

**BURDEN**

Written by  
Harry Lazarus

Based on the book  
"THE MYSTERIES OF HARRIS BURDICK"  
by CHRIS VAN ALLSBURG

film@harrylazarus.com

+44 07491 996452

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**CHARACTERS :**

JEAN BURDEN, a dedicated writer living in a modest Hôtel Meublé, wearily rushing to complete his novel the night before its looming deadline.

FLORENCE ÉLISABETH, a diligent though low-ranking clerk at the publishing house.

**SETTING:**

A quiet, provincial town in early 1900s France, marked by its gothic architecture and the looming presence of dark, wind-swept forests at its edge. The town's narrow streets and towering buildings evoke a sense of age and mystery, while the soft hum of industry quietly reaches its borders.

**NOTE:**

This film is presented in black and white.

Aspect ratio: 1.19:1 or 4:3, reminiscent of Jean's illustrated imagery.

Jean and Florence both speak French, subtitled in English.

The dialogue is written in English for clarity.

First, over BLACK, we hear...

The SOUND of rapid typing on a typewriter, accompanied by quick, sudden carriage returns and the howl of wind hitting the windows.

CUT IN:

INT. PROTAGONIST'S BEDROOM - DUSK

In a dimly lit bedroom, illuminated only by a banker's lamp and flickering candles, our protagonist, JEAN BURDEN (20) sits hunched at his typewriter. Sleep-deprived and weary in a white shirt and dark waistcoat, he types furiously - racing to finish his novel on the eve of its looming deadline.

By his side, next to his typewriter, a neat pile of previously written pages rests, each one a silent reminder of his obsessive work.

Suddenly, the distant chime of a clock tower echoes outside his window. Jean's head snaps up in sudden realisation.

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a pocket watch - he is late.

JEAN

Oh dear!

In a panic, he stands from his chair, grabbing his jacket and a folder before rushing out of the door.

TITLE CARD: BURDEN

MUSIC CUE: Original Score reminiscent of "Arrival" by Mark Korven

INT. HÔTEL MEUBLÉ HALLWAY - FOUNDER'S BUILDING - DUSK

Having left his bedroom, Jean rushes down the hallway of the Hôtel Meublé, a modest boarding house, clutching a folder tightly to his chest.

INT. HÔTEL MEUBLÉ STAIRCASE - FOUNDER'S BUILDING - DUSK

Jean rushes down the staircase of the of the Hôtel Meublé in a hurry.

INT. HÔTEL MEUBLÉ DOORWAY - FOUNDER'S BUILDING - DUSK

Jean opens the building door and rushes out.

EXT. CLOCK TOWER - FOUNDER'S SQUARE - DUSK

Jean continues rushing in the direction he's heading, passing the old-fashioned architecture of a tall clock tower that imposingly towers over him.

The SOUND of the harsh wind grows significantly louder.

EXT. PILLARED STATUE PATHWAY - FOUNDER'S SQUARE - DUSK

Jean continues walking along the path, glancing inside the folder to ensure he has everything he needs, checking that nothing has been forgotten.

As he moves, he brushes past a statue of a woman's head, reminiscent of Clotho, the first of the three Moirai sisters in Greek mythology, also known as the Fates.

The statue evokes Clotho, The Spinner - the sister who weaves the thread of life and entangles those who try to avoid their inescapable fate."

EXT. TUNNEL - FOUNDER'S SQUARE - DUSK

Jean quickly walks through a tunnel, briefly stopping to catch his breath and steady himself.

Above Jean's head, he passes beneath another statue - a face, this time of Lachesis, the second of the three sisters. Lachesis observes the fate of all mortals, yet remains passive, never intervening.

As Jean continues on his journey, the third sister, Atropos, is nowhere to be seen. She remains unseen, as she waits patiently at the end of every mortal's thread, for death is inescapable.

EXT. STAIRCASE - FOUNDER'S CORNER - DUSK

Jean rushes down the staircase, still clutching onto the folder.

