

THE IDEA A Play by Altenir Silva

Inspired by "The Pat Hobby Stories" of "F. Scott Fitzgerald"

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Perusal
Only

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CHARACTERS

F .SCOTT FITZGERALD, 44

PAT HOBBY, 49

JACK BERNERS / JUDGE / NICK CARRAWAY

DOORMAN / JOE / SMITH

ELEANOR CARTER / KATHERINE HODGE /GIRL 1

BERNERS' SECRETARY / PRINCESS DIGNANNI / ZELDA FITZGERALD / GIRL 2

WARD WAINWRIGHT / LOUIE / DeTINC/ PARKE

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F. SCOTT FITZGERALD is sitting at a table, his Underwood typewriter in front of him. PAT HOBBY is seated as well.

PAT

You make me feel miserable!

SCOTT

I'm so sorry! I didn't know what to do!

PAT

You hate me!

SCOTT

It's not true, Pat! I love all my characters!

PAT

Why not make me happy?

SCOTT

But you're a fictional character who works in movies. Who's happy in movies?

PAT

They despise me because I dream too much.

SCOTT

Me too! But I'm not a character - I'm real.

PAT

You created me! Now make me happy!

SCOTT

Characters live just for conflict. Happiness is for the end.

PAT

What does that mean?

SCOTT

That at the end of the story you'll be happy!

PAT

I will?

SCOTT

I don't know. I haven't written the ending yet.

PAT

And when will you?

SCOTT

If you let me work...

PAT

I'm leaving. I need to talk with Jack Berners and get my tickets for the preview tonight

(He stands.)

Scott... please... listen to me... change my destiny...

SCOTT

I'll try.

PAT

That's better.

(He leaves.)

(SCOTT rubs his hand over his face, takes a breath and begins typing.)

(Blackout.)

(Sound of typing.)

(Lights up on JACK BERNERS and PAT HOBBY.)

BERNERS

I haven't got a job for you. We've got more writers than we can use.

PAT

I didn't ask for a job... But I think I rate some tickets for the preview tonight... since I got a half credit.

BERNERS

Oh yes, I need to talk to you about that. We may have to take your name off the screen credits.

PAT

What? It's already on! I saw it in the Reporter. "By Ward Wainwright and Pat Hobby."

BERNERS

But we may have to take it off when we release the picture. Wainwright's back from the East and raising hell. He says that you claimed lines where all you did was change "No" to "No sir" and "crimson" to "red", and stuff like that.

PAT

I been in this business twenty years. I know my rights. I was called in to revise a turkey!

BERNERS

You were not. After Wainwright went to New York I called you in to fix one small character. If I hadn't gone fishing you wouldn't have got away with sticking your name on the script. Still, I was glad to see you get a credit after so long.

PAT

I'll fight it with the Screen Writers Guild.

BERNERS

You don't stand a chance. Anyhow, Pat, your name's on it tonight at least, and it'll remind everybody you're alive. And I'll dig you up some tickets... But keep an eye out for Wainwright. It isn't good for you to get socked when you're over fifty.

PAT

I'm in my forties!

SECRETARY

(Enters.)

Excuse me, Mr. Berners. It's Mr. Wainwright.

BERNERS

Tell him to wait.

(to PAT)

Better go out the side door.

PAT

How about the tickets?

BERNERS

Drop by this afternoon.

(Lights fade.)

(We hear the sound of the typewriter.)

(SCOTT is typing on his Underwood typewriter. PAT approaches him.)

PAT

Why are you doing this?

SCOTT

What?

PAT

I'm losing the writing credit.

SCOTT

Life is not always fair.

PAT

Please... change my story.

SCOTT

No. For a young screenwriter this might have been a crushing blow but you're made of sterner stuff.

PAT

Stern? Not me! I should be strong ... but I'm not ... even with the help of every poisonous herb that blossoms between Washington Boulevard and Ventura, between Santa Monica and Vine... I continue to slip.

SCOTT

Let me see what I can do. Let's go back to the moment you leave the office of Jack Berners...

(He begins typing.)

(Lights fade.)

(A cute blonde is looking for something.
PAT approaches her.)

PAT

Can I help you?

ELEANOR

Yes! I'm lost!

PAT

So I noticed.

