**Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement? (350 words)**

Staring at the off-white wall washed out by medical grade LED lights, I anxiously sat with my mom next to me as the sterility of the room overwhelmed me. Nerved silence filled the room until my nightmare was confirmed, “your daughter has an ovarian tumor”.

It felt as though an alternate reality came into play as I walked out of the doctor’s room with the diagnosis. The next few months were filled with fear and uncertainty, having to abruptly move back from my boarding school in England. Stomach cramps, heavy medication, and doctor visits seem to be the common cycle. It was not necessarily the seven months I had left (out of a normal twenty-four) to prepare for my now IGCSEs. It was the ‘I’ that was added to the GCSEs.

Be it the Sunday morning meditations or afternoon baking sessions with friends, I felt as though this body of mine was soullessly degrading, drifting away into an eerie dungeon. Not exactly sure what I had done wrong to the universe, I had to painfully mask behind a smile as watching people pity my condition was the last spectacle I needed.

I was adamant not to victimize myself, especially in front of my parents. Determined not to worry about them, I resorted to constant prayers and meditation as ways to cope. I imagined the post-exam trip to Bali me and my friends have meticulously planned over the past year. Lounging on Seminyak beach with fresh coconuts, jet skiing in Nusa Dua and photoshoots by the hanging gardens in Ubud. The only thing constantly snapping me back from this pain relief was the 25 papers I had to sit.

Challenged physically and emotionally, coupled by the study downtime I had critically missed, I knew I had to strategize. Knowing that all the hectic hospital madness would happen in the evenings, I figured that waking up at 4am daily was the sweet spot to crunch in a chapter or two. It was on August 7, 2019 that I fervently smiled at my straight A\*’s/A’s: the stars have rose above the blinding lights.

*Hi Raisa!*

*I was pleasantly surprised, being able to see a different side of the story with your academics. I cannot imagine how I would survive, let alone excel in the exams if I were in your position.*

*At any rate, keep up the excellent work!*

*- Matthew*