

***Through Pins or Needles* by Zuzana Říhová**

summary

A married couple, Bohumil and Bohumila, together with their mentally handicapped son, move from Prague to a small village in the borderlands to resolve their marital crisis. In the hot summer they try to fit in with the locals, first attributing their minor misunderstandings to their difference and inability to understand the rural environment. However, small and big lies, strange coincidences and unpleasant incidents increase and the feeling of being threatened grows. The village of Podlesí, where the whole family retreats, is far from a romantic idyll, a claustrophobic place and hostile to its surroundings. People coming from outside, especially from the city, are viewed with distrust and hostility. The local community does not accept outsiders and begins to play a strangely twisted game with the family. The hints that a large animal walks past their cottage at the bottom of the ravine every night correspond strangely with the mysterious leaflets with the tale of the wolf that the couple finds in the local watering hole.

Bohumil and Bohumila try to join in the village life, but from the beginning they are assigned the role of the strangers, the different ones. The closed world of the village community, which has its own rules of operation (everyone knows who drinks too much, who has what kind of illness, whose husband beats whom at home, but such things are not spoken about publicly), becomes a dangerous, threatening place for the family from the city, from which they (unsuccessfully) want to escape. One night the couple return to their empty cottage - their son has disappeared. The strange events culminate on the third day after the boy's disappearance, when all the villagers gather outside the couple's cottage in festive attire. Bohumil and Bohumila become actors in a kind of meta-theatre, a forest ritual inspired by the fairy tale of Little Red Riding Hood, which the villagers perform in the hope that it will rescue them from despair and nothingness. In the grand finale, we have no idea whether this is theatre or reality, a twisted form of modern folklore, or whether the couple's and their son's lives are at stake.