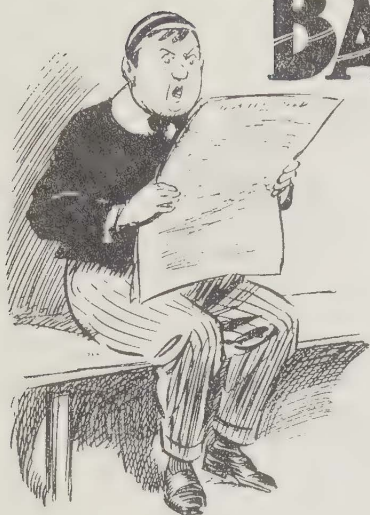




BAGGY TRIMBLE'S ROMANCE !

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

An Advertisement in the "Wayland Gazette"
leads to the most unexpected results in this
humorous little story.

THE FIRST CHAPTER

Baggy Writes a Letter

"If only I had a girl chum!"

Baggy Trimble spoke wistfully. The Fat Falstaff of the Fourth was reclining on a bench, under the old elms of the quadrangle.

It was a half-holiday, and the St. Jim's fellows were streaming out of gates, in merry parties. The sound of their gay laughter smote upon Baggy Trimble's ears with a jarring effect. And the sight of the picnic hampers which some of the fellows carried served to remind Baggy that he was hungry—his usual state. But it would be no use angling for an invitation to one of the picnics. Nobody wanted Trimble's company. The fat junior was universally avoided. The song, "Nobody Loves Me" would have been very appropriate for Baggy's present plight.

It was not surprising that nobody loved Trimble, or even liked him. He was not a lovable or even a likeable person. Chumming with Trimble was out of the question. Those who had tried the experiment had soon abandoned it in disgust. Trimble was a sneak, and a spy, and several sorts of a worm. And that explained why Baggy, like Eugene Aram in the poem, "sat remote from all."

"If only I had a girl chum!" he repeated to himself. "I'm fed up with fellows! Mean beasts, most of 'em—mean and selfish, greedy and grasping. But girls are different. Wish I could get to know a nice girl—a high-born young lady, of my own class."

Baggy knew very few girls, as a matter of fact. Perhaps this was because very few girls wanted to know Baggy. The few he had met at St. Jim's—D'Arcy's cousin Ethel and Levison's sister Doris, and one or two others—had not been impressed with Trimble. They had given him the cold shoulder, and when he had tried to worm himself into their good graces he had been promptly snubbed.

Yet Baggy would have given a good deal to be on terms of friendship with Cousin Ethel or Doris Levison. They were charming, high-spirited, fun-loving girls—very different from Baggy's cousin Bertha, who attended Burchester High School.

Cousin Bertha was the feminine prototype of Baggy himself. She was plump, and stupid, and greedy, and far from good-looking. Baggy had seen quite a lot of Cousin Bertha during the Vacation, but they had not hit it off at all well. Like does not always respond to like. Baggy and Bertha had quarrelled fiercely over a last remaining slice of plum-cake. Bertha had tweaked Baggy's nose, and Baggy had pulled Bertha's plait. There had been quite a scene, and the cousins had to be dragged apart by a horrified aunt. Baggy had painful recollections of that episode.

And he never wanted to meet Cousin Bertha again.

Baggy pined for a girl chum—but not of Cousin Bertha's type. He pined for some amiable and charming young lady, to whom he could pour out his troubles.

As he reclined on the old oak bench he fell into a reverie, conjuring up visions of the sort of girl he would like to know. She must be young, and sympathetic, and, above all, beautiful. The sort of girl a fellow would be proud to be seen out with.

It was a sheet of newspaper which roused Baggy from his reverie. The summer breeze sent the sheet whirling across the grass, and it came to rest at Trimble's feet. Idly, the fat junior picked it up. It was the front page of the "Wayland Gazette," and several columns of advertisements greeted Baggy's gaze. He looked at them with lack-lustre eyes, which presently became round and saucer-like with wonder. For in the "Agony Column" appeared the following advertisement:

"L O N E L Y
S C H O O L G I R L,
considered very
good-looking,
wishes to meet
lonely schoolboy.
View to friend-
ship. Applicant
must be handsome
and athletic. Send
photograph when
applying, and fix
appointment.—
Miss X., Box
No. 1234, 'Way-
land Gazette'
Offices."

"My hat!" ejaculated Trimble. "Here's the very chance I've been wanting! What a stroke of luck that this sheet should

have been blown across to me! I'll write to 'Miss X.' right away."

