

IngmarBergmanWildStrawberriesTextTVS

By Tim Van Schmidt

Wild Strawberries

Screenplay by Ingmar Bergman

I didn't get to see the movie, but dug up the screenplay for Ingmar Bergman's 1957 movie "Wild Strawberries." After reading it through, I found not just the clichéd atmosphere of a Bergman movie- the dreary grey cloud hanging over everything- but also just a little bit of color. That comes in the form of some little red strawberries that figure prominently in the screenplay.

In "Wild Strawberries," an old doctor is on his way to be honored by academic colleagues and the color he finds in the world is from his past. The doctor is having episodes where memories melt into the present as he mulls over the events of his life. While en route to the ceremonies he is to attend, the doctor makes a stop at his childhood home. There, his other concerns drop away and he is transported to another time. The strawberries are a prized gift being gathered by his first love decades before, but the doctor sees them as clearly as he sees the girl he loves, who will marry his brother and break his heart.

The old doctor did not get the girl and his own marriage became tarnished by sexual assault, guilt and coldness. By the end of his life, the strawberries represent what he still has left- just a little bit of emotion peeking through his controlled exterior, from a long ago time.

Mixed into the doctor's reveries are the marital problems between his son and daughter-in-law- echoing his own dysfunction and that of his large family. The daughter-in-law has left the doctor's son- and has been staying with the doctor- and she ends up taking the wheel on the road trip. Along the road, the doctor and his daughter-in-law encounter a bickering couple who illustrate clearly to both the old man and the younger woman just how horrible marriage can get.

Also involved in the trip is a trio of young people- a girl and two boys- who ride along just by chance. They're adventurers on their way to Europe and they mirror the Doctor's yearning for that flicker of youth. The flicker of youth he gets from them sends him back to his daydreams of the girl with the wild strawberries.

All of this moves the doctor profoundly and he grasps at some renewal from the experience. Both his daughter-in-law and son do the same. But not the doctor's longtime housekeeper- she stubbornly holds onto how things have always been, refusing to accept even familiarity of speech. She represents the world that does not want to change- the rigidity that entraps us all- even as we yearn for something more colorful.

The most arresting quotes in Bergman's screenplay are from the old doctor's son, a man who believes living is "absurd" in the first place, and it was "ridiculous to populate it with new victims." His is a cynical and defeatist attitude that admits only a desire for stone cold death. However, even he finds a spark of meaning in his love for his wife, despite an unwanted pregnancy. This indicates that despite the general harshness of Bergman's view of the world, he leaves a small crack in the door for redemption.