THE GRAND INQUISITOR

by

Eddie Muller

Based on his short story

©2007
Eddie Muller
St. Francis Studio
1411 Paru Street, CA 94501
510. 769. 0884

1 BLACK SCREEN. 1

AMBIENT SOUNDS of a woman in her apartment: footsteps, water running, buttons pushed on a phone...

PHONE MACHINE (O.S.)
Beep: Hey, it's me. It's been two weeks since I heard from you. I'm getting worried. Give me a call, Okay?

CUT TO:

2 INT LULU'S APARTMENT. DAY. 2

A series of CUs show a young woman (Lulu) dressing: applying makeup, shimmying into a vintage dress, zipping it up in back, fixing her hair, etc.

PHONE MACHINE (O.S.)
Beep: This is Dr. Klein's office. The doctor is concerned that you've missed your last two appointments. Please call to reschedule.

Lulu moves urgently — on a mission. A female soldier dressing for combat.

[Note: her face is never seen.]

PHONE MACHINE (O.S.)
(CONT'D)
Beep: Miss Vaughan, this is Det. Clarkson, SFPD. Thanks for showing us all that, ah, evidence. At this time the case is inactive and we don't believe there's enough there to merit it being reopened. Best to just let it lie and leave the police work to us ... but if you want to meet for a cup of coffee or a drink, I'd be glad to give you some pointers on how this kind of work is done professionally.

During the message: CU of a package of books, the brown paper in which they were wrapped ripped open. A LETTER, on Vallejo Police Department letterhead, sits atop the books:

Dear Ms. Vaughan,
We are returning the "evidence" you submitted.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED: 2

PHONE MACHINE (O.S.)
As we consider the case closed we have no use for these materials and are returning them to you forthwith. Thank you for your interest.

The letter is brusquely pushed aside and the books gathered up and stuffed into a large purse.

CU ANGLE ON the young woman's feet stepping into a pristine pair of vintage shoes. She walks out the door, slamming it shut behind her.

CUT TO:

3 BLACK SCREEN. 3

TITLE FADES IN:

THE GRAND INQUISITOR

CUT TO:

4 INT / EXT AUTOMOBILE ON STREET. DAY. 4

A rear-view mirror, twisted askew, shows a slightly blurred image of 1920s era house, surrounded by an overgrown, unkempt garden.

5 INT/EXT HOUSE - STREET IN FRONT OF HOUSE. DAY. 5

Seen through a smudged second-story window, Lulu alights from the car. She slings the big purse over her shoulder. The SOUND of someone inhaling on a cigarette, off-screen. After a brief pause, Lulu strides purposefully toward the house. A plume of smoke drifts through the frame, clouding the image further.

6 EXT STREET. DAY 6

CU ANGLE ON LULU'S SHOES as she walks; CAMERA TRACKING with her. A WIDE SHOT reveals the ramshackle house, sitting beyond an overgrown yard. Lulu enters the frame and walks up the path to the house, for the first time revealing her full vintage attire: a 1950s era summer dress, topped by a demure wool sweater. From her posture, it's clear the purse is heavy. (We still have NOT seen Lulu's face.) The house, looming forlornly above her.

7 PORCH. DAY. 7

Lulu walks up the steps, enters frame. She reaches for the door bell. The SOUND of the old-fashioned DOOR CHIME within.

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED: 7

CU of LULU, straight on, as she waits pensively: mid-twenties, retro-stylish, black hair in a Louise Brooks cut. Wholesome but vaguely haunted. The shot is held for several beats - is someone going to answer? - Lulu's conflicting emotions register: anxiety, determination, uncertainty, resolve. Suddenly, the SOUND of a LOCK OPENING. Lulu re-composes herself.

A KEY TURNS in a lock, followed by a metallic SNAP. After a moment another BOLT SLIDES back. Another deadbolt CLACKS open.

The door opens a crack, revealing a slender WOMAN (HAZEL) in her late sixties, wearing a simple blue housedress and sweater. Her striking features have been wizened by age and veined by alcohol. Lustrous waves of white hair, fixed with jeweled berets, frame her face.

