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**Opening Extract from...**

# **Christmas at Rosie Hopkins' Sweetshop**

Written by Jennie Colgan

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*Jenny*  
COLGAN  
Christmas  
at Rosie Hopkins'  
Sweet Shop



SPHERE

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To J. Delphine-Waverley-James-Bond-Spiderman-  
Buzz-Lightyear-Come-in-Peace Beaton,  
who grows older and smarter and lovelier  
every day but whose little Spider feet  
I hope will always caper through  
the pages of this book.



## *A Word From Jenny*

Hello!

Now it is a rule of life that parents should never ever ever have a favourite child. And neither do I (although the one who just drew all the way across the rug with an orange felt tip ‘because it is **SOME CARS RACING** and the baddies were winning and the goodies had to get away!’ may do well to stay out of my way while I type this bit).

A similar thing applies to books: writers are supposed to feel the same way about their books, really, and call them your children, and say that you love them all the same, and I am sure some authors truly do. I personally just enjoy the idea that my children would all come and sit quietly lined up next to each other on a shelf all day.

Anyway, *Sweetshop*, or *Welcome to Rosie Hopkins’ Sweetshop of Dreams* to give it its full title, was not just

another book to me. It was quite a rare experience; it came out, more or less, exactly as I had seen it in my head. And for those of you who also felt very strongly about it, and got in touch with me to let me know, thank you so much. I just grew very fond of Rosie, and Lilian, and thought about them from time to time, and my lovely editor took me out to lunch and said, ‘Well, this is what *I* think would probably have happened next’, and my agent said, ‘Well, I would have liked THIS to happen ...’ and even my copy-editor, whose job isn’t really to read the book at all but to check it for spelling mistakes and fill it with funny little typesetting marks that I don’t really understand, put a big handwritten note on the bottom saying ‘Well, I just hope that man is good enough for Rosie’, and then it even won a lovely prize, which was very exciting. So, without being too big-headed about it, I knew it wasn’t just me who wanted to know a bit more about the story.

And I will be honest, I really wanted an excuse to go back to Lipton again, to eat chocolate caramels and think about Old English Sheepdogs. I grew up a massive fan of James Herriot’s books (in the beginning because we were skint and they were really cheap at jumble sales), and *Sweetshop* and Lipton are a little in homage to those books; if you were a fan too, see if you spot any references.

So here is a new book about Rosie and her friends, all in time for Christmas. It is kind of a sequel, but you

TOTALLY don't have to have read the first one to know what's going on, because I am going to tell you everything you need to know right now:

Rosie Hopkins is an auxiliary nurse, a London-dweller all her life, who was all ready to settle down in the city with her boyfriend Gerard, who was, between you and me, a bit of a mummy's boy.

Her mother Angie lives in Australia taking care of Rosie's brother Pip's kids. When Angie's aunt Lilian fell ill in a small Derbyshire village, Rosie was the only person available to look after her, which involved taking over the running of Lilian's old-fashioned sweetshop. While there, she made friends with Moray, the nice village GP, ran foul of Lady Lipton, the local lady of the manor, and met, and eventually fell for, Stephen Lakeman, who was blown up working for Médecins Sans Frontières in Africa and returned to Lipton traumatised and determined to shut himself off from the world. Rosie managed to help him pull it back together, partly because she tries to be a good person and partly because he is an utter fox, even when he turned out to be Lady Lipton's estranged son.

Anyway, although Rosie meant to sell the sweetshop, she decided instead to stay on in Lipton and run it, and I will tell you now that Gerard, who does not appear in this story, was very very good about it.

Meanwhile Lilian, who spent a lifetime mourning Henry, a young man who died in the Second World War,

has moved into a home with Ida Delia Fontayne, Henry's widow. Lilian had three brothers: Terence Jr, Ned, who also died in the war – Henry comforted her through this, which made her fall madly in love with him – and Gordon, who was Rosie's grandfather.

So here we are! Stephen is just about to take up his new job as a teacher in Lipton's local school . . .

Oh, and another note: you may not have heard of the carol 'Sweet Bells', which appears in this book. It's an old variation on 'While Shepherds Watched', and I think it's absolutely beautiful (and huge fun for children). I discovered it via the ever-magnificent and talented Kate Rusby, and you can find it on her splendid Christmas album *Sweet Bells* ([www.katerusby.com](http://www.katerusby.com)).

