

# Mama Calls Me Tennis Ball Because I Always Bounce Back

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I still remember my ball boy training  
you have to squat with your left leg  
simultaneously kneel with your right leg perpendicular to your left  
so even if you miss the catch  
the ball is halted by your legs at a 90-degree angle

I often missed the catch  
even before my strokes  
never the athlete  
always in awe of my sibling's physicality  
my assignment was always ball boy  
during early morning tennis practice on clay courts in Khartoum

aspired to be more  
eventually achieved more  
now I watch tennis in the hospital bed  
paying close attention to the ball boys/ball girls/ball children's technique

I used to be able to kneel on the sidelines for the length of several matches  
now I faint if I kneel for longer than a couple minutes

discovered this when I fainted while praying the rosary  
everything faded to black in the middle of a Hail Mary  
my mouth continued "Holy Mary Mother of God"  
as I swayed and collapsed onto the ground  
unconscious  
woke up in a hospital bed with a diaper as I'd soiled myself  
it's been a while since I defecated in bed because I lost control of me

ball boy duty requires kneeling by the sidelines for the duration of the  
match  
hands splayed against the court  
right knee tucked into chest  
left calf tensed ready to spring into action  
head on a swivel, following the ball  
ears zoned in on the umpire and line umpire  
ready to strike at any moment  
leap into action  
retrieve the ball  
with whichever hand is closest

Being disabled requires laying in bed by the sidelines for the duration of  
your life  
right hand spastic, an effect of the paralysis from your first stroke  
right knee throbbing in pain from a patella fracture that never healed  
properly  
left calf painfully spasming non-stop beyond your control  
head propped up on a rolled-up towel to ease the muscle pain from neck spasms  
ears assaulted by the constant onslaught of sensory overload  
ready to have a seizure at any moment  
fighting the aura  
press next on Doom Patrol  
with your left hand because your right (formerly dominant) hand lost all fine  
motor control thanks to your first stroke  
continue to distract yourself from the pain through power fantasy  
see yourself in Cyborg's group therapy for amputees

shed a tear

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**do not judge me by my weak handshake**

your right hand reaches out  
my anxiety rises  
your right hand continues to swing upwards propelled by able-bodied shoulder  
lever action  
you can do this without thinking about it  
globules of sweat on my nose, forehead, palms and soles engorge  
hyperhidrosis sucks  
anxiety only makes it worse

handshakes always make me anxious

I attempt to wipe the sweat on my right palm off against my right pant leg, while using my left hand to fish out my ride or die crimson and pantone checkered handkerchief out of my left pocket, to wipe the engorged globules sweat off my:

nose

forehead

and palms for good measure

my socks absorb the sweat from my soles

I wish wearing gloves was more socially acceptable

your eyebrows raise

I awkwardly propel my right hand upwards

bent shoulder

bent elbow

spastic clenched right hand

lots of fatigue

your eyebrows raise higher

my spastic right hand attempts to splay out but instead starts spasming

your eyebrow raise even higher

I attempt to place my hand in yours

you have been awkwardly waiting for me to complete the handshake, so as soon as my hand is in the general vicinity, you grip firmly

I spasm as my double jointed pinky raises straight out like I'm a part of genteel society sipping tea

your eyebrow raises higher than I've ever seen

you take a step back

I smile and say

"It's nice to meet you"

you grimace

I smile and think

why can't I shake hands with my left hand?

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## Physical Therapy

had a seizure

after walking for 60 metres  
decked from head-to-toe in athleisure  
push pause on Deezer  
feeling like a geezer  
trapped in a 30-year-old, 180 centimeter  
frame, a.k.a shell of what I used to be at leisure  
patients gawk  
staff gawks  
this is just the teaser

collapse into wheelchair  
legs need a breather  
black spots mid-air  
blink blink  
still there  
blink blink  
aura stays rising like a lever  
blink blink

Transfer to bed  
continue seizure  
electrical impulse transceiver  
beset with convulsions  
physical therapists circle  
Mugabi, The Main Feature  
formerly known as, an overachiever  
formerly known as, a 10 kilometer  
runner of races  
now I have a seizure  
after walking 60 metres

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**Mugabi Byenkya** is an award-winning writer of prose, poetry, comics, essays, drama and occasional rap songs. Mugabi's writing is used to teach High School English in Kampala and Toronto schools. In 2017, Mugabi published his award-nominated Ugandan bestselling debut novel-memoir, 'Dear Philomena,' (Discovering Diversity Publishing) and he went on a 43 city, 5 country North America/East Africa tour, in support of this. In 2018, Mugabi was named one of 56 writers who has contributed to his native Uganda's literary heritage in the 56 years since independence by Writivism (East Africa's largest literary festival).