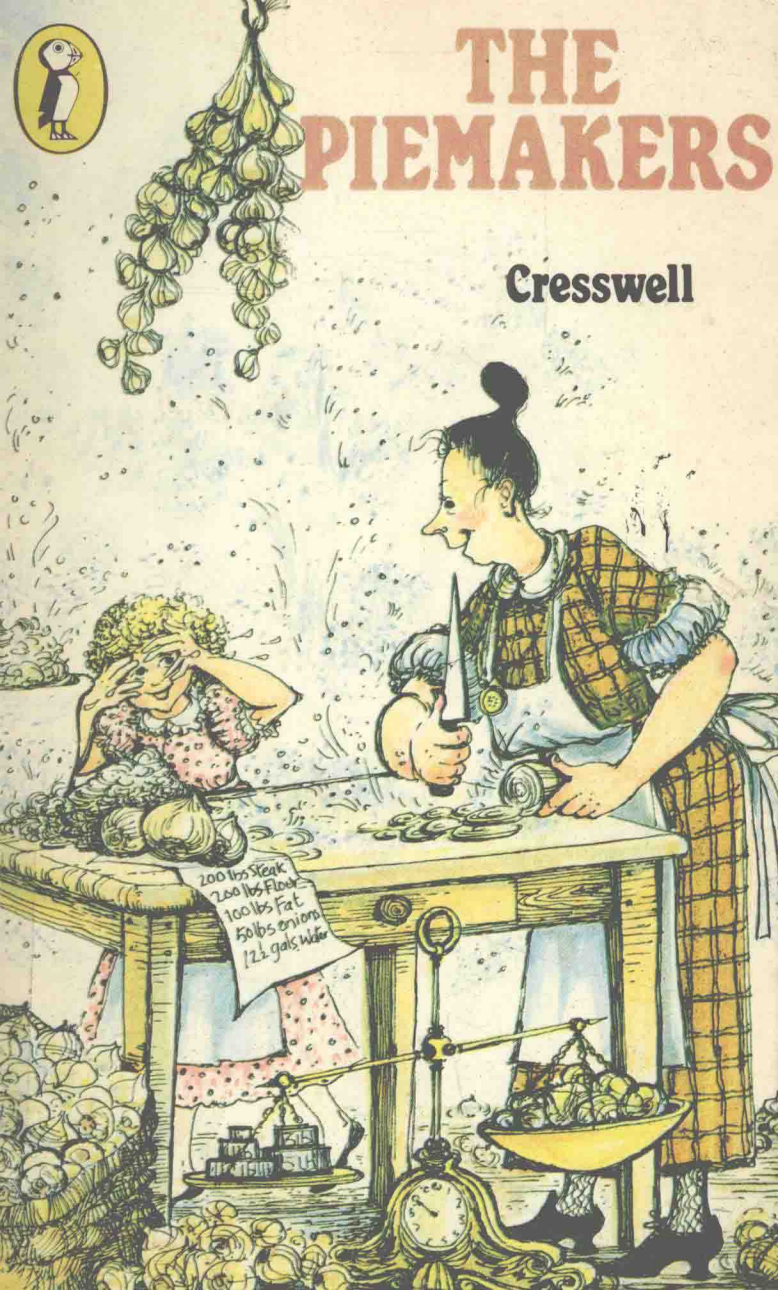




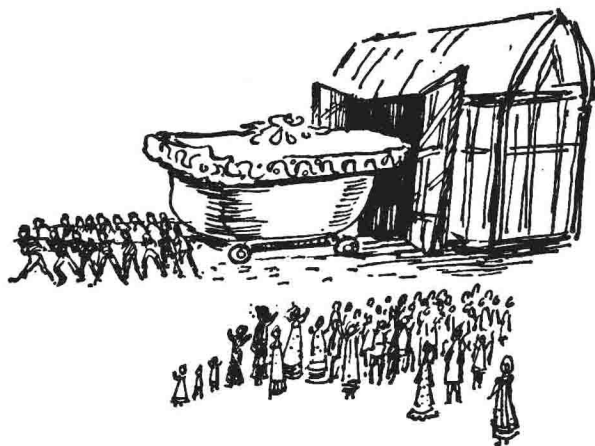
THE PIE MAKERS

Cresswell



Helen Cresswell

The Piemakers



Illustrated by V. H. Drummond

Puffin Books

in association with Faber & Faber Ltd

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Editor: Kaye Webb

The Piemakers

Sometimes Gravella Roller felt she would scream if she ever saw another pie, but it couldn't be helped. The fact was that piemaking was in her blood. Her family, the Danby Rollers, were piemakers through and through, and nothing would change that now – why, even her name Gravella was just 'Gravy' prettied up!

