

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

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?

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

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).