HAZEL
Yes? May I help you?

LULU
Good afternoon. I have some things I believe belong to you, Mrs. Reedy. You are Hazel Reedy?

HAZEL
I am. What things?

She gives Lulu a suspicious head-to-toe inspection.

LULU
(patting the purse)
Some books.

HAZEL
Books? I don't read. My eyesight is going.

LULU
They belong to your husband. At least I think they did.

HAZEL
My husband is dead.

LULU
I know. I'm sorry. Mrs. Reedy, I think these books are important. If I could have just a minute of your time, you'd be able to clear up a lot of things.

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED: 7

Hazel Reedy thinks it over, then steps back inside, leaving the door to slowly drift open on its own.

HAZEL
Come inside.

LULU
I'll try not to take too much of your time.

Lulu enters the house.

8 INT. HAZEL'S HOUSE. DAY. 8

The foyer is murky and silent and still. Hazel closes the door and turns a key to re-lock one deadbolt. She leaves the rest untouched. The place is stale, as if no one has been in or out in years. Lulu scans the foyer, noticing huge stacks of newspapers, going back months, maybe years.

HAZEL
I didn't get your name.

LULU
Lulu.

Hazel Reedy leads her guest to a small living room.

HAZEL
You know, I was very fashionable once, like you. I like that dress. It's lovely.

LULU
Thank you. It was my mother’s.

HAZEL
I still have lots of them. Closets full, upstairs. Come, sit down.

9 LIVING ROOM. DAY. 9

The chesterfield breathes out dust when Lulu sits. Motes swirl in the afternoon light that angles through a gap in the drapes. There are paintings on the walls, and more canvases propped here and there.

(CONTINUED)

9 CONTINUED: 9

HAZEL
Excuse the gloom. I never have visitors and rarely open the drapes. I don't want the upholstery to fade.

LULU
(nodding toward the paintings)
Are you the artist?

Hazel Reedy clicks on a floor lamp beside the chesterfield.

HAZEL
I used to be. I've made myself a pot of tea. May I bring you a cup, as well?

LULU
Um, sure. That would be nice.

HAZEL
I keep it quite warm in here. Take off your sweater if it would make you more comfortable. I'll be right back.

Lulu watches the woman walk to the kitchen: she notices Hazel Reedy's hands seeking out familiar landmarks: a chair rail, the edge of the dinner table, a stretch of wainscoting.

Lulu, hot and tense, fans herself. She removes her sweater and sets it beside her. Glancing around, she notices ashtrays stationed on every flat surface. Stale cigarette smoke, decades worth, thickens the air. Hung on nicotine-stained walls are dingy landscapes. No photographs are displayed anywhere. No trace of any husband, relatives, children.

Lulu steels herself, opens the purse, and begins removing books. She stacks them next to her on couch, sets a couple on the coffee table in front of her.

Hazel Reedy returns carrying one saucered cup, which she carefully sets before her guest.

LULU
Thanks. Aren't you having some?

HAZEL
I could only carry one at a time.

(CONTINUED)

9 CONTINUED: 9

LULU
I'm sorry, I should have asked if you needed help.

HAZEL
I'll get mine in a moment.

LULU
Let me get it for you.

HAZEL
Sit down. In a moment.

Hazel Reedy pulls over a straight-backed chair, its velour seat worn to a shine. She lowers herself into it.

HAZEL (CONT'D)
Are those the books you wanted me to see?

LULU
Do you recognize them?

HAZEL
No. But I'm curious why you think I should.

Lulu separates from the pile an exhausted volume: *The Synonym Finder* by J. I. Rodale. The broken-apart hardcover is missing the front signature and the cover boards are held tenuously in place by a patchwork of masking tape. Lulu delicately places it on the table and flips it open to a random page.

The book's margins are filled with miniscule notes in various colors - cribbed comments running vertically up the side, across the head and foot, sentences underscored with heavy pen lines, certain words and phrases highlighted with yellow marker.

