

I want to talk to you for a few minutes about Roland.

Roland and I are brothers. Throughout our lives, our paths have intersected continually. The same piano awards adorn the walls of our bedrooms back in Philadelphia. Matching high school diplomas sit proudly beside the same academic honors. The same clothes fill the closets of our respective rooms in Kirkland and Lowell. If I were just to clip my eyebrows in the curious way in which they point upwards on his face, I could step into his life with hardly anyone noticing. I could easily look like Roland. Being like him, however, is a different matter.

It's hard to compare to a PBK, Harvard Alumni Association award-winning most interesting senior who is headed to D.C. to consult for McKinsey next year. In addition to all of the official recognition, Roland seems to know everything: American fiscal policy, Turkish cuisine, airport architecture. Growing up, he played the more difficult piano pieces and performed better academically. My parents' constant comparison of us cemented Roland's superiority, as did their heightened expectations of me in light of Roland's achievements. I have spent most of my life plodding along behind Roland's light-footed dance in my struggle to keep up. I just never have been quite good enough.

To say that Roland is better at everything would be twisting the truth. I have a better singing voice. I can scale tougher rock-climbing routes. I obtain less of a reddish glow on my

cheeks upon consumption of certain beverages. But these consolation prizes are shadowed by the endless list of his wins and my losses in the unstated competition between us, and I find myself hesitating between striving to be better and giving up.

I don't carry just an inadequacy regarding his catalog of achievements, but an inadequacy in character. Roland's charisma, selflessness, and strength all seem to come so easily to him. His inviting of friends for impromptu Brazilian cocktails in his room on the day before spring classes, his insistence on opening doors for people he has never met; everything is so natural, so effortless. Everyone I know seems to either know and love Roland or know of and want to meet him. And when someone jokes, "I like Roland better," I can't help but realize that I would, too.

And so, again, I find myself facing the choice: do I strive to be better, or do I give up?

I don't know where Roland finds the energy to be so kind. It's exhausting for me to try to emulate his character. I simply don't understand, because for me, it's a persistent and taxing effort, and at a certain point, I crack. I don't have a boundless capacity to be kind. Exhausted by an accumulation of work and pressure and expectations, I don't want to put others before me. I'm selfish. I give up.

And these moments – they terrify me. When I expect myself to be kind, and I just cannot do it; when I lack the energy even to try – it’s so, absolutely terrifying. I have failed to be a good person. My values have crumbled and pinned me beneath. I am stuck.

But that’s when I get a text from Roland: “I’m having cake and wine in my room at 9. See you there?” And I go to his room in Kirkland, and I see a picture of the two of us by his desk, and I hear him boast to his friends about my being in the Dins, or my rock-climbing, or how I got him wine glasses for his birthday, and he resonates with pride and an energy that creeps into me and somehow, somehow makes everything okay. Having fallen in his shadow, I find myself lifted and placed upon his giant shoulders. And I decide that I will strive to be better; that I will strive, but not in Roland’s shoes. No, I will strive to be better, with Roland’s help, because that is who I am.

I am not Roland. I will never be Roland. And although his shadow will always loom, although he will always be a giant, he has taught me that I need not walk behind him; I can walk beside him.

Roland, you have pulled me up when I have fallen. You have made me a better person. Thank you for being my brother.