Baggy jumped to his feet, folding up the sheet of newspaper and tucking it into his pocket. His eyes were glistening. He stood on the threshold of Romance, and the world seemed suddenly to have become brighter. Birds twittered gaily in the branches of the old elms; and the pleasant quadrangle was bathed in sunshine. Baggy had scarcely noticed these things before; but they seemed to have a special significance for him now.

As he rolled away towards the building, however, Baggy's jaw dropped. An obstacle had suddenly presented itself.



When Baggy Trimble appeared in the quad, he caused quite a sensation. Tom Merry & Co. stared at him in blank amazement. "Hello! Here's Baggy sallying forth to meet his lady-love!" chuckled Lowther. Baggy blushed, and hurried on.
(See Chapter 2.)

"Miss X.," the lonely schoolgirl who wanted a boy friend, had stipulated that applicants must send their photographs. And Baggy Trimble had no photograph to send. He could not afford the luxury of being photographed. This was a pity, for a photograph of Baggy would have impressed the mysterious "Miss X." very favourably, Baggy being quite an Adonis—in his own opinion!

On reaching his study, Baggy had a sudden brainwave.

On the mantelpiece was a photograph of Kit Wildrake, Baggy's study-mate. Wildrake was one of the most manly-looking fellows in the Fourth. He was not only handsome, but his face was full of character.

Baggy Trimble stood looking at Wildrake's photograph for a moment; then he reached it down.

"I'll send this to Miss X.," he murmured. "Wildrake won't miss it; he's got several more in his desk. Of course, when Miss X. meets me, she'll say that I'm nothing like the photo. But I'll tell her it was taken a couple of years ago, and that I've put on flesh and got more handsome in the meantime."

Chuckling softly to himself, Baggy sat down at the table and wrote a letter to "Miss X." He described himself as a lonely schoolboy, anxious to meet another lonely soul of the opposite sex, and suggesting an appointment for Saturday afternoon, outside the Wayland Cinema. Baggy signed the letter "Master T." At this early stage of the romance he was chary of giving his full name.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

Keeping the Tryst

THE letter, with Wildrake's photograph enclosed, was duly despatched. And for the next forty-eight hours Baggy Trimble was in quite a fever of excitement. He watched every post come in; he waited hungrily for a reply from "Miss X."

It was not until Saturday morning that a reply came. The postman had three letters for Master Bagley Trimble. The first was from Baggy's pater, and it contained—joy of joys!—a remittance for five shillings. The second letter was not really a letter at all, but an unpaid bill, which Baggy screwed up in his

fat palm and flung to the winds. And the third communication was addressed in a round, girlish hand. Baggy's heart jumped at the sight of it.

"At last!" he exclaimed. "This is from Miss X.!"

It was the briefest of brief notes—quite a curt epistle, in fact. But to Baggy Trimble, in his highly romantic state of mind, it had the tonic effect of a love-letter.

"Dear Master T.,—Letter and photo received. Will meet you on Saturday at the time and place mentioned.—Miss X."

Baggy Trimble fairly danced with elation. A short distance away, Mellish of the Fourth was also dancing with delight, having received a letter by the same post. And there was another fellow who held an open letter in his hand, and seemed very happy about it. This was George Alfred Grundy, of the Shell.

But Baggy Trimble was too busy with his own thoughts—too excited at the prospect of meeting "Miss X."—to care about the elation of Mellish and Grundy, or to wonder what was the cause of their elation. All that morning, he seemed to be walking on air. And he was impatient for the afternoon to arrive.

It was observed at the dinner-table that there was something wrong with Baggy Trimble's appetite. He ate considerably less than usual, being satisfied with only two helpings of apple-pudding, instead of the usual five. Mr. Railton inquired, solicitously, if Trimble was ill. And Baggy's schoolfellows looked quite concerned about him. They did not know that Baggy was in too great a state of excitement and suspense to consume his usual quota of dinner.

When the meal was over, Baggy paced feverishly to and fro, in the quadrangle. He saw Percy Mellish go out of gates, dressed in his Sunday best, and looking very smart and spruce. In the ordinary way, Baggy's curiosity would have been aroused by the incident, and he would have asked Mellish if he was going to a wedding. But his mind was too full of that unknown charmer, "Miss X.," to bother about the doings of Percy Mellish.

An hour after Mellish's departure, Grundy of the Shell went out of the gates. Curiously enough, Grundy was also habited in his Sunday best. A silk "topper" was perched jauntily on his head, and he wore a big carnation in his buttonhole. Grundy was looking very flushed and excited, as he swaggered majestically past Baggy Trimble. But the self-absorbed Baggy scarcely noticed him.

