Joe, when the wisecracker had climbed to the stand.

“I sure have,” he tossed back. “What did yer think I was—a blank? Me name is Josiah Littletree Balsam, and I’m twenty-two years old, and I can lick any wrestler in the U.S.A. Weight, two hundred pounds—all muscles. Take a think at that!”

“I have,” said Joseph, “and I think that when two hundred pounds hit the floor it will require two carpenters to repair it. All right! Stand back, la-dees and gentle-mun, Moogoo is about to give a demonstration of how to render Mr. Josiah Littletree Balsam null and void.

“Remembah, Mr. Balsam, all holds go!” he went on. “That means toe holds, arm holds, foot holds, finger holds, and even eye holds. In fact, Mr. Balsam, you are permitted to use anything but an ax and cannon in your bout with Moogoo. La-dees and gentle-mun, in this cor-r-ner, Mr. Joseph Littletree Balsam, of Lord-knows-where, who is the challenger. In this cor-r-ner, Moogoo, the Terrible, of far-off Indo-Palooka. Ready? Le’s go!”

They went.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT WOULD NEVER HAPPEN.

ACCORDING to his start, Balsam was very ambitious. Without wasting any time, he hauled off and socked Moogoo a terrific right swing to the kisser, or mouth. However, Joseph had said nothing about boxing being barred, but when Balsam repeated the dose, why, it seemed to awaken Moogoo to the fact that either a mosquito or a fly was annoying him.

“So you’re a champ, hey?” snorted Balsam, at the same time landing a torrid left jab to Moogoo’s beak, or nose. “Well, champ, take this here wallop to the chin home to your mamma and tell her that I—”

That was all I, or any of the customers, heard. However, if the eye does not deceive, Moogoo leaped upon “Battling” Balsam, grabbed that amazed chap by everything but his shins, and then, with a mighty heave, tossed the challenger clean over the heads of the audience and landed him near the side-wall canvas.

After which, Moogoo walked up and down the platform, with his chest expanded to the full, and let out a few ferocious blasts of rage. That over with, he settled in his corner and flashed a pair of wicked eyes on one and all.

“Well, is there anybody else in this audience who thinks that Moogoo, the Terrible is a joke?” asked Joe quietly. “The five hundred dollars reward is still here to be won by some intrepid son of Pokerpan. An-ybodee? I say, is there an-ybodee else?”

Nope, boys and girls: there was nobody else. A few minutes later, all the strong boys had decided to pass on to the other attractions. Moogoo looked good, eh?

Yep—too good!

The next town we played was laboring under the fetching title of Pruneberry Corners. And you needn’t bother to look that up in your geography. It was one of those duck-in-and-duck-out burgs that most shows have to play now and then to “break” a big jump. This is a snapshot description of it—a general store, a blacksmith shop, and a haystack. That’s all there was; there wasn’t any more.

Owing to Moogoo’s good showing, Callahan had got the Old Man to raise the reward from five hundred dollars to a thousand.

“You’ve got the same chance of losing that thousand,” enthused the suave Callahan, “that I have of raising six mustaches on the upper lip!”

“Yeah,” admitted Tim Mackensie; “but a thousand bucks is a bunch of pennies. If some chump happens to knock Moogoo for a goal—”

“When Caesar comes to life and does a back flip off the Woolworth Building,” began Manager Callahan, “and Napoleon takes up stenography, when flivvers run on hair tonic, and black crows stay out of cornfields—then, my dear Mr. Mackensie, will you stand a chance of losing your

money!”

CHAPTER IV.
EAGER FOR THE FRAY.

THANKS to our elastic-brained press agent, the side show was jammed to the hilt on the opening night. There was a large “spread” in the Pruneberry Corners *Daily Cub* that would have taxed the imagination of Milton, Shakespeare, and—er—even Santa Claus.

According to this latest blurb, Moogoo, the Terrible was not only the strongest man that had ever appeared on this whirling comedy ball called Earth, but he was also “a muscular marvel, the Atlas of strength, and the most perfect human—” et cetera.

All of this was the finest sort of pure piffle-peddling.

Joe Sweeney concluded his customary talk on Moogoo and his merits, while the crowd hemmed the platform, open-mouthed and ears flapping forward. Now and then Moogoo would let forth a slight growl, twiddle his huge mustache, and the like.

“Anybody willing to try for the one-thousand-dollar reward?” asked Joe. “Is there anybody, I say, in the beautiful village of Pruneberry Corners, who is willing to risk his neck, limbs, and good health in a wrestling match with Moogoo?”

Joseph paused dramatically for a moment; he was a master of that trick. “I repeat,” he went on, “is there anyone in this large audience who cares to win one thousand dollars? Remembah—if he does not down you within five minutes of wrestling, the prize is yours. The prize, by the way, is offered by that great showman and humanitarian, Mr. Tim Mackensie, the owner of this grea-at carnival. Anybodee?”

There was.

“Do I get the money if I knock that bird off his perch?” piped up a squeaky voice from the rear of the crowd. I whirled around to see where the noise came from. “Hey!” he yelled again. “I wanna know if I get that thousand in real money or in chestnuts?”

Joe Sweeney held up his hand for silence, with a pained expression upon his pan, or face. “My good man,” began Joe, “Mr. Tim Mackensie, the famous owner of this famous carnival, has yet to defraud a single person out of a single cent! Who are you that

you dare to question the integrity of Tim Mackensie? Besides, do you think for a moment that a little runt like you can grapple with the Mighty Moogoo? He could crush you with one hand!”

