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Mike

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

This novel tells the story of 15 year-old Floyd Beresford, a major tennis star in the making who suddenly decides to quit the game for good. Coached by his enthusiastic but basically caring father, always referred to in the text as Mr Beresford, Floyd is compelled to make this move by the increasing appearances of Mike, a figure around the same age who can only be seen by him. Once Mike actually stops him serving during an important match, it is time to call in the psychologist. Enter Dr Pinner, a figure much given to consuming tea and cake during his consultations. He and Floyd work out that Mike is in fact a projection of Floyd's hidden dissatisfaction with tennis as an all-consuming future career, a state of mind he has up to that point kept secret both from his parents and himself.

Told in curiously flattened prose, this could read like an unusually interesting case history, with Floyd very much a patient rather than a rounded individual. We hear almost nothing about his time at school, and his feelings for his peer group and the opposite sex also hardly come into it until he meets Charity, a charming American girl of the same age. But now things are getting more complicated, with psychology straying into parapsychology. Because Charity can see Mike too, and this normally taciturn but occasional conversational Spirit also starts helping Floyd make decisions based on what has yet to happen while also revealing an inexplicable mastery of Ancient Greek. All works out well at the end, and the basic plot remains intriguing even while Floyd, his parents, Charity and a few other bit parts remain two dimensional figures. Reminiscent in its measured prose and general tamping down of emotions of a benign ghost story written a hundred years ago, there is still much to enjoy though potentially troubling possibilities never get raised. Would other characters really accept the presence of Mike so readily even if he remains invisible to them? And what if Mike sometimes gave Floyd bad advice? Part psychological study, part ghost story, this readable but enigmatic story hovers between the two without ever quite deciding which genre finally to plump for.

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