LULU
Look familiar?

HAZEL
That looks like the work of a crazy person. You know, your hairdo is very old-fashioned, dear. I'm trying to think of that actresses' name. My memory-

LULU
When you look closely, you see it's not really crazy.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

9 CONTINUED: 9

LULU (CONT'D)
It's not disorganized or random. It's more like the work of someone whose mind won't shut off. There's a thesaurus I didn't bring that's 1,289 pages. There are notes like this on every page. It’s like he’s trying to grasp everything.

Hazel Reedy silently lights a cigarette, her movements so stealthy Lulu doesn't notice the lighter striking.

HAZEL
You think you're describing my husband? From this book?

LULU
Did this belong to your husband?

HAZEL
John did study a lot, I'll say that. If that was his, I wouldn't be surprised.

LULU
Your husband was a brilliant man, I'm assuming. Being a teacher and all.

HAZEL
Um-Hmm.

Hazel Reedy gazes through a plume of exhaled smoke as Lulu places a 1946 Encyclopedia Brittanica - Volume 16: Mushroom to Ozonides - atop the Rodale. She opens it to a bookmarked section midway through the volume.

HAZEL (CONT'D)
You don't mind my smoke, I hope.

LULU
Of course not. Here's a long entry in this encyclopedia regarding “Numbers.” Notice all these highlighted and marked-up sections pertaining to cuneiform numerals and hieroglyphs; all this stuff here about the development of numerals through the symbolic, decimal, and cipher stages…

Hazel Reedy reaches for an ashtray at the end of the table and moves it closer. She taps ash into it, never taking her eyes off her guest.

(CONTINUED)

9 CONTINUED: 9

HAZEL
And your reason for showing me this?

LULU
I'm getting to that. You may remember that many years ago there was a man, a man who killed some people and boasted about it by sending letters, letters and messages in code, to the newspapers.

HAZEL
You came here because you think my husband was Zodiac.

LULU
Am I the first?

HAZEL
Yes, you are. You certainly are.

Lulu hastily hands Hazel Reedy a musty paperback: *Haunted Mesa*.

LULU
Here – look at this. It’s from a series of westerns about a vigilante gunfighter with a secret identity. There were a bunch of these “Masked Rider” novels in with these other books. Turn to the last page…

Hazel Reedy's fingers, balancing a dwindling Pall Mall, absently turn pages. Her gaze, however, stays on Lulu's face. A flush rises from Lulu's chest to her cheeks. (She's expected a different kind of reaction.) Shaking slightly, Lulu takes the book, riffles to the end, and replaces it in Hazel Reedy's passive hands.

LULU (CONT'D)
See what's there?

Below the final line is a series of numbers, arranged to form a code. Beneath that: a crudely etched circle bisected by two crossing pen slashes.

HAZEL
What am I supposed to make of this?

(CONTINUED)

9 CONTINUED: 9

LULU
Doesn't that symbol mean anything to you?

HAZEL
I suppose you'll tell me.

LULU
It's crosshairs. A gun sight. It's the symbol Zodiac used to sign his letters. Flip through that book, any of these books. That symbol is all over the pages.

Across a vast stretch of years, the two women stare at each other.

HAZEL
Don't let your tea get cold.

Parched by her nervousness, Lulu swallows gulps of tepid tea.

HAZEL (CONT'D)
If you thought this all amounted to something, you wouldn't have come brazenly knocking on my door. You'd have taken all this to the police.

LULU
I have.

HAZEL
And did they laugh at you?

LULU
(lying)
No. No, they did not.

Lulu tries to appear forthright, but cannot look Hazel Reedy in the eye.

HAZEL
And if the police saw something in all this, why aren't they here?

LULU
Because there's nothing in these books they can act on. It's barely circumstantial. But when I learned that John Montgomery Reedy was married … well, it seemed obvious that his widow could settle this.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

9 CONTINUED: 9

LULU (CONT'D)
You are the one who can blow my whole crazy theory right out of the water.