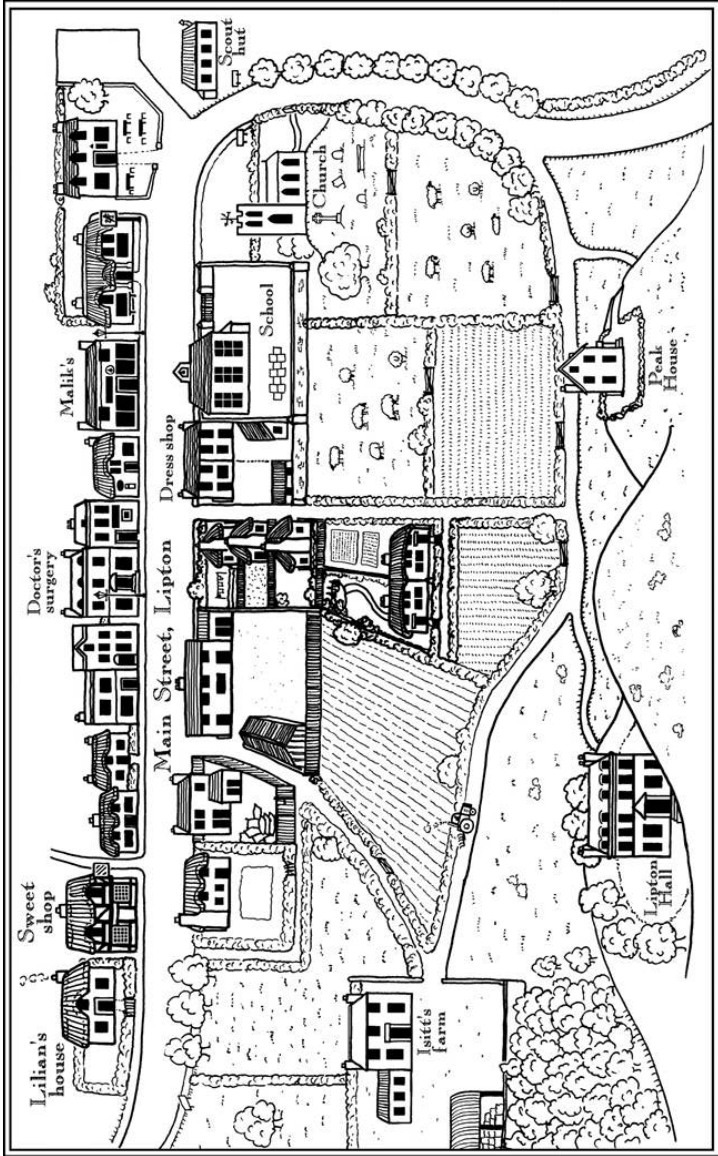
I have also put together a Spotify list of the Christmas music that appears in this book, plus a few extra lovely carols and Christmas songs, so if you want to listen along to what I was listening to when I wrote it, it's at: [www.tinyurl.com/sweetshopcarols](http://www.tinyurl.com/sweetshopcarols).

As ever, I love to hear from people – the best places to find me are at @jennycolgan on Twitter, and [www.facebook.com/jennycolganbooks](http://www.facebook.com/jennycolganbooks).