EXT. FOREST FOOTPATH - JANE HOLLOWAY BUILDING - DUSK

The SOUND of the harsh wind grows louder, now echoing through the depths of the forest as Jean runs along a footpath, faintly lit by street lamps.

Jean runs toward a building in the distance. He turns the corner and hurries inside.

END MUSIC CUE

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE OFFICE - FOUNDER'S ART HALLWAY MEETING ROOM - DUSK

Jean enters the office of the publishing house that will be publishing his novel. He carries a folder containing the illustrated imagery for his book, intended for the clerk, FLORENCE ÉLISABETH (20) - sharp-eyed and composed, wearing a high-necked blouse tucked into a dark, ankle-length skirt.

The office is dimly lit, much like Jean's bedroom, with shadows filling the corners. Florence's face is partially obscured by shadow, illuminated only by the flickering light of a Tiffany Dragonfly Lamp on her desk.

She sits at her desk, directly opposite the doorway, and looks up from the documents in front of her.

For a brief moment, as she looks up, the light catches Florence's face, fully illuminating her expression. But as Jean moves, his shadow falls over her, shrouding her into darkness. Jean stands opposite her, holding the folder high.

JEAN

(quickly)

I've got all the images, every single one, all fourteen...as promised.

Florence looks down at the folder as he places it down on her desk opposite her.

FLORENCE

Thank you, and you'll have the stories to match them tomorrow?

JEAN

Yes, by tomorrow morning I'll have all the matching stories.

Jean begins to back toward the door, his urgency palpable as he prepares to leave. As he moves, his hand briefly rests on the back of an empty chair at a long table.

FLORENCE

Okay, as long as you have them  
completed and delivered by tomorrow  
then you should be fine.

JEAN

(hurriedly)

Okay, excellent.

JEAN (cont'd)

I'll be back tomorrow morning with-

Jean rushes toward the door, his urgency clear as he speaks,  
eager to leave and return home to continue writing his  
novel. He begins making his way through the doorway.

FLORENCE

(quickly)

Mr. Burden?

Florence rises from her desk. As she stands her lamp  
flickers.

Jean stops, peering his head back into the office. He is  
stood in the room with her, but his mind is elsewhere - back  
at his bedroom, sitting at his typewriter.

He is an obsessed artist, his fixation taking a toll on his  
health - something Florence notices with concern.

FLORENCE (cont'd)

(briefly pauses)

Are you okay?

JEAN

(quickly)

Yes, I'm fine, I'm just in a hurry.

JEAN (cont'd)

(confused)

Are you okay?

FLORENCE

Yes, I'm doing fine. Though...

Florence pauses for a moment as Jean stands in the doorway,  
visibly eager to leave.

Her expression visibly changes as she decides not to  
continue with what she planned on saying.

Florence has seen countless authors come into this office. She recognises the positive and negative effects the writing process can have on authors.

She can tell that Jean's work is wearing on his health, but with only a day left before he finishes, she hesitates.

Florence looks back up at him, offering a small smile before shaking her head.

FLORENCE (cont'd)  
Nevermind.

Jean, for a brief moment seemingly more in touch with reality, nods his head before starting to step backwards.

JEAN  
(quick but slightly  
calmer)  
Very well, I'll see you tomorrow.

Jean rushes through the doorway, leaving before Florence has a chance to respond.

FLORENCE  
Goodbye.

Florence glances down at the documents in front of her, then looks back up to the empty doorway as the SOUND of Jean slamming the door echoes down the hallway.

She looks down at the folder containing Jean's illustrated imagery, then lifts it, beginning to examine its contents.

SMASH CUT:

EXT. FOREST FOOTPATH - JANE HOLLOWAY BUILDING - DUSK

Jean rushes back the way he came, now empty-handed. He begins to climb the slope leading to the staircase he had descended earlier. Exhaustion, both physical and mental, is evident on his face.

MUSIC CUE - "Sonovabitch" by Mark Korven

EXT. STAIRCASE - FOUNDER'S CORNER - DUSK

Jean reaches the top of the stairs and forces himself to jog lightly back towards his bedroom.

