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# Butterfingers

J M Trewellard

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# BUTTER



J. M.  
Trewellard

**BUTTERFINGERS**



# FINGERS

Illustrated by  
Ian Beck



CORGI BOOKS

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*For my sons,  
Joseph and Edward Trewellard,  
and with thanks to Zoe Allday.*

J.M. TREWELLARD







# NED

ON A GREEN HILL STOOD A KING'S PALACE, SURROUNDED BY THE ROLLING HILLS, FIELDS AND WOODS WHICH WERE HIS KINGDOM. Inside the palace lived the king with his daughter, the lovely Princess Bella. Her beauty delighted all who set eyes on her. Outside there were large formal gardens with knot-hedges and herbs and roses of all kinds. There were tree-lined walks and arches and mazes. There were small secret gardens with seats and arbours. The towers of the palace reached high up into the sky.



Today it was clear and very blue. There was nothing in it but a few fluffy clouds, until suddenly several large black and white birds appeared, calling harshly to each other. They were magpies. They flew steadily over the king's land, looking down on the neat meadows and moats that surrounded the palace.

The birds soared over the courtyard, the gardens and the stables - a long stone building with rows of neat, wide stalls for the king's fine horses. One magpie soared lower, spying the tiny figure of a stableboy.



The boy's name was Ned. He was the youngest of the stableboys. He hadn't realized he could be seen, for he was sitting in his favourite place of all - the top of a tall elm tree. This was where he hid when he wanted to catch a glimpse of the princess in her secret garden. But he hadn't accounted for the sharp eyes of the magpies.

Magpies - most annoying birds, thought Ned, with their big wings and sharp beaks.



Always interfering in other peoples business, always making trouble. Nosy and greedy: their beady eyes were always looking out for precious objects which they could take back to their nests as trophies. Nothing bright or shiny was safe when a magpie was around.

"Cack-cack-cack, Clumsy!" Ned jumped and almost toppled from the tree. "I know you, Butterfingers. Skiving again!" cackled the magpie and swooped a little lower.

"Go away, Magpie," said Ned.

Cack-cack-cack, you'll never amount to anything, Butterfingers."

"Be quiet, Magpie," called up Ned, "and don't call me that name."

But the magpie merely laughed and flapped his wings, soaring up to join the other birds. As he flew, he eyed the martins, which flew in and out of their nests under the eaves of the stables.

"You keep away from those martins' nests," called Ned to the big bird. "I've seen you steal their eggs. You're a thief!"

"Quiet, boy. Get back to dreaming," called the others.

"Cack-cack-Cack!" laughed the magpies, their wings flapping. "Nothing for you, boy, but work and dreams, work and dreams." And they flew off.

"Look sharp, lad!" barked Tuff. "Dreaming again! Back to work, boy, for goodness' sake! Don't want old grumble-guts, Mr Squelch, after you!"

Tuff was Ned's little dog. Now he stood at the bottom of the tree, yapping and looking cross. Ned lost his footing on the last branch and slid to the ground in a rush.

"I don't know, boy," Tuff said. "What am I to do with you? When will you ever learn? I thought you'd get a little less clumsy as you grew older, but bless me, the longer your legs are, the more you trip over them. And what have you been up to? Spying on the princess?"

"I wasn't spying," said Ned, getting up. "Just trying to find a bit of peace and quiet."

"No chance of that, lad, if you annoy the stable master!"

Ned ignored his little dog. He was used to him grumbling on. Tuff had been with Ned since he was a pup. He was a grumbly sort of dog even then, but they were used to each other.

Ned hurried off to his work in the stables. As usual, there was a lot to do.

"That's my good boy," came the soft voice of Dilly, the pony who was stabled in the far corner. 'Back to work.'" Dilly was not much good for anything but pulling carts, but Ned loved her. He slept on the straw by her stall at night. Tuff slept with him, curled up at his side, or sometimes on his tummy - until he got too heavy and Ned pushed him off. Tuff, the brown and white terrier, and Dilly, the little bay mare - these were Ned's only friends. He looked after them - or was it the other way round? Dilly thought him wonderful. Didn't he bring her extra rations? Wasn't he always kind to her? He was her boy, he was. "My Ned," she'd say, "is a good, kind boy. And good, kind boys get their rewards eventually. And my Ned will, you mark my words."