HAZEL
Or I could just admit that my husband was a murderer?

LULU
Or that.

HAZEL
You have a lot of guts, young lady. I'll say that for you. We called it moxie, in my day.

Hazel Reedy stands up again and starts toward the kitchen, trailing cigarette smoke. She pauses beside a small desk situated between living and dining rooms. Her fingers absently move some envelopes around, then she flicks a precarious ash into a waiting ashtray.

HAZEL (CONT'D)
Dear, the notes in these books, don’t you think you'd find that kind of thing in any teacher's reference books?

Lulu stands up and approaches Hazel Reedy, a slip of paper clutched in her hand.

LULU
This was used as a bookmark. It's a bank deposit slip: J. Montgomery Reedy, 25 Fairlawn Drive, Riverside, California. Were you married then? In Riverside?

HAZEL
Yes. I was married to John Montgomery Reedy from the time I was twenty-two years old. A very naïve twenty-two year old. How old are you, dear?

LULU
Twenty-six.

HAZEL
You weren't even alive then. What possible interest could you have in those horrible crimes?
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

9 CONTINUED: 9

HAZEL (CONT'D)
For God's sake, look at you. You're still a child.

LULU
I know someone who was murdered.

HAZEL
I'm sorry ... were you close?

LULU
I didn't know her very long.

Hazel is momentarily set back on her heels; she steps from the lving room into the dining room. Lulu moves to the desk, watching Hazel. She shakes off any doubts and forges ahead, more determined than ever.

LULU (CONT'D)
Your husband taught in Riverside for two years, at Harbor Avenue Junior High School. Isn't that right?

INT. DINING ROOM.

HAZEL
He taught English. The notes in those books, they're just things a teacher does. The musings of a fertile mind.

LULU
Some of these books were purchased in Riverside. The receipts are still in them. Zodiac's first documented murder was in Riverside: Cherie Jo Bates.

HAZEL
We moved here in 1967. So that seems to-

LULU
(striding up to Hazel)
Cherie Jo Bates was killed in 1966. The records at Harbor Avenue Junior High show that Mr. Reedy quit three months after her murder. He immediately moved up here to Danville, where he got a job teaching at Monte Vista High School.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LULU (CONT'D)
But you lived in Vallejo, where Zodiac started killing again in 1969. Let me show you something else.

10 Lulu hurries back to the coffee table and grabs something. Hazel sinks into a chair beside the dining table, drawing an ashtray to her and stubbing out her cigarette. Lulu suddenly reappears, kneeling beside the old woman. 10

LULU (CONT'D)
(working faster, excited)
This is from a book called *The Experience of Literature*.

Hazel Reedy crushes the butt in another ashtray and accepts the stapled pages as if they are a dead thing. She peruses the pages silently. Lulu kneels beside the old woman, their arms touching.

LULU (CONT'D)
Its an excerpt from Dostoevski's *The Brothers Karamazov*, called “The Grand Inquisitor.”

Lulu guides the suddenly mute woman through pages she has endlessly studied, making sure that Hazel Reedy's eyes follow her finger as Lulu traces the intricately-inscribed notes. In CUs, Lulu's finger points out highlighted words: GOD, DEATH, FREE WILL, ENSLAVEMENT, GOOD/EVIL - she lingers on the violently underscored phrase Through Suffering Victory Over Flesh.

LULU (O.S.) (CONT'D)
All of these references appear in Zodiac's letters to the press. I have read every word of these books, Mrs. Reedy - the ones printed on the pages and the ones written in by your husband. There is a manifesto in the margins of these books.

Lulu rises and quickly pulls over a chair. She sits.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LULU (CONT'D)
He scares me. Just on the page, he scares me. Did he scare you?

HAZEL
(snapping out of it)
Even if these did belong to my husband, maybe he bought them second-hand, maybe the markings was already in them. How could we know? And how did you come to have them anyway?