ELEANOR

I came for a tour of the studio and a policeman made me leave my camera in some office. Then I went to stage five where the guide said to go, but it was closed.

PAT

We'll see about that.

ELEANOR

You're very nice. I'm Eleanor Carter from Boise, Idaho.

PAT

My name is Pat Hobby. I write movies.

(They shake hands.)

ELEANOR

I never met a writer before.

PAT

Writers are some of the biggest shots in Hollywood.

ELEANOR

You see, I never thought of it that way.

PAT

Bernard Shaw was out here... Eugene O'Neill... and Einstein... but they couldn't make the grade.

ELEANOR

Look! They are filming there!

PAT

I-I know the director!

ELEANOR

Really?

PAT

Ronald Colman.

ELEANOR

It's awesome.

PAT

He owes me some favors.

ELEANOR

Oh! What did you write?

PAT

"The Christmas Family"; "Force to Victory"; "Six Minutes of Happiness"; "The Woman Who Blew the Men"...

ELEANOR

I don't think I've seen those movies.

PAT

All silents...

ELEANOR

Well, what did you write last?

PAT

Well, I-I worked on a thing at Universal. I don't know what they called it finally...

(Lights up on SCOTT. He reads what he's written.)

SCOTT

Pat Hobby saw that he was not impressing her at all... He thought quickly... What did they know in Boise, Idaho?

PAT

I-I wrote "Captains Courageous". And "Test Pilot" and "Wuthering Heights"... and... and... "The Awful Truth"... and... "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington".

ELEANOR

I love those pictures! "Test Pilot" is my boyfriend's favorite picture and "Dark Victory" is mine.

PAT

I thought "Dark Victory" stank. Too highbrow. Hey, I've got a picture opening tonight.

ELEANOR

You have?

PAT

I was going to take Claudette Colbert but she's got a cold. Would you like to go?

ELEANOR

Oh... Yes!

PAT

We can have lunch together, go to my house, and then go to opening night. What do you think?

ELEANOR

I need to change clothes.

PAT

No, you look great!

(Lights fade. We hear the sound of the typewriter.)

(Lights up on SCOTT typing. PAT approaches him.)

PAT

Thank you.

SCOTT

You're welcome.

PAT

I think I'm in love.

(SCOTT stares at him.)

What's the matter?

SCOTT

I don't know how to finish the story.

PAT

It's easy! She goes to the premiere tonight with me ... later we make love... and she falls for me...

SCOTT

I don't like it that way.

PAT

Why not?

SCOTT

No conflict.

PAT

Who needs conflict? Just give it a happy ending. We both get married and live ...

SCOTT

It's not a good ending.

PAT

It's a Hollywood ending.

SCOTT

I don't like it. I need to come up with something else.

PAT

Then... tell me... What'll happen?

SCOTT

I don't know!

PAT

If you don't know... who does?

(SCOTT starts typing. PAT stares at him.)

SCOTT

What?

PAT

Why are you embarrassing me?

SCOTT

All characters need to feel embarrassed from time to time.

PAT

I just want to be happy.

SCOTT

You'll be happy... at the end of the story.

(Pause)

Wainwright lost his temper, which was the last thing anybody should ever do in pictures.

PAT

I don't like Wainwright...

SCOTT

He made a big mistake...

PAT

So...?

SCOTT

So, it's good for you.

PAT

How?

SCOTT

Perhaps you ought to present your case to the Screen Writers Guild.

PAT

I don't care... I want know about Eleanor... My date with her.

SCOTT

Your meeting with Eleanor will be an ellipsis.

PAT

Ellipsis? This means that it won't be ...?

SCOTT

Exactly.

PAT

Why?

SCOTT

It won't help advance the story. So, I'd rather it be an ellipsis.

PAT

I hate you.

SCOTT

It's my story... I decide... and case closed. Remember... I can erase you...

(Pause)

Maybe I'll write Wainwright's story instead.

PAT

No... please...

SCOTT

Then... accept my way.

(Beat)

PAT

Okay... okay...

SCOTT

That's better...

PAT

May I know how my date will go?

(SCOTT thinks a moment.)

SCOTT

You call for Eleanor at five o'clock to take her somewhere for a cocktail. You bought a two-dollar shirt, changing into it in the shop, and a four-dollar Alpine hat... thus halving your bank account...