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE OFFICE - DUSK

Looking through the pages of the folder, Florence carefully focuses on each image one page at a time.

Jean's novel tells fourteen separate stories and he has hand drawn a single image for each of the stories.

Other than the name and a brief description of the stories being attached to each image, Florence is largely left to fill in the gaps with her imagination.

Florence focuses on an image titled "THE THIRD-FLOOR BEDROOM."

The image depicts a bedroom with the window open. The wall is noticeably covered in wallpaper scattered with doves. Interestingly, one dove is missing from the pattern entirely, whilst another is starting to peel from the wall as if it is coming to life.

INT. HÔTEL MEUBLÉ HALLWAY - FOUNDER'S BUILDING - NIGHT

Jean hurries down the hallway, quickly reaching his bedroom door.

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE OFFICE - NIGHT

Still staring at the image, Florence shifts her attention to the description, which reads: "It all began when someone left the window open."

INT. JEAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Before sitting at his typewriter, Jean feels a stronger breeze in the room. He glances at the open window, puzzled, certain that it hadn't been open before.

Faintly recalling the possibility that he might have opened it without realising, he walks over and shuts it.

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE OFFICE - NIGHT

Florence flips the page, briefly pausing to examine an image titled "JUST DESSERT," depicting a woman holding a knife. She then turns her attention to the next page.

MUSIC CUE: "Sonovabitch" by Mark Korven fades into "Curse Your Name / Dirty Weather" by Mark Korven



INT. JEAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Now seated at his desk, Jean types frantically at his typewriter, his fingers moving in a blur.

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE OFFICE - NIGHT

As if drawn by an unseen force, Florence remains fixated on the contents of the folder, unable to tear her eyes away from its pages.

Turning the page once again, she takes interest in one image in particular titled "MR. LINDEN'S LIBRARY." As she is drawn to the image, the lamp on her desk flickers, casting an eerie glow.

The image portrays a girl sleeping on her bed, an open book resting beside her. From within the pages, brambles begin to emerge, slowly creeping into the waking world.

She is enthralled by this image, unable to break her gaze.

FLORENCE  
(whispering)  
Oh my God.

As Florence moves to read the description beneath the image, the sound of a bell chimes from a clock within the publishing house, pulling her attention away. Realising the time, she recognises it's time for her to go home.

She stands from her desk and begins to collect her belongings.

INT. JEAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jean types feverishly, his fingers moving with relentless speed.

The carriage return echoes in the quiet room as he continues to write, absorbed in his work.

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE OFFICE - NIGHT

As Florence is about to leave her office, she stops in the doorway, her gaze drawn back to the book. She hesitates for a moment, an inexplicable pull urging her closer.

Almost as if compelled by something beyond her will, she walks back to her desk, her hand reaching for the book before she exits.

## INT. JEAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jean is now even more visibly exhausted. For the first time in a while he is not typing but rather reading through a page.

Lifting the page from the typewriter, he tightly clasps it before a look of frustration covers his face.

Tearing up the piece of paper he throws it in the bin at the side of his desk which is already overflowing with torn pieces of paper.

Jean places a new piece of paper in the typewriter before continuing to type away.

## INT. FLORENCE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Placing her belongings down in her bedroom, Florence sets the folder on her desk.

The SOUND of harsh wind howling through the trees intensifies as rain begins to pour.

As she moves towards the opposite side of the bedroom, faint whispers begin to echo, as if the voices of lost souls linger within. The candle next to the folder flickers.

## INT. JEAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Looking extremely weary, Jean continues to rapidly type away. He lifts a finger, quickly rubbing his eye before returning to his relentless pace.

## INT. FLORENCE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lying in bed, Florence continues to gaze through the folder. She focuses on an image titled "UNINVITED GUESTS," which depicts the basement of a house, featuring an extremely small door.

## INT. JEAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jean types furiously at his typewriter, not pausing for a second as he relentlessly pushes forward to finish his work.