“So the money’s good, hey?” squeaks the wee chap. “Aw right—here I come! And if I don’t toss that big boloney for a touchdown, then me name ain’t Alo Buff!”

The next moment Buff leaped upon the platform, where one and all could get a good peek at ‘im. One look showed the following features—four feet nothing; sandy hair, with a moon at the exact top; a set of legs that were so bandy that one probably had to stop and ask the other to go past.

Joe looked his amazement. Ditto everybody else.

“What asylum did you escape from?” inquired Joe, as soon as he caught his breath. “D’yer think for a moment that I’d let you wrestle with a powerful giant like Moogoo? I can’t permit murder to take place under this tent!”

“Blah!” was the gentlemanly retort of Alo Buff. “Kin I help it if I ain’t as big as that large hunk of beef? Quit stallin’ and gimme a crack at that boloney. A thousand berries will help to pay off the mortgage on the farm, give maw and paw a chanct to buy a flivver—”

“Are you willing to sign this paper, relieving this show of all responsibility in case of—er—accident, that may result in your speedy demise?” intoned Joe.

“Mister, don’t make me laugh! I’ll sign anything, just to take a shot at that big flookerdoodle.”

He signed—and the next minute the panic was on.

CHAPTER V.
TRIED TOO OFTEN.

MOOGOO rushed out of his corner, grabbed Buff by the seat of his pants, and whirled him around like a top for at least two minutes.

Then he set him down, none too gently, and was amazed that the runt did not collapse upon the platform. Instead of quitting cold, Buff grinned, wiggled his cute ears, and made a leap for Moogoo’s thick neck.

Getting his wiry arms around a large portion of the same, he worked the half-nelson for all he was

worth. All of which amused Moogoo immensely. He looked purringly at the audience, as if to say: “Gosh, ain’t the flies getting naughty?”

Next, as the barbers say—sometimes in English—Moogoo reached out with his right hand, planted it firmly upon the small noodle of Buff, and gave it a slight twist. It went halfway around the neck, and I looked for hospital service in the near future, if not sooner.

“D’yer call that wrestling, you big pie face?” yelled Buff, beginning to lose his grin. “Fight like a man, you ape!”

“I told you that all holds go!” warned Joe. “Anyway, didn’t I tell you not to fuss around Moogoo, you little fish?”

The following moment the show was over—but not for Alo Buff. When it was all done, Manager Callahan claimed that Buff had suddenly extracted a wad of cotton from his hip pocket, cotton that was saturated with ether, and applied it to the extra-large snoot of the innocent Moogoo. After that, curtains! The giant collapsed like a toy balloon punctured by a healthy porcupine. Moogoo proceeded to doze off for a quiet snooze.

Pandemonium busted loose in the crowd, and all we could hear was: “Pay ‘im the thousand! Pay ‘im the thousand! The little fellow won—the little fellow whipped the big stiff! Pay ‘im the money!”

To have ignored the roar and demands of that crowd would have meant suicide, assault and battery, and civil war. With the mob following at his back, Alo Buff raced to the treasury wagon across the midway, where Tim Mackensie was obliged to pay off the thousand.

After which, Mackensie grabbed the largest guy-rope stake on the lot and went out hunting for J. Stockbridge Callahan and his little playmate, Moogoo, the Terrible. The last I saw of those birds was the Old Man chasing ‘em down the midway, one stake-length in back of Moogoo, and walloping that dazed gent at every stride.

So that, ladies and gentlemen, was that.

By the time the show closed that season, everybody had nearly forgotten the pleasant incident, except Tim Mackensie. Naturally, the chap who loses a thousand bucks would have a better memory. About two weeks after the close, I met one John O’Neill Grift. During that season

John had managed the side show for the Greater Ozone Shows.

“Speaking of wise ginks,” began Grift, as we sat sipping some coffee in one of New York’s Java palaces, “reminds me of what happened in the middle of last season.”

I gulped some coffee and flapped my ears forward.

“There was a bird named Callahan—and that was only one of his names—who claimed to be an explorer,” went on Grift. “While exploring, he discovered a sap entitled Moogoo, from Indo-Palooka, which is all applesauce.

“Moogoo was supposed to be a great wrestler, and this bird Callahan decided to exploit him with the side show of a carnival. He cleaned up pretty in one show, then he tried it on another. He hyped up the Old Man to put up a reward of one thousand dollars for any native who could pin him to the mat. The first time they tried the stunt with the show, a ‘shill’ called Josiah Littletree Balsam came up to the platform and was promptly knocked for a quart of apricots. Then Callahan got the boss to raise the reward to one thousand five hundred, which the Old Man did.”

“I bet it was some kind of a frame-up, huh?” I put in.

“Doc,” said he, “you’re a bright boy. The next town was the blow-off—for Mr. Callahan and his boyfriends. A little shrimp called Alo Buff comes up to the platform and smacks Moogoo plum on his ear. Callahan put up a howl that Buff used ether, but all he had on the cotton was molasses. They tell me that the four of ‘em had worked the game once before and got away with it.”

“Did they collect the one thousand five hundred bones when they tried that game the second time?” I wanted to know.

“Fat chance! The Old Man got wise to the trick right away and chased the gang into the next county, where he landed ‘em all in jail. D’yer think a showman could get fooled on anything as raw as that?”

“Nope,” I said. “Anybody ought to be able to see through that stunt!”

Anybody—except Tim Mackensie and company!

Now you tell one.