PAT

Go on...

SCOTT

The modest bungalow in West Hollywood yields up Eleanor without a struggle. On your advice she is not in evening dress but she is as trim and shining as any cute little blonde out of your past.

PAT

She is lovely!

SCOTT

Wait! You don't have a car!

PAT

Who care? I can borrow of my friend!

SCOTT

Friend?

PAT

Bill Gordon... the baseball player.

SCOTT

I didn't create any baseball player.

(PAT leaves.)

(Light fades.)

(PAT and ELEANOR are sitting at the table in the Brown Derby. ELEANOR looks beautiful in her dress. PAT's wearing a tuxedo. He's drinking whiskey and she a dry martini.)

ELEANOR

This place is amazing! I've never been to the Brown Derby.

PAT

It's always full of movie stars.

(ELEANOR looks around.)

ELEANOR

I don't see nobody famous!

PAT

Just wait...

ELEANOR

Do I look OK?

PAT

Good enough to eat. If I see a big shot, I'll ask him to give you a screen test.

(Lights up on SCOTT, typing.)

SCOTT

Looking at her he wondered honestly to himself if it couldn't be arranged. There was Harry Goodorf... there was Jack Berners... but his credit was low on all sides. He could do something for her, he decided. He would try at least to get an agent interested...

(Back to the Brown Derby.)

PAT

What are you doing tomorrow?

ELEANOR

Nothing.

(Back to SCOTT.)

SCOTT

He made a further inroad on his bank account to pay for their drinks. You certainly had the right to celebrate before your own preview. It had been a long time since he had seen a picture with his name on it.

(PAT and ELEANOR are standing, ready to leave.)

It would be nice to see it again and though he did not expect his old friends to stand up and sing "Happy Birthday to You", he was sure there would be back-slapping and even a little turn of attention toward him as the crowd swayed out of the theatre. That would be nice.

(PAT and ELEANOR disappear into the darkness.)

(We hear the sound of a crowd. Spotlights. PAT and ELEANOR walk through the alley of unseen fans.)

ELEANOR

I'm frightened.

PAT

They're looking at you.

ELEANOR

Me? I don't think so!

PAT

They're wondering if you're somebody famous.

(They go inside the theater. A DOORMAN blocks them, holding tickets.)

DOORMAN

Hey Buddy, these aren't tickets for here.

PAT

I'm Pat Hobby. I wrote this picture.

DOORMAN

These are tickets to another show.

PAT

Go inside and ask Jack Berners. He'll tell you.

DOORMAN

Now listen... these are tickets for a burlesque in L.A. You go to your show, you and your girlfriend.

PAT

You don't understand. I-I wrote this picture.

DOORMAN

Sure. In a pipe dream.

PAT

Look at the program. My name's on it. I-I'm Pat Hobby.

DOORMAN

Can you prove it?

PAT

Of course... Look at my document...

(Pat Hobby handed it over for doorman.)

PAT

(Whisper to Eleanor)

Don't worry!

DOORMAN

What's your name?

PAT

Pat Hobby, the writer.

DOORMAN

This doesn't say Pat Hobby. This says Bill Gordon.

PAT

Sorry, wrong document.

(A well-dressed man, WARD
WAINWRIGHT, strides out of the theatre.
He sees PAT.)

WARD

Pat!

(He approaches PAT.)

PAT

Ward. Let me explain...

WARD

You here to see the picture?

PAT

Yeah, but they won't let me in.

WARD

Why not?

PAT

Berners gave me the wrong tickets.

WARD

Take mine.

(He hands PAT his stubs.)

PAT

What?

WARD

I think the prop boy directed it! Go and see!

PAT

Thanks!

WARD

(To DOORMAN)

It's all right! He wrote it.

(To PAT)

I wouldn't have my name on the piece of shit.

(He leaves.)

ELEANOR

You're not a big shot. You're nothing ...

PAT

My name is on the movie... screenplay by Pat Hobby.

ELEANOR

I'm leaving.

PAT

Please... This is my preview.

(Beat)

ELEANOR

Okay... But only for the preview... Then, we're through.

(Lights up on SCOTT)

SCOTT

(laughing)

Ahh ha ha! Very funny! I love it.

(PAT approaches him.)

PAT

Did you like that?

SCOTT

A happy ending!