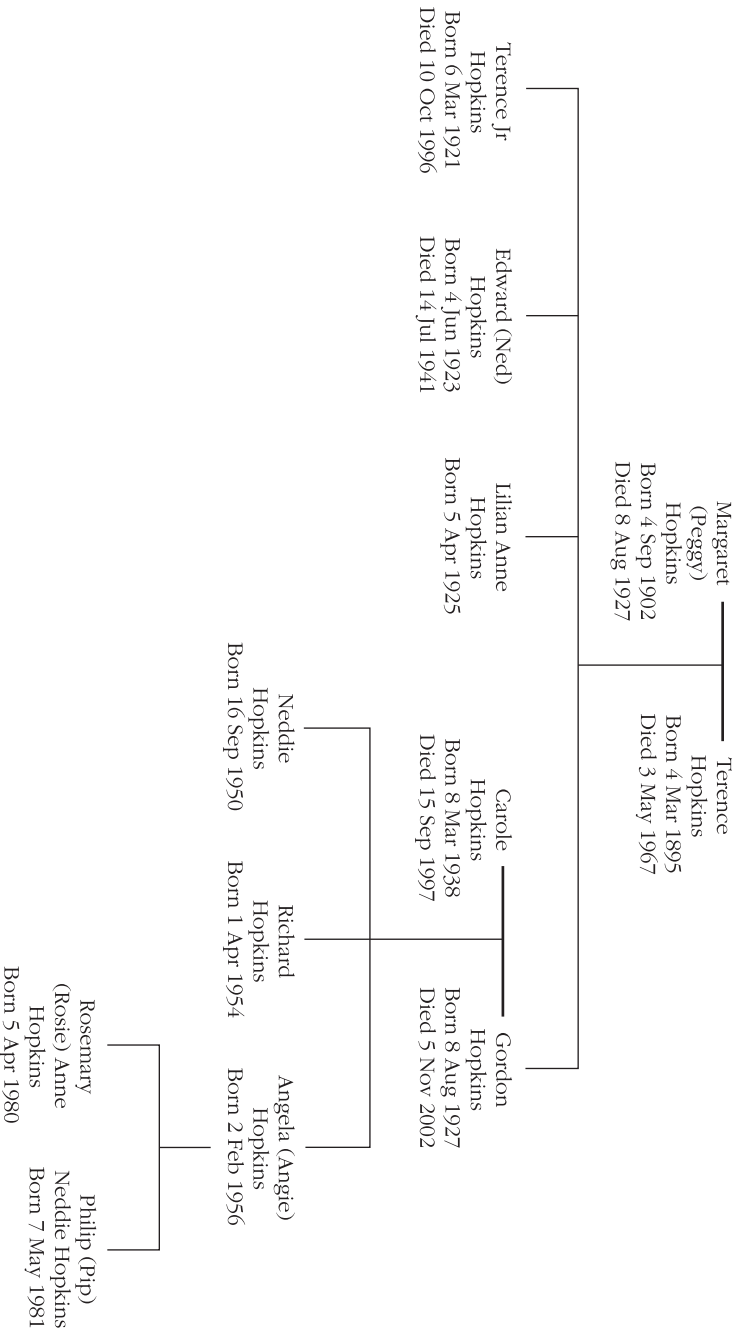
Wishing you the very happiest of Christmases, and I really hope you enjoy the book.

*Jenny xxx*





# The Hopkins Family



*Sweet bells! Sweet chiming silver bells!*  
*Sweet bells! Sweet chiming Christmas bells!*  
*They cheer us on our heavenly way,*  
*Sweet chiming bells!*

*(Traditional)*



## *Chapter One*

Lipton was quiet underneath the stars. It was quiet as the snow fell through the night; as it settled on the roof of the Isitts' barn and the bell house of the school; as it came in through the cracked upper windows that needed mending at Lipton House; as it cast a hush across the cobbled main street of the village, muting the few cars that passed by. It lay on the roofs of the dentist's and the doctor's surgery; it fell on Manleys, the dated ladieswear boutique, and on the Red Lion, its outdoor tables buried under mounds, its mullioned windows piled high with the stuff.

It fell on the ancient church with the kissing gate, and the graveyard with its repeated local names: Lipton, Isitt, Carr, Cooper, Bell.

It fell on the sleeping sheep, camouflaging them completely; (Rosie had made Stephen laugh once, asking

where the sheep slept when it got cold. He had looked at her strangely and said, ‘In the Wooldorf, of course, where else?’ and she had taken a moment or two before she kicked him crossly in the shins). It fell on birds cosy in their nests, their heads under their wings, and settled like a sigh, piled soft and deep in the gullies and crevasses of the great towering Derbyshire hills that fringed the little town.

Even now, after a year of living there, Rosie Hopkins couldn’t get over how quiet it was in the countryside. There were birds, of course, always, singing their hearts out in the morning. One could usually hear a cock crow, and every now and then from the deeper sections of the woods would come a distant gunshot, as someone headed out to hunt rabbits (you weren’t meant to, the woods belonged to the estate, so no one ever owned up, although if you passed Jake the farmhand’s little tied cottage on a Saturday night, the smell of a very rich stew might just greet your nostrils).

But tonight, as Rosie went to mount the little narrow stairs to bed, it felt quieter than ever. There was something different about it. Her foot creaked on the step.

‘Are you coming up or what?’ came the voice from overhead.

Even though she and Stephen had lived there together now for nearly a year, Rosie still wasn’t out of the habit of calling it Lilian’s cottage. Her great-aunt,

whom she'd come up to look after when Lilian had broken her hip, had moved into a lovely local home, but they still had her over most Sundays, so Rosie felt that, even though legally she had bought the cottage, she rather had to keep it exactly as Lilian liked it. Well, it was slightly that and slightly that Lilian would sniff and raise her eyebrows when they so much as tried to introduce a new picture, so it was easier all round just to keep it as it was. Anyway, Rosie liked it too. The polished wooden floor covered in warm rugs; the fireplace with its horse brasses, the chintzy sofa piled with cushions and floral throws; the old Aga and the old-fashioned butler's sink. It was dated, but in a very soft, worn-in, comfortable way, and as she lit the wood burner (she was terrible with fires; people from miles around would come to scoff and point at her efforts, as if growing up in a house with central heating was something to be ashamed of), she never failed to feel happy and cosy there.

