

## From 'Freddie Pilcher' by Pie Corbett

Grandma Pugh sized the baby up like a pig at the cattle market. There was a pause and then she pronounced.

'He's got nice long legs.' She smacked her lips together in approval. But then she frowned and leaned forwards. Everyone waited anxiously. The baby had opened his eyes and was staring up at her from his cot. 'But that squint won't do!' she declared firmly, turning her back on him and tut-tutting.

That had been Freddie Pilcher's first meeting with Grandma Pugh. Since then, ten years had passed. Much to his grandmother's satisfaction, his legs had not let her original pronouncement down. She had been correct. The boy was a regular beanpole.

Grandma Pugh had also been correct about his eyesight. At first, he had worn glasses. The lenses were so thick that it was like looking at the world through the bottom of a milk bottle.

When he was old enough Freddie had been to hospital to have an operation. Now he no longer squinted. He still wore glasses. Without them, he was like a fish out of water. His mother had to fix his glasses to his ears with sticking plaster; otherwise he kept losing them. And as she kept saying, they might be National Health but that wasn't the point. Freddie not only had poor eyesight, but he was also clumsy.

Freddie did not really seem suited to schoolwork. But there was one thing that he was good at and it was all on account of the length of his legs. His grandma had been right to be proud of him. He could jump.

Freddie was the best jumper in school. Not only could he leap the furthest but also the highest. At breaktimes, he entertained the little ones by leaping over the school wall into Mrs. Hobson's garden and then rapidly vaulting back. She had been up to see the Head Teacher several times because somebody had been trampling on her vegetables.

It was badgers, Freddie suggested, when quizzed by Miss Harpy – definitely badgers. His dad had terrible problems with badgers. Only last week he had lost two rows of carrots. Freddie had woken one night and heard them rampaging through the garden, a whole herd of them. They rooted up the lawn, dug up the vegetables and crunched up the snails like boiled sweets. Terrible things, badgers. All the other children nodded their heads sagely. There was a moment's pause in class three as everyone pondered on the dreadful damage that badgers could do.