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Izzy

My big sister, Alex, is a letter writer.
She says nobody writes letters
any more,
but they should
because letters are special.

She says you can hold a letter and
keep it
close to you and read it
any
time
you
want.
Emails can be wiped and texts are
gone
if you lose your phone – but letters stay
forever.

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This is just one of the ways that
Alex is different
from other people I know
and it's one of the reasons that
I want to be
just
like
her.

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Mellow Yellow

I am a hundred per cent determined to win. Never, in living memory, has Alex lost a game of Snap, but tonight history is about to be rewritten. In fact, it's my New Year's resolution. I have decided that this year is going to be the Year of Yellow and that means the Year of Happiness because yellow is a very happy colour. Winning this game against Alex is definitely going to make me happy. I crack my knuckles and wiggle my fingers – best to be flexible and ready for ninja-like moves.

'OK,' says Mum, shuffling the cards. Our deck is ancient, all dog-eared and crumpled. 'Are we all agreed on the rules?'

'Bring it on,' says Alex, sounding confident. I just nod, not taking my eyes off the cards that Mum is dealing out on to the kitchen table. When all the cards have been shared out between the

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three of us, we each pick up our pile, keeping the cards face down so that they can't be seen.

'Your turn to go first,' Mum says to me.

I put down the first card, turning it over as it reaches the table. Alex slams a card on top and the game has begun.

Jack, Two, Queen, Ace. I am totally focused, looking at nothing but the cards mounting up in front of me. My mouth is half open, the 's' ready on my lips. I WILL beat her this time – there's no way she can win again.

Three, Ten, Jack, King, King.

'Sn–' I start, but unbelievably my noisy, annoying big sister gets there before me.

'Cheese sandwiches!' she yells, nearly deafening me, and whacking her hand down on top of the stack of cards, just in case we're in any doubt about who has won. 'I win! Again!'

I cannot actually believe that this is happening. She's going to be utterly unbearable now. I really thought I'd win this time. I'd just like to win ONCE – is that too much to ask? I think I'd be a pretty good winner too and not do what Alex is doing now, making 'loser' signs at us and dancing round the kitchen bragging. I'd just smile generously and say, 'Good game.' Well, I think I

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would. It's hard to know what I'd do when I never actually get to win. Ever.

Mum is laughing and Alex sinks back into her chair, looking across at me with a huge grin on her face.

'How, how –?' I splutter, but I can't even get the words out properly. 'It's not right, Alex. You've GOT to be cheating. We made you say "cheese sandwiches" – there was no way you could win.'

'What can I say?' says Alex, flicking her hair behind her shoulder and shrugging. I'm sure she'll think of something though; she's never usually short of a word or two. 'Natural talent, I guess. If there was an A level in playing Snap then I'd get an A star, that's for sure!'

'Well, it's totally unfair,' I tell her, feeling cross. 'We have to play again and this time you've got to say "cheese and mayonnaise sandwiches". And NO cheating.'

I grab the cards and start to reshuffle the deck, but Mum stops me.

'Not tonight, Izzy. Alex has got studying to do and, sadly for her, Snap is not one of her A level subjects, so she needs to put a bit of effort into doing some work.'

Alex groans dramatically. Alex does everything

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dramatically actually, like her entire life is really a show and she's the star. It means that she's noisy and bossy and very opinionated, but it also makes her a pretty exciting person to live with. You never quite know what she's going to do next – the only thing you do know is that it won't be boring. In the whole seventeen years that Alex has been alive I don't think she's ever done anything average. Not like me. My name could be the definition of average.

'Do you *have* to remind me? We haven't even gone back to school yet. I was just starting to relax.' She scowls at Mum. 'It's very important that I have rest sessions in between all the hard work, you know – all my teachers say so. Stress can be very damaging at this stage of my life.'

Mum stands up and starts to clear away our leftover dinner plates. 'Stress can be very damaging at my time of life too, I'll have you know. And I think you'll find the most important part of what you just said was the bit about resting in between working. WORKING! And, as I've seen precious little evidence of you doing any actual work over the Christmas holidays, I think you'll survive with a shorter "relaxation" session tonight!'

She is smiling at Alex, but in that way that

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means 'do what I say or I'll stop pretending that you have a choice'. Alex pushes back her chair and gets up, pulling a face when Mum has turned towards the sink.

'Sorry, Izzy. I'll have to thrash you at Snap another night.'

'No rush,' I mutter. 'I'm probably going to be really busy with violin practice for the next few weeks.'

'Oh joy. More screeching and wailing to set my teeth on edge.' Alex grimaces at me as she leaves the room, her pile of school books still on the table and her jumper and scarf hanging over the back of her chair. She'll be back down in ten minutes, once she's spent a while making her room right for studying. That doesn't mean that she'll tidy it up. No. Alex says that the ambience has to be right so she'll drape a silk scarf over her lamp and light some incense sticks, and then flit around lighting candles all over the place.

It drives Mum crazy – she's terrified that Alex is going to burn the house down – but Alex says it's her room and she's virtually an adult so Mum should trust her for a change. Mum lets her, but what Alex doesn't know is that, when she's asleep, Mum always creeps into her bedroom and checks

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everything is safe. I know this because I check on her too, and one night I opened my bedroom door just as Mum was going into Alex's room. I saw her tiptoe round the room, turning off the lamp and making sure that the candles were out. When she came out, I pretended that I was going to the bathroom. Mum gave me a hug and put her finger to her lips and I knew that she didn't want Alex to know that Mum still looks after her.

I'm glad that Alex has got me AND Mum to keep her safe because sometimes her head is so busy with exciting things she forgets to do the things that she really should be doing. We're like her protectors so that she can get on with being Alex.

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