And the pies they made! Superb they were, with their decorated crusts, succulent meat and luscious gravy. Generations of dedicated work and tradition went into making them perfect every time! Piemaking was almost a sacred ritual to the Danby Rollers, even to young Gravella, who merely prepared the seasoning, while her father did the crust and her mother chopped the onions.

And were they always good, those pies? Without fail? Yes, they really were, until the great calamity of the pie that was meant for a King but wasn't fit even for a pig, for didn't the bakehouse break down only that night? Though only the family knew of the disaster, Gravella's father was so miserable that he felt he could never find joy or interest in life again. And he might have remained like that for ever but for the King's competition for the best pie in the dales, and the stupendous, impossible, marvellously reviving idea of baking a two-thousand-size pie!

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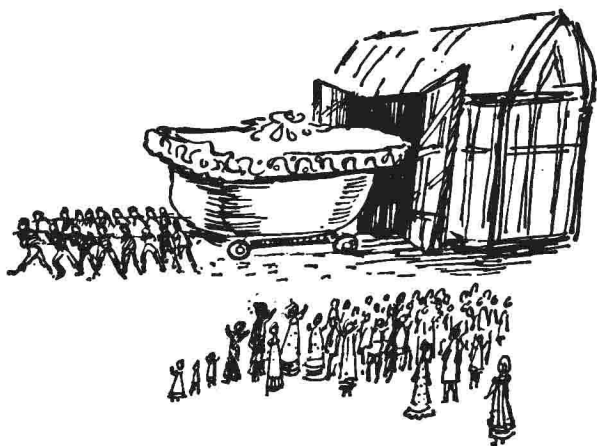
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For
My husband Brian
with love

Preface

This book is a history book, in a way. At any rate, it is based on some very old documents, and that makes it something like history.

In the attic of my great-grandmother's house I found an old box. It was cobwebby and the lock was rusty – in fact I had to take it to the locksmith to get it open at all. I broke two pairs of scissors trying to prise it open myself.

Inside the box I found several notebooks and diaries and a thick yellow wad of papers called *The Danby Chronicles*. I sat up all night reading them, and by dawn my mind was made up. A book must be written about the piemakers of Danby Dale.

I like to think that the people this book is about are my ancestors. After all, their story was found in my great-grandmother's house, and I once made a pie myself, so it could be in my blood, handed down through the generations. I don't know how many generations, because there are no dates in the *Chronicle*, which made my task very much easier, because dates are inclined to confuse me.

This is the story of the Danby Dale piemakers, based on their own diaries and the *Chronicle* of their village.

Chapter I

Gravella Roller sat in her bedroom writing. Her slate filled, she held it at arm's length and took a long hard look at it. She had written her own name eight times.

'Gravella Roller,' she repeated. 'Gravella Roller.'

She threw the slate down on to her patchwork quilt and herself after it. She lay with her hands under her head and stared up at the ceiling. She could still see her name written there on the white stripes between the black, lumpy beams.

'Gravella Roller.' She tried again, flourishing it on her tongue. 'I can see cobwebs on those beams. Why, oh why, Gravella? The Roller's bad enough, but Gravella!'

She knew very well why. In fact she was very lucky indeed not to have been plain Gravy. It had been her mother who had decorated it up a little, seeing that she had been a girl. She shuddered at the thought that she might have been a boy and gone through life a Gravy. Her father had been set on the name right from the start, so Jem had told her. He'd just been in the middle of making the gravy when she'd been born, and to him it was perfect.

