

# A Letter to Littler Isa

January 2023

Dear Littler Isa,

Hi, me. If you're reading this, you're probably wondering how it got to you. You're probably freaking your butt off wondering how the older version of yourself sent this letter back in time. You're probably going to show your Kuya this and tell him about it...or you might be completely enraged at him.

Why? Well...why not? He probably slapped you harder than he should have playing rock-paper-scissors or is flat-out ignoring you because he's too busy playing MarioKart Wii. He's probably being a horribly mean brother to you when all you want is to be his best friend.

But most importantly? You're mad at him because being compared to your older sibling sucks, especially when said sibling is insanely smart, athletic, and achieves all the same accomplishments you do, only first. Your family (whether they know it or not) is always coming you to each other, and every award, high grade, or achievement you have gotten seems to be overlooked just because Kuya's already done it two years prior. You don't think your family realizes how much it hurts when you don't get nearly as much acknowledgement when you accomplish the same things they would have damn (excuse my language, young me) near thrown Kuya a party for, or when you seem to be the one they always tease just because "you're the youngest." And although Kuya and you are closer than most siblings out there, you reach a certain point where you decide that it's time for you to get some recognition.

Call it revenge, call it vengeance. I'd like to call it "the underdog-arc," but I'm pretty sure this was pretty much your tween, watered-down version of a villain-arc (you'll learn about what an 'arc' is once the term gets popular in the 2020s). You're going to be fueled by greed and jealousy (major antagonist vibes here) and you're going to devise a plan to become a better version of yourself so that at least once in your life, you can beat Kuya at *something*.

But I know you (I *am* you). You had never liked sports as much as Kuya does. Sure, you're going to get into a club volleyball team with zero experience (because you were *that* good), but Kuya had probably already done that for baseball three years before. And we can never really do anything about his seniority in age, so you're going to decide that you simply have to do something about becoming as smart or smarter than he is.

I know you don't like to read, Isa. I know that school assigns you a fair share of boring books and that alone takes away your interest in reading. I know you feel insecure since Kuya reads chapter books like a machine. When you finish one *Magic Tree House* volume, he's already finished three. The villain version of yourself is going to feel hopeless at trying to surpass Kuya at *something*. *If I can't read as fast as Kuya, how am I supposed to be*

*smarter than him?* If you follow my advice, then one summer in middle-school is going to change that.

Do us a favor. When you sort books for the Christ the King book fair in the summer before sixth grade, grab that copy of *Along for the Ride*. It's by Sarah Dessen, and I promise you that you'll love it, even spending an entire day reading that good 'ole cliché romance novel. You're going to pretend you live in that fictional beachside town of Colby, going as far as blasting ocean-wave ambience in some tattered earbuds from Fry's Electronics. Mom's even going to ask, "*Wala ka ba ginawa na iba ngayon?* (Did you really not do anything else today?)" when she sees that you haven't left your spot lying belly-down on our rattled pink-and-green striped bed sheets since she and dad left for work in the morning. That paperback book is going to be nestled between your hands, your sausage-like (no offense) fingers pressing the pages down on our mattress so that you don't lose your spot from the air circulating from the ceiling fan. You're *really* going to be holed up in our room the entire day, solely focused on the romantic coming-of-age story laid out on the off-white pages of text in front of you. Your brain won't supply even half a response besides telling you to get back to the story, so you're only going to shrug at Mom in response. You'll be in disbelief when you realize the entire morning and afternoon had passed and you've just been reading.

You finished that book in a day, Isa. I'm proud of you.

Just from a single young adult novel, you're going to learn that maybe you don't read as fast as Kuya because you have different tastes in genres, and you've only been struggling to read the books he reads because they're just not your type. You're going to learn that you're a little bit of a hopeless romantic and that you're a sucker for clichés and those childhood-friends or enemies-to-lovers tropes, and in that way, you're different from Kuya. You'll learn that you actually like reading historical fiction and slice-of-life. Kuya's love for *Star Wars* will rub off on you too, and you'll learn that you'll start liking fantasy because of it. Maybe you'll learn that you really aren't into dystopian novels like Kuya is, but you're going to learn that you really do love to read - it's just a matter of what.

You're also going to learn that you really love to write. Spoiler alert: but you get really into K-Pop and K-Dramas when you're in high school. You get inspiration for so many cute, k-drama-esque scenes that you'll end up making a completely new Gmail account just to have a Google Drive dedicated to the stories that you end up writing. Maybe you'll struggle a little to finish these stories and maybe they'll just stay hidden, but with all this practice, you'll develop a knack for writing in fiction and essays.

And right now? You're preparing for your first scientific research paper. You know how you love the zoo right now? Well, you're going to learn that it'll grow into something bigger than just fascination, and your newly found writing skills will help you get along with your first research paper. You'll be looking into marine biology a lot (you probably don't know what that is yet), and writing up proposals for echinoderm research.

Look at you, my little STEM star. Go you.

Sure, right now, it might be super annoying that it seems like Ate, or Ninang and Ninong, or literally everyone else is looking only at what Kuya is doing. But you're going to grow up and find yourself through this process of wanting to be better than him. People are going to acknowledge you for your own achievements and for the skills and literacies you develop that are separate from his. You're a great writer. People tell you this all the time. Elena and your roommate are always amazed by the way you convey emotion and details in your stories, and mom and dad are always proud of the way you're able to clearly bring across complicated scientific facts and results into a concise, yet informative sentence. You should be proud of the way you can write academically, informally, and fictionally. Even more, Kuya's always amazed by how you write essays so well that you usually don't have to make major changes to your drafts. He thinks you're really freaking cool for the way you word emails to authoritative figures and serious texts to bad friends so easily. He can't do that for the life of him, and you'll learn that he tells you that all the time. Don't be so jealous of Kuya, Isa. He always says how much he envies your work ethic and your ability to write, so he's jealous of you, too, okay? If that makes you feel any better.

So don't be too discouraged, Isa. Your little villain-arc? It's going to end without you even realizing it. Maybe it'll really be an underdog story, who knows? Even 20-year-old you doesn't know where you're going in life right now, but you're going to surpass Kuya in your own way, and he's going to surpass you in his. You and he are different people, with different interests. You have different strengths, different weaknesses, different literacies – and Mom, Dad, everyone, love you both equally. The comparisons you'll tend to make between yourself and Kuya are going to affect you a lot, both in positive and negative ways. Sure, it might fuel some self-deprecating thoughts, but those thoughts are what will motivate you to become a better version of who you are. It'll take a lot of work. but what I want you to know most: you're going to be okay.

And one more thing: you and Kuya are going to turn out the best of friends. I promise.

Much love <3,

You, from 2023

P.S. Stop comparing yourself to other people.

P.P.S. Try to get as much sleep as you can. You stop growing in middle school and college is exhausting. Just a warning.