PAT

That's your idea of a happy ending?

SCOTT

Sure. You got to take the girl to the movie. Wainwright's going to refuse to have his name on the picture.

PAT

You're an asshole!

SCOTT

Why are you angry?

PAT

You made me a conformist. And a weakling.

SCOTT

No. No. I left it open-ended.

PAT

Bullshit. An open-ended ending is nothing... It's like bread dough without baking. Like sex without orgasm...Like the Fourth of July without fireworks.

SCOTT

I don't know what else I can do with you.

PAT

Make me happy... you son of a bitch!

SCOTT

I should forget you...

(He stands up.)

That's it... I'm going to drop you.

PAT

Impossible. I'm your idea... you created me... I'm fixed forever in your mind.

SCOTT

Many writers forget their ideas.

PAT

But not when they want...

SCOTT

Wait, I have an idea!

(He sits back down.)

(Lights fade on PAT.)

SCOTT

(He starts typing.)

Distress in Hollywood is endemic and always acute. Scarcely an executive but is being gnawed at by some insoluble problem and in a democratic way he will let you in on it, with no charge.

(Lights up on BERNERS. He is sitting at a table. PAT and LOUIE are seated in front of him.)

SCOTT

The problem, be it one of health or of production, is faced courageously and with groans at from one to five thousand a week. That's how pictures are made.

BERNERS

(to PAT and LOUIE)

But this one has got me down... because how did the artillery shell get in the trunk of Claudette Colbert or Betty Field or whoever we decide to use? We got to explain it so the audience will believe it.

LOUIE

Who's your writer on it?

BERNERS

R. Parke Woll. First I buy this opening from another writer, see. A grand notion but only a notion. Then I call in R. Parke Woll, the playwright, and we meet a couple of times and develop it. Then when we get the end in sight, his agent horns in and says he won't let Woll talk any more unless I give him a contract... eight weeks at \$3,000! And all I need him for is one more day!

SCOTT

(Typing)

The sum brought a glitter into Pat's old eyes. Ten years ago he had camped beatifically in range of such a salary... now he was lucky to get a few weeks at \$250. His inflamed and burnt over talent had failed to produce a second growth.

BERNERS

The worse part of it is that Woll told me the ending.

PAT

Then what are you waiting for? You don't need to pay him a cent.

BERNERS

I forgot it! Two phones were ringing at once in my office... one from a working director. And while I was talking Woll had to run along. Now I can't remember it and I can't get him back.

PAT

What a pity.

BERNERS

Now he's on a big bat. I know because I got a man tailing him. It's enough to drive you nuts... here I got the whole story except the pay-off. What good is it to me like that?

LOUIE

If he's drunk maybe he'd spill it.

BERNERS

Not to me. I thought of it but he would recognize my face. But I've to go.

(Takes a breath; stands up.)

I picked a horse in the third and one in the seventh.

PAT

I got an idea.

BERNERS

I got no time to hear it now.

PAT

I'm not selling anything. I got a deal almost ready over at Paramount. But once I worked with this R. Parke Woll and maybe I could find what you want to know.

BERNERS

Alright! You're employed to discover how a live artillery shell got into Claudette Colbert's trunk or Betty Field's trunk or whoever...

(Light fades.)

SCOTT

Pat caught up with at two a.m. in Conk's Old Fashioned Bar. Conk's Bar was haughtier than its name, boasting cigarette girls and a doorman-bouncer named Smith who had once worked as stuntman of Tarzan.

(Lights up on Conk's Bar. SMITH is standing. PARKE drinks with two girls. PAT enters.)

PAT

Hi, Smith!

SMITH

Hi...

(PAT approaches PARKE)

PAT

Hello, good looking, Remember me... Pat Hobby?

PARKE

Pat Hobby! Of course I remember you. Girls, this is Pat Hobby... best left-handed writer in Hollywood. Pat h'are you?

PAT

I'm fine...

PARKE

Some new script?

PAT

Yeah... I'm working on Western at Paramount...

PARKE

Great... I'm writing a thriller for Mr. Cagney. Warner Bros.

PAT

Cool.

(Takes a breath)

Listen Parke, Mr. Berners is having you followed... I don't know why he's doing it. Louie at the studio tipped me off.

PARKE

You don't know why? Well, I know why. I got something he wants... that's why!