'I suppose I should be thankful not to be a Crusty,' she told the one ambling spider who stalked his nets above her.

'Or Sagetta, or Onionana. How am I supposed to be a famous actress with a name like that? I don't even know how I've got as far in life as I have.'

'Gravella! Gravella!'

It was Jem's voice wafting up from below. She gave a great sigh and pulled herself up.

'Coming!' she called. After a pause she repeated it, 'Coming!'

She enjoyed the sound of her own voice and practised the word under her breath as she went downstairs, 'Coming, coming!'

Jem was in the kitchen, sleeves rolled up, chopping onions. The minute Gravella came through the door she could feel her eyes begin to smart.

'Will I *never* get used to it?' she thought with despair.

'There's another pie on the go, Gravella,' said Jem.

She was red with excitement as she always was when pies were about. Nothing else filled her with such enthusiasm, in fact when she wasn't actually 'on the go' with a pie she was rather gloomy in outlook and difficult to please.

Gravella was afraid she must have inherited this enthusiasm from Jem and Arthy. She didn't *want* to be thrilled by pies, in fact sometimes she felt as if she would scream if she ever saw another. Apart from that, a famous actress was at a disadvantage with a background of piemaking. And yet the plain truth of it was that whenever another pie was on the go she could feel her own heart treacherously thudding and her tongue aching to ask questions about it. Quite often she didn't ask questions, but that was only to save her dignity

and because she knew that she would hear all about it in the end. Arthy and Jem talked pies till all hours once they were caught up in making one.

'Did you hear me, Gravella?' said Jem sharply. 'Another pie!'

Gravella groped her way to the milking stool by the chimney corner and sat down.

'I'm half-blind!' she wailed. 'Do there have to be onions?'

'Have to be onions?' Shocked, Jem laid down her knife. 'Gravella! What would your father say if he heard you!'

'Well, it could be an apple pie, couldn't it?' argued Gravella. 'It's years since we've done an apple!'

'There's no call for them,' said Jem, resuming her chopping. She chopped with enjoyment, loudly and thoroughly. Her own eyes never watered. This she put down to the fact that she kept a pressed nettle leaf in the locket that was now swinging vigorously to and fro across the front of her brown pinafore.

'It takes a big sting to chase a little sting,' she would say when people, half-blinded with tears, would comment on her own remarkable immunity. 'As my grandmother always said.'

Gravella had secret misgivings that her mother's grandmother might have been a witch. She had handed down to Jem an astonishing number of very effective charms. The only thing that reassured Gravella, who had no real wish to be descended from a witch, was that these charms and remedies only seemed to work for Jem herself. When Gravella had tried wearing a nettle leaf round her neck her

eyes hadn't stopped watering until the next day, and ever since then she had refused to chop onions.

Gravella was longing to ask how big the pie was, when it was due, who had ordered it. Instead, she picked up a book from the shelf beside her and pretended to look at it.



There was only one shelf of books in the whole house and that was in the kitchen. Nobody ever read anything but recipe books. They weren't even books, in the strictest sense, because there were very few real sentences in them. Most of them were in Arthy's own laborious handwriting and contained lists of ingredients and little marginal notes that only he could understand, like 'Sage half and two tbsps and no B', or 'Crust half \times quarter \times four hours'.

Often Jem would read one in bed at night if she was having difficulty in dropping off and Gravella would hear her loud whispers as she woke Arthy to explain bits that she couldn't understand, or to share her excitement at some discovery.

'Arthy! Arthy! Wake up! Look! Isn't this the one we made when your Clover married the miller from Fendale? Don't you call it, that one where we tried the sultanias and then went and forgot the cinnamon? Oh, I'll never forget that one, not if I live to be a hundred and ten, like my grandmother did.'

This was another reason why Gravella suspected witchery. A hundred and ten, to Gravella, who was only ten and already seemed to have been alive an extremely long time, distinctly smacked of witchery.

'Gravella!'

She looked up. She knew that if she waited long enough Jem would never be able to contain herself and would spill out the details, words headlong after each other, while Gravella tried to repress her own rising excitement.

'Guess who it's for?' Jem had stopped chopping and was