## INT. FLORENCE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Florence's attention shifts back to the description below the image title, which reads: "His heart was pounding. He was sure he had seen the doorknob turn."

## INT. JEAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Typing at an incredibly rapid pace, Jean pushes himself to his limits, his fingers flying over the keys as he continues to work tirelessly on the novel.

His speed increases, his breathing becoming heavier, when suddenly, a loud thud at the door startles him.

Frantically, Jean's eyes dart toward the bedroom door, sweat dripping down his face as he breathes heavily.

Uncertain whether the sound was a product of his imagination, he continues to stare at the door, then glances down, taking a moment to gather his thoughts.

His mind is consumed by the words on the page, leaving him detached from the reality around him.

## INT. FLORENCE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Florence turns her focus to perhaps the most unsettling image she's seen yet. This image is titled "UNDER THE RUG."

She brings her candle closer to the image, the flickering light casting eerie shadows as she examines it more closely.

The image depicts a man in a ill-lit room with an expression of terror as he holds a chair above his head. From the carpet beneath him, a lump begins to rise, its shape unnatural and ominous. It moves as though it's alive, ready to consume him, pulling him into an inescapable darkness.

## INT. JEAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

## SLOW MOTION

Now standing, Jean's head hangs low, his eyes locked onto the floor as a dark, unnatural force begins to materialize before him. His breath catches in his throat, and his body trembles with a mix of disbelief and dread.

Jean lowers himself, trembling to take hold of something.

## INT. FLORENCE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The folder lies open on Florence's bed, revealing the image titled "MR. LINDEN'S LIBRARY."

Brambles, dark and gnarled, begin to slither from the edges of the page, creeping into reality with unnatural intent, twisting and writhing as they spill into the room - threatening to escape the confines of the paper itself.

The air grows thick as a supernatural presence begins to arise from within the folder.

## INT. JEAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jean lifts his chair above his head, his face filled with defiance, but it soon shifts to one of confusion and fear as an unexplainable force takes hold of him.

## INT. FLORENCE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Florence lies dormant, the book open beside her. A creeping sense of dread fills the air as the brambles continue to emerge from the pages, mirroring the haunting image.

This shot perfectly recreates "MR. LINDEN'S LIBRARY."

The image appears again in the frame, showing the same haunting scene. The description beneath it reads: "He had warned her about the book. Now it was too late."

Florence lies with her eyes shut. The brambles grow larger, curling around her, creeping ever closer to overtaking her body.

The room, once serene, is now filled with an unnatural stillness.

## INT. JEAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jean now holds the chair completely above his head with an expression of terror covering his face.

From the carpet beneath him, a lump begins to rise, its shape unnatural and ominous. It moves as though it's alive, ready to consume him, pulling him into an inescapable darkness.

This shot perfectly recreates "UNDER THE RUG."

What he had only written in the pages of his novel has now become a living nightmare, a force beyond his control. The very thing he had conjured in fiction now stands before him, an inescapable fate closing in.

His face twists with the horror of knowing that this is no longer a story - this is his reality.

With all his strength, he slams the chair down, his breath ragged, his movements frantic - fighting for his life against the writhing presence beneath the rug.

END SLOW MOTION

CUT TO BLACK

CUT IN:

INT. JEAN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Bright daylight spills through the window, illuminating the bedroom in disarray. The chair is knocked over, papers shredded, bottles spilled across the desk, seeping into the wood.

Jean is gone. His typewriter sits untouched, the pile of written pages missing.

A cold wind howls through the room, unnatural and alive. Faint whispers swirl in the air, rising and falling like distant voices. A bottle rolls across the desk, moving with a deliberate jerk.

The open window glows with an unnatural, ethereal light, casting an eerie radiance across the room. The whispers intensify, growing louder and more frantic, as if beckoning something, or someone, closer.

The room feels heavy, as if it's alive, the oppressive air thick with an unseen presence.

Suddenly, the light from the window grows blinding, overwhelming the room in a searing white. The whispers reach a crescendo, then-silence.

END MUSIC CUE

CUT TO BLACK

THE END