Stephen had the use of Peak House, which was part of his family estate, a bankrupt and crumbling seat that gave Lipton its name. Peak House was a great big scary-looking thing up on the crags. It had a lot more space, but somehow they'd just found themselves more and more at Lilian's cottage. Also, as Rosie was just about eking a living from the sweetshop and Stephen was in teacher training, they were both completely skint and Lilian's cottage was substantially easier to heat.

Stephen may have scoffed a bit at the decor, but he seemed more than happy to lie on the sofa, his sore leg, damaged in a landmine accident in Africa, propped up on Rosie's lap as they watched box sets on Lilian's ancient television. Other nights, when the picture was just too grainy, Stephen would read to her and Rosie would knit, and Stephen would tease her for making the world's longest scarf, and she would tell him to hush, he would be pleased when it turned cold, and if he wasn't quiet she would knit him a pair of long johns and make him wear them, which shut him up pretty fast.

'In a minute!' shouted Rosie up the stairs, glancing round to make sure the door was shut on the wood burner – she was always nearly causing conflagrations. She was struck by the heaviness of the air. They hadn't moved in to Lilian's downstairs bedroom, all of them keeping up the pretence that one day Lilian might want to use it again, so they kept it pristine, the bed made up, her clothes still hanging in the wardrobe. Rosie kept a shrewd nurse's eye on her eighty-seven-year-old great-aunt. Lilian liked to complain about the home, but Rosie could see, in the rosiness of her cheeks (Lilian took great pride in her excellent complexion) and her slight weight gain (this, by contrast, made her utterly furious), that actually, living somewhere with help on hand all the time, and company, was just what Lilian needed. She had lasted a long time by herself in her own home, trying to

pretend to the world at large that everything was absolutely fine, when clearly it wasn't. She might complain, but it was clear that it was a weight off her shoulders.

So they continued to sleep in the little attic, adapted years before as a spare bedroom for Lilian's brothers. It was clean and bare, with views on one side of the great craggy Derbyshire fells, and on the other of Lilian's garden, the herb and vegetable patches tended with surprising care by Stephen, the rose bower trimmed from time to time by Mr Isitt, the local dairy farmer.

It was utterly freezing up in the unheated attic. Rosie saw with a smile that Stephen was already in bed, tucked in tightly under the sheets, blankets and thick eiderdown (Lilian thought duvets were a modern intrusion for lazy people; Rosie couldn't deny there was a certain comfort in being tucked in tight with hospital corners, plus it was much harder for your other half to steal the covers).

'Hurry up,' he said.

'Oh good,' said Rosie. 'You've warmed up one side. Now can you shift to the other side, please?'

The shape under the covers was unmoved.

'Not a chance,' it said. 'It's brass monkey bollocks up here.'

'Thank goodness I share my bed with a gentleman,' said Rosie. 'Move! And anyway, that's my side.'



‘It is NOT your side. This is the window side, which you insisted, when we were stifling up here in the summer, was making you too hot so you needed the other side.’

‘I don’t know what you mean,’ said Rosie, coming round the far end of the large sleigh bed.

‘Now budge.’

‘No!’

‘Budge!’

‘NO!’

Rosie began to wrestle with him, avoiding, as ever, his weaker left leg, until eventually Stephen suggested that if she really needed warming up, he had a plan, and she found that she liked that plan.

Afterwards, now cosy (as long as her feet didn’t stray to the far regions of the mattress; if she didn’t think it would turn Stephen off for ever, she would have worn bed socks), she felt herself drifting off to sleep, or she would have done if Stephen hadn’t been lying so rigid next to her. He was pretending to be asleep, but she wasn’t fooled for a second.

Still distracted by the heavy weather, she turned round to face him in the moonlight. Rosie liked to see the moon, and the countryside was so dark they rarely closed the curtains, a novelty she was so keen on it made Stephen laugh, as if it were a house feature. Stephen looked back at her. Rosie had curly black hair that she was always trying to wrestle into straight

submission, but he loved it when it curled, as it did now, wild and cloudy around her face. Her eyes were direct and green, her face freckled. Her skin glowed pale, her curvy body lit by the moonlight. He couldn't resist running his hand round her waist to her generous hips. He could never understand for a minute why Rosie worried about her weight, when her body was so voluptuous and lovely.

