**Prompt 2: The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?**

There it was, a black piece of fabric plummeting towards the swimming pool floor.

I laughed at myself as it fell down my field of vision into the abyss of water behind me. ‘Who’s the idiot who lost his pants during the swimming race?’ And then I realized. In my next freestyle stroke, I pulled inwards and felt my body, hoping to be met with friction from the black Speedo I was donning. Nope. Just skin. On a normal day, pure skin to skin contact of any kind is something I’d be very happy with, but not this time. Standing out from all the racers in the 50 meter pool was me and my 8th grade rump. How did I get here?

“Alright guys, it’s now or never. We have been training weeks on end for this. If you’re not giving it your all, why do you think you deserve to race?” said my coach. And I agreed. Feeling as aggressive as an alligator, I anticipated a medal in my jaw.

My head, usually a treasure trove abound with math conjectures, physics formulas, bus services, now devoured by the sweet temptation of triumph, with the occasional hallucinations of the blue and black refractions of the swimming pool tiles. I stood, firmly, aside the starting block as my competitors stretched their rigid bodies in a variety of ways. I give my teammates one last fist bump before we take on the final nightmare that is the 4x50m freestyle relay.

As the whistles blow, I promptly jump up onto the starting block. However, something was off. I feel uneasy, as if I’m about to slip. My grip on the hard, gray stone has never been so loose. Maybe it’s just the pre-game jitters.

Beep!

Under the water I dove. With each powerful stroke, I pull through with all my might. But there was a tingling sensation in my waist that couldn’t be ignored. Is it a sudden urge to pee? Or is it some bizarre episode of paraplegia?

The demons of misfortune clutch at my legs on the pool floor, but all they grasped was the ill-fated Speedo. The rubber layer slowly separated the world from my mini-me, sliding down my leg. For every 10 cm I pulled it up, it went 20 cm down. With only split second thinking, I decided that

saving my slipping shorts would simply slow my pace. I started pulling even harder with my strokes. By meter 25, the only thing I had in common with the other swimmers in the pool was my goggles.

I could picture the scene above me: teammates, friends, and family laughing at the sheer absurdity unfolding before their eyes, a rare sight not seen during televised Olympic events, let alone at a live swimming race.

As I reached the end of the pool, tapping the wall, my teammate dove in. Instead of seeing the face of a racing man, I saw a boy nearly bursting out hysterically at the absurd shape floating in the water. Smiling in response, I sighed in relief, knowing my part of the relay was done.

The walk back to the locker room was not any easier; passing the row of parents was intimidating. Laughs and chuckles, reassurances telling me ‘it's okay’ surrounded me like a Dolby Atmos 5.1. But, despite all expectations, even my own, I was laughing with them.

Any attempt to take oneself seriously from this point on would fail repeatedly as they laid their eyes on me: the striking image of my bare bottom breaking their determined train of self assertions, invading their peace of mind.

To everyone’s surprise, the races that succeeded my raunchy one had now been plagued with a contagious fits of laughter. The built-up pressure and our inner, threatening us with victory or death, had completely vanished. The laughter that was brought upon by my “Jupiter” and “Saturn” allowed my teammates to keep their minds off the victory and just focus on the objective that was the swimming pool wall. Because of this, my team managed to secure a medal for each of their categories in the swim meet—our best performance to date.

This tale of my swimming misadventure has become a locker room legend, shared with junior members of my team. Aside from reminding everyone to tie their pants before they swim, I

also the importance of staying balanced in the pursuit of victory. As humiliating as it was,

this experience taught me about humility and lightheartedness; while it was necessary to take things seriously, an excess of it would not lead to optimal performance.

Even now, as my friends and I are drowning in the sea of physics formulas and computer science lingo before our finals, I never hesitate to start singing the funniest song I know if I feel that the stress is getting to all of us. Amidst any daunting challenge, a well-timed joke can cut through the pressure, reminding us to embrace the joy and absurdity of life’s journey. Laughter is our secret weapon, and with it, we tackle challenges with lighter hearts and brighter smiles, finding success in the joy of the process.

Hi Rayhan,

Your essay is absolutely fantastic! Your anecdote is unique, and your personality shines through with impeccable comedic timing and profound reflection. I thoroughly enjoyed reading it from start to finish, and your attention to detail and vivid descriptions had me fully immersed in the story.

As you mentioned the need to cut down on some parts, I've made some suggestions and directly edited your sentences to maintain the comedic impact while ensuring clarity and cohesion. Some parts were slightly repetitive but still amusing, so selecting the best lines will enhance the overall flow.

Overall, you've done a terrific job, and your essay is a joy to read! Keep up the excellent work!

Best,

Melinda