When three o'clock came, the fat junior went up to his dormitory, and followed the example of Grundy and Mellish, dressing himself with meticulous care. Trimble was a slovenly fellow, as a rule. He had the reputation of being the worst-dressed junior of St. Jim's. He was the despair of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the dandy of the Fourth. But he could furbish himself up quite smartly, on occasions; and he was now at great pains to transform himself into a modern edition of Beau Brummel.

When Baggy Trimble made his appearance in the quad, at half-past three, he caused quite a sensation.

Tom Merry & Co., the chums of the Shell,

were chatting on the School House steps, and they broke off in astonishment to stare at the resplendent Baggy.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Monty Lowther. "I'm sure there's a wedding on, this afternoon. First Mellish goes out of gates, dressed

to kill; then old Grundy goes swaggering out, like Solomon in all his glory; and now Trimble!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Let us into the secret, Baggy," he said. "Whose wedding is it?"

"Eh? There's no wedding," said Trimble.

"Pr'aps it's a funeral?" suggested Manners.

"Or else Baggy is sallying forth to his trysting-place, to meet his lady-love!" chuckled Lowther.

Baggy flushed crimson, and walked on very hurriedly. Monty Lowther had merely spoken in jest; but he was much nearer the truth than he knew. Trimble was certainly

going to meet a young lady, by appointment; and if that fact were broadcast through St. Jim's, Baggy would have to suffer a good deal of chaffing and chipping.

For the first time in his life, Baggy Trimble walked to Wayland at a really brisk pace.



Baggy Trimble uttered a cry of astonishment as the girl drew near. "Cousin Bertha!" They regarded one another in stupefied silence. "I'm meeting a St. Jim's fellow here," said Bertha, and as she spoke an awful suspicion flashed upon Baggy's mind. Was she Miss "X"? (See Chapter 3.)

But Baggy's fat little legs were now going like clockwork. He simply dare not be late for his all-important appointment.

As he hurried along, Baggy speculated as to what manner of young lady "Miss X." would prove to be. Was she dark or fair? She was good-looking, unless her advertisement misrepresented the facts. Was she as attractive a girl as Gussy's cousin Ethel, or Levison's sister, Doris? Was she plump or slim? How would she greet Baggy? Would she expect him to take her to the pictures, or to treat her to a spread at the Café Royal, in Wayland?

These, and many other questions, tumbled over each other in Baggy's mind as he hurried along.

The fat junior was in funds, for he had converted his pater's remittance into cash, and the five shillings jingled pleasantly in his trousers pocket. He was prepared for any contingency. How fortunate that he was not in his usual state—broke to the wide!

THE THIRD CHAPTER

A Surprise for Baggy

BAGGY reached Wayland in record time.

He was panting and perspiring as he made his way up the High Street.

Four o'clock was striking when he halted outside the Wayland Cinema. There was no young lady waiting on the steps; and Baggy drew a sigh of relief.

"I haven't kept her waiting, anyway!" he murmured.

But the young lady, it seemed, had no compunctions about keeping Baggy Trimble waiting. The minutes passed, and she failed to appear, as they say in the police-courts. The quarter rang out from the old church steps, and still there was no sign of "Miss X."

Baggy fidgeted impatiently on the steps of the cinema. He was beginning to feel uneasy. He began to fear that he might have been hoaxed, and that "Miss X." had no intention of turning up.

He had been waiting nearly half an hour, when a young and attractive girl in a smart tennis-frock came tripping along the street, and halted at the foot of the steps.

Baggy's heart gave a bound.

"Here she is—at last!" he ejaculated.

And he ran down the steps so precipitately that he nearly overbalanced.

"Miss X.?" queried Baggy, lifting his topper to the girl in the tennis frock.

The girl looked at him coldly.

"I beg your pardon?" she said stiffly.

Baggy had replaced his topper on his head at a ridiculous angle, and he stood looking very awkward and sheepish.

"Ahem! Are you Miss X., the—the lonely schoolgirl?" he faltered.

"Indeed I am not!" retorted the young lady. "Please go away. I don't like the look of you."

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Baggy.

"I am waiting here for a friend, and he will be very angry if he sees me in conversation with you," said the young lady. "He may even go so far as to punch your nose!"

"Ow!" yelped Baggy. And he promptly bolted up the steps, as an athletic-looking young man came striding up.

Baggy was painfully aware that he had made a mistake, and he eyed the athletic-looking young man with inward quakings. The young man glared at him in return, and then walked off with the girl in the tennis-frock.

Baggy Trimble continued his vigil on the steps of the cinema. After waiting nearly an hour, he was almost in despair. It seemed futile to wait any longer.