'Mm,' he said.

'What's up with you?' asked Rosie.

'I'm fine,' said Stephen. 'And don't look at me. That wasn't an "I'm fine" I'm fine. That was an "actually I am TOTALLY fine" I'm fine.'

'That one's even worse.'

'Ssh.'

Rosie glanced towards the window.

'It's weird out there.'

'That's what you said the night you heard the owl.'

'Come on, owls are really scary.'

'As opposed to drive-by shootings in London?'

'Shut it.' Rosie did her proper cockney voice that rarely failed to make him laugh, but she could see in the light, as her fingers traced his strong brow, his thick dark hair flopping on his forehead, his long eyelashes, that he wasn't even smiling.

'It's just kids.'

'I know.'

Stephen had been waiting for a job to come free at the

local school for a while. He had only ever taught overseas, so had been considered underqualified and sent off to do his time in various schools, including one in central Derby that had taught him a bit, but nonetheless he was still nervous about tomorrow.

‘So what are you worried about?’

‘Because I’m not just their new teacher, am I? They all know who I am.’

Stephen was from the local family of landed gentry. Even though he’d rejected everything they stood for, and broken from his parents – he had now made up with his mother, after his father had died of a heart attack – his every doing was subject to constant speculation in the village. Rosie also got her fair share of snotty gossip for going out with him, as several local worthies had had him in mind for their own daughters, but she kept this from him as much as possible.

‘Well that’s good,’ she argued. ‘All the young mums fancy you and all the kids think you’re Bruce Wayne.’

‘Or they all still think I’m a sulky pretentious teen,’ said Stephen sorrowfully.

‘Well that’s okay too,’ said Rosie. ‘You’ll get on well with the kids.’

She could tell he was still wearing the brooding expression.

‘We should definitely have had this conversation before we had sex,’ she said. ‘Then the relaxing bit could have come later.’

The moonlight caught a glint in his eye.

‘Well, maybe ...’

She grinned at him.

‘You know, for a wounded war dog. the Right Hon. Lipton, you still have some moves ...’

Just as she moved towards her, however, she leapt up out of bed.

‘Snow!’ she shouted. ‘Look at the snow!’

Stephen turned his head and groaned.

‘Oh no,’ he said.

‘Look at it!’ said Rosie, heedless of the cold. ‘Just look at it!’

The previous winter in Lipton, after an early flurry, it had simply rained all winter; they had had hardly any snow at all. Now here it was, great big fat flakes falling softly all down the road, quickly covering it with a blanket of white.

‘It’s settling!’ shouted Rosie.

‘Of course it’s lying’ said Stephen. ‘This is the Peak District, not Dubai.’

Nonetheless, with a sigh of resignation, he got up and pulled the eiderdown off the bed and padded across the cold wooden floor to Rosie, wrapping them both up in it. The snow flurried and danced in the air, the stars peeking out between the flakes, the mountains great dark looming silhouettes in the distance.

‘I’ve never seen snow like this,’ said Rosie. ‘Well, not that’s lasted.’

‘It’s bad,’ said Stephen soberly. ‘It’s very early. Lambing was late this year; they’ll need looking out for. And no one can get around. It’s treacherous for the old folks; they don’t clear the roads up here, you know. People get trapped for weeks. We’re barely stocked up, and we’re in town.’

Rosie blinked. She’d never thought of snow as a serious matter before. In Hackney it was five minutes of prettiness that bunged up all the trains then degenerated quickly into mucky, splashy roads, dog poo smeared into sleet and big grey slushy puddles. This silent remaking of the world filled her with awe.

‘If it blocks the pass road . . . well, that’s when we all have to resort to cannibalism,’ said Stephen, baring his teeth in the moonlight.

‘Well I love it’ she whispered. ‘Jake’s going to drop us off some wood, he said.’

‘Ahem,’ said Stephen, coughing.

‘What?’

‘Well,’ said Stephen, ‘he’ll probably be nicking it from somewhere that belongs to my family in the first place.’

‘It’s just ridiculous that a family owns a whole wood,’ said Rosie.

‘Ridiculous or not, I can get Laird to deliver it for nothing’ said Stephen. ‘Seeing as it’s, you know. Ours.’

‘Yeah yeah yeah. Because your great-grandad times a jillion shagged a princess by accident,’ said Rosie,

whose interest in Stephen's ancestry was hazy.  
'Whatever.'

'Whatever,' said Stephen, kissing her soft scented shoulder, 'means a warm, cosy house. Unlike this icebox. Come come, my love. Back to bed.'