PAT

You owe him money?

PARKE

Owe him money. Why that... he owes me money! He owes me for three long, hard conferences... I outlined a whole damn picture for him.

(His finger tapped his forehead)

What he wants is in here.

SCOTT

An hour passed at the turbulent o Conk's Bar. Pat waited, waited, waited... and then inevitably in the slow, limited cycle of the lush, Parke's mind returned to the subject.

PARKE

The funny thing is I told him who put the shell in the trunk and why. And then the Master Mind forgot.

PAT

But his secretary remembered.

PARKE

She did? Secretary... I don't remember secretary.

PAT

She came in...

PARKE

Well then by God he's got to pay me or I'll sue him.

PAT

Berners says he's got a better idea.

PARKE

The hell he has. My idea was a pip. Listen...

(PARKE whispers to PAT.)

PAT

(Enchanted.)

Oh my God!

PARKE

You like it?

(Beat)

PAT

I think not... I need to go...

PARKE

Wait.

PAT

Bye.

(PAT goes out. PARKE holds him by the arm.)

PARKE

Why are you rushing?

PAT

I need to go.

PARKE

You're acting weird. I get it! I get it! Why you little skunk. You've talked to Berners... he sent you here.

(PAT runs for the door.))

PARKE

(Cries)

Smith! Hold him!

(SMITH holds PAT.)

SMITH

(Catching PAT by his lapels.)

Where you going?

(PARKE coming up. He aimed a blow at PAT which missed and landed full in SMITH'S mouth.)

SMITH

(To PARKE)

You son of a bitch!

(Smith dropped Pat, picked up Parke by crotch and shoulder, held him high and then in one gigantic pound brought his body down against the floor.)

(The two girls approaching PARKE which lies motionless on the ground.)

(Lights fade on Conk's Bar.)

(We hear the screams of the girls)

SCOTT

(Typing)

Three minutes later R. Parke Woll was dead.

(PAT enters. He approaches SCOTT.)

PAT

You should forget that idea... I did not like it.

SCOTT

Never more... I-I already wrote.

PAT

Mr. Parke really died?

SCOTT

Like Abraham Lincoln in April 15, 1865.

PAT

And me? I'm going to be arrested? That's my happy end?

SCOTT

Of course not.

PAT

What'll happen to me?

SCOTT

Let me see... after your arrest...

PAT

I'll be arrested.

SCOTT

You left the prison the next morning without bail. You're only a material witness. Smith killed the screenwriter.

PAT

Oh, boy, oh, boy.

SCOTT

This publicity is advantageous... Look man, for the first time in a year, your name appeared in the trade journals.

PAT

So...?

SCOTT

Moreover you are now the only living man who knew how the artillery shell got into the trunk of Claudette Colbert or Betty Field.

PAT

You're a crazy man.... I give up...

SCOTT

Trust me... I'll help your life...

PAT

How?

SCOTT

Typing...

(Light fades on them.)

(Lights up on BERNERS and PAT HOBBY)

BERNERS

When can you come up and see me?

PAT

After the inquest tomorrow. I feel kind of shaken... it gave me an earache.

(Lights up on SCOTT typing.)

SCOTT

That too indicated power. Only those who were 'in' could speak of their health and be listened to.

BERNERS

(To PAT)

Parke really did tell you?

PAT

He told me. And it's worth more than fifty smackers.

BERNERS

I tell you a better plan. I'll get you on the payroll. Four weeks at your regular price.

PAT

What's my price? As Shakespeare says, "Every man has his price.". I've drawn everything from four thousand to zero.

(Light fades on PAT and BERNERS.)

SCOTT

(Typing)

The attendant rodents of R. Parke Woll had vanished with their small plunder into convenient rat holes, leaving as the defendant Mr Smith, and, as witnesses, Pat and two frightened girls.

(Lights up on the inquest. The two girls are seated in front of the JUDGE.)

SCOTT

(typing)

Mr Smith's defence was that he had been attacked. At the inquest one girl agreed with him. Pat Hobby's turn was next, but before his name was called he remembered the night he was arrested with Mr. Smith.

(Lights up on PAT and SMITH.)

SMITH

You talk against me and I'll twist your tongue out by the roots. You hear me?

PAT

I didn't see nothing...