LULU
I found them in an antique store all boxed up together. The dealer bought them at a church bazaar at St. Isidore's, just down the road from here. Sister Joan said thay were donated by a long-time parishioner whose husband had died eight years ago. She said you're exact words were: 'Someone else needs to have these now.'

HAZEL
(contemplative)
I didn't go to St. Isidore's very much by then. Yes, she would have remembered.

LULU
Did you want them to be found?

Hazel Reedy draws a deep wheezing breath, which doesn't fill her deflated frame. She fidgets with an empty cigarette pack.

LULU (CONT'D)
(pressing her advantage)
Why didn't you take them to the police?

HAZEL
(starting to stand)
My cigarettes are in the kitchen. Come with me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LULU
(touching Hazel, taking her hand)
If you can disprove what I'm suggesting, please do. Any of it. Like here - how the writing on this side of the page slants to the left. Yet in the other margin it leans to the right. From all the police reports and research shown, the belief is that Zodiac was ambidextrous, that he could write with either hand, which would account-

HAZEL
Don't you believe that. That's ridiculous.

Hazel Reedy rises from her chair.

LULU
Was your husband ambid-

The old woman holds up her hand, like a reprimand. She glares at her young inquisitor.

HAZEL
The person who wrote all this … madness … was not ambidextrous. What you see on these pages is more like schizophrenia.

Lulu's chest tightens. Her arms tingle. She closes the book.

HAZEL (CONT'D)
Follow me. I want to show you something.

Hazel Reedy feels her way through the dining room, her figure disappearing through a swinging door that divides the dining room from the kitchen. Lulu faintly hears the SOUNDS of a CABINET opening, a FAUCET running, a glass being rinsed. Then Hazel Reedy's voice, calling:

HAZEL (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Dear, please. Come in here.

Lulu walks toward the kitchen. She is surprised how unsteady she feels, wobbly in the knees, feet slightly numb. She is more afraid than she realized.

11 PANTRY / KITCHEN. DAY. 11

Pushing open the swinging door, Lulu is startled to see the empty liquor bottles filling a pantry that extends toward the kitchen. Dozens and dozens of them, marshaled on the tile counter, collected in boxes on the floor, precariously poised everywhere.

Lulu notices a wastebasket just inside the door. It is filled with empty prescription drug containers. Hundreds of them.

Lulu steps slowly, dreamily, toward the kitchen.

Hazel Reedy stands on the back porch, before a curtained window. She appears to be looking up a flight of water-stained wooden stairs to her right, leading into darkness. She turns slowly to face Lulu: she’s drinking from a highball glass and smoking a cigarette. Hazel urgently draws down on the cigarette, lengthening the ash.

HAZEL
Louise Brooks.

LULU
I'm sorry?

HAZEL
That's the actress I was trying to think of before. She had a haircut like yours.

LULU
That's why I took the name Lulu. For her movie.

HAZEL
You're too young to know about her. And too young to have lost anyone the Zodiac. And also too young to be my daughter, I am sorry to say.

Lulu isn't sure she's heard right. The words sound distant, faint. Her head feels strange. She tries to ignore it.

LULU
I’m sorry I thought you said someth—

Hazel holds up her hand again, hushing Lulu. She drags deeply on the cigarette again and lets the smoke out in a long, luxurious breath.

(CONTINUED)

11 CONTINUED: 11

HAZEL
That's it. My last one.

She flicks the butt in the sink. Hazel Reedy straightens to her full height.

HAZEL (CONT'D)
Lulu, listen to me. There isn't much time. What would you say if I told you you were right? What would your reaction be? Would you hate me? The way I hate myself?

Lulu tries to answer, but her tongue is too thick to let words out.

HAZEL (CONT'D)
Look at me, look at this place. I have been ill my whole life. I couldn't do what needed to be done.

LULU
(difficultly)
It’s not your fault. God forgives.

HAZEL
(angrily)
I don't want God's forgiveness. Where was God when the damage took place? Why did he let it happen? Any of it? Why hasn’t he eased my conscience after all the years I've spent praying for help? No, I don't need God’s forgiveness - I need your forgiveness. I’m so glad it’s going to be you. Look at you, so full of promise. Like the ones that died. The ones he killed.