And then, just as Baggy was about to wend his way disconsolately back to St. Jim's, a plump figure came into view—the figure of a girl, wearing a school frock and a straw hat. There was something familiar about that figure, and as it drew nearer Baggy Trimble uttered a cry of astonishment.

"Cousin Bertha!"

The girl was no less astonished.

"Cousin Bagley!" she gasped.

The two cousins regarded each other in stupefied silence for a moment. Then Baggy extended his hand, not very cordially, however.

"Fancy meeting you here, Bertha!" he exclaimed. "Why aren't you at Burchester?"

"I've got an appointment in Wayland," explained Bertha. "Afraid I'm rather late, but it's the privilege of the fair sex to be late. I'm meeting a St. Jim's fellow—here."

An awful suspicion flashed upon Baggy Trimble's mind.

"You—you're not the Miss X. who advertised in the 'Wayland Gazette,' are you?"

Bertha nodded. As for Baggy, he gave a groan of dismay.

"And I'm Master T.!" he exclaimed.

"Oh!"

Cousin Bertha appeared deeply disappointed. She had, of course, expected to meet the handsome schoolboy of the photograph—not her fat and egregious cousin, Bagley.

Trimble was equally disappointed. He had expected to meet a charming and good-looking young lady—not his plain, plump Cousin Bertha!

The girl's eyes flashed angrily.

"You have fooled me Bagley!" she cried. "You sent me another boy's photograph!"

"I—I——"

"You might have wasted my afternoon!" said Bertha reproachfully. "I tell you frankly, I shouldn't have come all the way from Burchester for the doubtful pleasure of meeting you!"

"And I shouldn't have fagged all the way over from St. Jim's to meet you!" groaned Baggy, with equal candour.

Bertha glanced up at the church clock.

"My train doesn't go for an hour," she said, "and I'm hungry. There's a nice tea-room a few doors from here."

It was a significant hint, but Baggy Trimble hesitated. He could be excused for hesitating. He knew what an illimitable appetite Cousin Bertha possessed! Baggy had been there before, so to speak.

"Come along!" said Bertha briskly. And she took her cousin's arm, and led Baggy willy-nilly down the street. The swing doors of the tea-room closed behind them.

When they had settled down to tea, Baggy was relieved to find that Bertha's appetite was less hearty than usual. She nibbled nonchalantly at a number of fancy cakes, while Baggy cleared a dish of doughnuts with his usual avidity.

"I say, Bertha," he mumbled, when the girl pushed her plate away, to signify that she was finished, "your appetite isn't quite so keen as it used to be, you know."

"Oh, yes, it is," answered Bertha, with a smile. "But



Cousin Bertha waved the bill gaily. "Pay up, Baggy! I know, it's like having teeth out for you to part with your money!" Baggy did not look pleased. His fond dreams had been rudely shattered—but he paid! (See Chapter 3.)

"I've already had one feed here."

"What!" almost shouted Baggy.

"Earlier in the afternoon," explained Bertha. "I met one of your fellows by appointment—a fellow named Grundy. He stood me an excellent spread. Charming fellow, Grundy—isn't he? But he's so ugly—almost as ugly as you. I was quite relieved when he went, so that I could go and meet Mellish."

Baggy Trimble stared blankly at his cousin.

"You—you met Mellish?" he stuttered.

"Yes. We spent a pleasant hour together at the cinema. Then we went for a stroll, and after that I went back to the cinema, to keep my appointment with Master T. Of course, I didn't dream that Master T. would be you."

"Well, of all the nerve!" he ejaculated. "Did Mellish and Grundy answer your advertisement?"

"Certainly!"

"And you arranged to meet them at different times, and squeezed a feed out of one, and a cinema-show out of the other? And then, to crown it all, you've squeezed another feed out of me! Well, of all the blessed nerve! If you

were a fellow, Bertha, I'd jolly well give you a licking!"

Bertha merely smiled. She had had a very enjoyable afternoon, and her cousin's wrath merely amused her.

"Here's the bill!" she said, gaily. "Pay up, Bagley! I know it's like having teeth out, to part with your money."

Baggy paid, but he did not look pleasant. It might almost be said of Baggy, like it was said of the monarch in the poem, that he never smiled again! His little romance had ended in a frost. His fond dreams had been rudely shattered. And it was a very forlorn Baggy Trimble who made his way back to St. Jim's, after seeing Cousin Bertha off at Wayland Station.

ALONZO TODD'S JOY-RIDE!



Speed! Horace Coker, of the Greyfriars Remove, tries to convince Alonzo Todd that one has never really "enjoyed" a motor ride till the milestones whizz by so dizzily that you mistake them for the palings!