SMITH

Silence... And you'll see the sun for so long.

PAT

The silence like the movies that I'd wrote.

SMITH

Very good.

JUDGE

Now Mr Hobby tell us exactly what happened.

(They approach of the two girls.)

SCOTT

The eyes of Mr Smith were fixed balefully on his and he felt the eyes of the bouncer's mate reaching in for his tongue through the back of his head. He was full of natural hesitation.

PAT

I-I don't know exactly. All I know is everything went white!

JUDGE

What?

PAT

That's the way it was. I saw white. Just like some guys see red or black I saw white.

JUDGE

Well, what happened from when you came into the restaurant... up to the time you saw white?

PAT

Well... well... It was all kind of that way. I came and sat down and then it began to go black.

JUDGE

You mean white.

PAT

Black and white.

JUDGE

Explain that.

What? PAT

Talk about the event. JUDGE

What? I'm not listening. PAT

Please tell us about the murder. JUDGE

I have not heard. PAT

But what is happening? JUDGE

Oh my God! I lost my hearing! PAT

I'm going to speak slowly... Look for my mouth... What was that you saw in Conk's Bar? JUDGE

Conk's Bar? PAT

What did you see? JUDGE

I saw nothing. Suddenly everything went white. PAT

Black or white? JUDGE

What Your Honor said? I don't listen. PAT

JUDGE

Forget. Witness dismissed. Defendant remanded for trial.

SCOTT

There was a general titter.

(Light fades on the inquest. PAT approaches SCOTT.)

PAT

(To SCOTT)

What will happen?

SCOTT

You're free from the Tarzan and the police. He'll never get out of jail.

PAT

What about the end of the script that Parke wrote?

SCOTT

Don't worry... your agent will solve this.

PAT

I don't have agent.

SCOTT

I'll give one for you...

(PAT disappears into the darkness.)

SCOTT

(Typing)

Next morning in the office. PAT was accompanied by one of the few Hollywood agents who had not yet taken him on and shaken him off.

(Lights up on BERNERS, PAT and his AGENT.)

BERNERS

A flat sum of five hundred. Or four weeks at two-fifty to work on another picture.

AGENT

How bad do you want this? My client seems to think it's worth three thousand.

BERNERS

Of my own money? And it isn't even his idea. Now that Mr. Parke is dead it's in the Public Remains.

AGENT

Not quite. I think like you do that ideas are sort of in the air. They belong to whoever's got them at the time... like balloons.

BERNERS

Well, how much?' How do I know he's got the idea?

AGENT

(To PAT)

Shall we let him find out... for a thousand dollars?

(After a moment PAT nodded. Something was bothering him.)

BERNERS

All right. This strain is driving me nuts. One thousand.

(There was silence.)

AGENT

(To PAT)

Spill it Pat.

SCOTT

(Typing)

Still no word from Pat. They waited. When Pat spoke at last his voice seemed to come from afar.

PAT

Everything's white.

(The AGENT and BERNERS speak together)

AGENT

What?

BERNERS

How?

PAT

I can't help it... everything has gone white. I can see it... white. I remember going into the joint but after that it all goes white.

BERNERS

Why are you holding it? I'll pay for you. Tell me now how did the artillery shell get in the trunk.

PAT

I don't know.

AGENT

I think Pat is having a psychological blank.

BERNERS

Get out of here.

SCOTT

The secret of R. Parke Woll was safe forever. Too late Pat realized that a thousand dollars was slipping away and tried desperately to recover.

PAT

I-I remember, I remember! It was put in by some Nazi dictator.

BERNERS

Bullshit! Maybe the girl put it in the trunk herself... For her bracelet...

(Light fades on them.)

SCOTT

For many years Mr Berners would be somewhat gnawed by this insoluble problem. And as he glowered at Pat he wished that writers could be dispensed with altogether. If only ideas could be plucked from the inexpensive air!

(PAT enters.)

PAT

Stop it! Stop!

SCOTT

What?

(PAT pulls out a gun.)

PAT

I'm going to kill you. It's gonna be the perfect ending.

SCOTT

You can't kill me. You're a character. You're a creature of my imagination... nothing is true... everything is fake... this gun is fake...

PAT

There's only one way to know if the gun is fake.

SCOTT

I told you. I can erase you.

(He points at the typewriter.)