LULU
That he *may* have killed.

HAZEL
Lulu, look under there.

Hazel points to a table against the kitchen wall. The tabletop is pink-and-gray speckled Formica. Lulu sets a hand on it to steady herself.

HAZEL (CONT'D)
You'll have to kneel down.

(CONTINUED)

11 CONTINUED: 11

Hesitantly, Lulu lowers a knee to the floor, bends over, and cranes her neck to look beneath the table. Whatever she sees shocks her: Lulu stands up too quickly, banging back into the table. Her head reels.

HAZEL (CONT'D)
He had them hidden all over the house. In secret places. That's the only one left. I don't know why, but I had to keep one.

LULU
I have to go now. I don't feel well.

HAZEL
You'd better sit down. Use this chair.

LULU
I don't know what's happening.

HAZEL
I put something in your tea. It took so long for you to finally come, I didn't want you running away.

Lulu pitches against the table, clutching it to stay upright.

Hazel stands in front of Lulu and touches her damp face. Both women have tears in their eyes. Hazel displays her left hand. The thumb has been hacked off.

HAZEL (CONT'D)
Lulu — He did that, Lulu. You asked before if he scared me? He paralyzed me, every moment I was alive. I had no one to help me, no one to talk to. But that's no excuse. I let it happen. John did evil things, but I am guilty too, as much as if I'd held the gun or the knife.

Lulu makes a dizzy move to get away, but Hazel clutches her and deposits her in the chair. The older woman is surprisingly strong. Their faces touch as Hazel lowers Lulu sags into the chair.

(CONTINUED)

11 CONTINUED: 11

HAZEL (CONT'D)
(looking down at Lulu)
You see, to make sure I never left him, John made me his accomplice. How could I betray him then? He was brilliant, as you said. But I wrote everything in those books, Lulu, not John. All the ciphers, all the letters. I wrote them.

Lulu, fighting to stay conscious, looks devastated. Hazel bends down and wraps her arms around the young woman.

HAZEL (CONT'D)
Here, let's get this off. It'd be a shame to ruin it.

Lulu's eyes fight to stay open. They beg for mercy. She feels the zipper slide down her back and the dress spread open. Gently, Hazel Reedy slides the dress from Lulu's shoulders, to her waist. She balances the young woman against the table and tugs the dress down her hips and off. Lulu is left in white brassiere and panties. Hazel folds Lulu’s dress expertly and sets it at the table’s far end.

HAZEL (CONT'D)
Can you still hear me? I'm sorry to put you through this, Lulu … but I am guilty of terrible sins.

Hazel spreads Lulu's knees apart and kneels between her bare legs.

HAZEL (CONT'D)
God won't forgive me and I don't want him to. I could have stopped it, but I didn't know how. I can't forgive myself. But you, you can forgive me, Lulu.

Hazel reaches her right hand under the table and pulls free a Navy-issue survival knife hidden there. With her other hand she caresses Lulu's face, tilting her chin gently upright. Hazel sits back on her haunches, her face streaked with tears.

HAZEL (CONT'D)
Please, my dear … try to understand. That's all I want. It's what I've waited for all these years. To look in your eyes and see your forgiveness. Will you forgive me?

(CONTINUED)

11 CONTINUED: 11

With what little will she still possesses, Lulu holds her head up and looks into Hazel's eyes. She nods.

HAZEL (CONT'D)
Thank you. Thank you for finally coming, my dear. Thank you for being so smart. And thank you for hearing my confession. God hates me, but he blesses you.

With a fast deep cut, Hazel Reedy pulls the blade across her own throat. The remains of her life spill into Lulu's lap. The knife clatters to the floor. Shuddering, Hazel drops her head into Lulu’s lap and clutches her around the waist. Hazel hugs Lulu more tightly than she has ever held anyone.

THE SCREEN
SLOWLY GOES
WHITE.

END CREDITS