

On Schedule, F. Scott Fitzgerald

I

In September, René's old house seemed pretty fine to him, with its red maples and silver birches and the provident squirrels toiling overtime on the lawn. It was on the outskirts of a university town, a rambling frame structure that had been a residence in the 80's, the county poorhouse in the 1900's, and now was a residence again. Few modern families would care to live there, amid the groans of moribund plumbing and without even the silvery "Hey!" of a telephone, but René, at first sight of its wide veranda, which opened out into a dilapidated park of five acres, loved it for reminding him of a lost spot of his childhood in Normandy. Watching the squirrels from his window reminded René that it was time to complete certain winter provisions of his own, and laying aside his work, he took a large sheet of paper ruled into oblongs and ran over it once again. Then he went into the hall and called up the front staircase:

"Noël."

"Yes, daddy."

"I wish to see you, chérie."

"Well, you told me to put away the soldiers."

"You can do that later. I want you to go over to the Slocums' and get Miss Becky Snyder, and then I wish to speak to you both together."

"Becky's here, daddy; she's in the bathtub."

René started. "In the bath—"

The cracks and settlings of the house had created fabulous acoustics, and now another voice, not a child's, drifted down to him:

"The water runs so slow over at the Slocums', it takes all day to draw a bath. I didn't think you'd mind, René."

"Mind!" he exclaimed vaguely. As if the situation was not already delicate. "Mind!" If Becky took baths here, she might just as well be living here, so far as any casual visitor would conclude. He imagined himself trying to explain to Mrs. Dean-of-the-Faculty McIntosh the very complicated reasons why Becky Snyder was upstairs taking a bath.

At that, he might succeed—he would have blushed to attempt it in France.

His daughter, Noël, came downstairs. She was twelve, and very fair and exquisitely made, like his dead wife; and often in the past he had worried about that. Lately she had become as robust as any American child and his anxieties were concentrated upon her education, which, he had determined, was going to be as good as that of any French girl.

"Do you realize that your school starts tomorrow?"

"Yeah."

"What is that?"

"Yes, daddy."

"I am going to be busier than I have ever been in my life."

"With all that water?"

"With all that water—think of all the baths Becky could take in it. And with the nice cute little power plant of my own the Foundation has built me. So, for you, Noël, I have prepared a schedule and my secretary has made three copies—one for you, one for me and one for Becky. We shall make a pocket in the back of your arithmetic in which to keep your copy. You must always keep it there, for if you lose it, then our whole day is thrown out of joint."

Noël shifted restlessly in her chair.

"What I don't understand," she said, "is why I can't take just like the other girls? Why I have to do a lot of goofy—"

"Do not use that word!"

"Well, why I can't do like everybody else?"

"Then you don't want to continue the piano."

"Oh, yes, piano; but why do I have to take French out of school every day?"

René rose, pushing his fingers distractedly over his prematurely iron-gray hair—he was only thirty-four.

"What is the use of explaining things to you?" he cried. "Listen. You speak perfect French and you want to preserve it, don't you? And you can't study in your school what you already know more accurately than a sophomore in the college."

"Then why—"

"Because no child retains a language unless she continues it till fourteen. Your brain—" René tapped his own ferociously. "It cannot do it."

Noël laughed, but her father was serious.

"It is an advantage!" he cried. "It will help you—it will help you to be an actress at the Comedie Francaise. Do you understand?"

"I don't want to be an actress any more," confessed Noël. "I'd rather electrolyze water for the Foundation like you, and have a little doll's power plant, and I can keep up my French talking to you in the evening. Becky could join in, because she wants to learn anyhow."

Her father nodded his head sadly.

"Very well, then; all right." He brushed the paper schedule aside; being careful, however, that it didn't go into the wastebasket. "But you cannot grow up useless in this house. I will give you a practical education instead. We will stop the school and you can study sewing, cooking, domestic economy. You can learn to help about the house." He sat down at his desk thoroughly disgusted, and made a gesture of waving her away, to be left alone with his disappointment.

Noël considered. Once this had been a rather alarming joke—when her marks were unsatisfactory, her father always promised to bring her up as a fine cook. But though she no longer believed him, his logic had the effect of sobering her. Her

own case was simply that she hated running around to extra lessons in the middle of the morning; she wanted to be exactly like the other girls in school.

"All right, then," she said. Both of them stood up as Becky, still damp and pink from her bath, came into the room.

Becky was nineteen, a startling little beauty, with her head set upon her figure as though it had been made separately and then placed there with the utmost precision. Her body was sturdy, athletic; her head was a bright, happy composition of curves and shadows and vivid color, with that final kinetic jolt, the element that is eventually sexual in effect, which made strangers stare at her. Who has not had the excitement of seeing an apparent beauty from afar; then, after a moment, seeing that same face grow mobile and watching the beauty disappear moment by moment, as if a lovely statue had begun to walk with the meager joints of a paper doll? Becky's beauty was the opposite of that. The facial muscles pulled her expressions into lovely smiles and frowns, disdains, gratifications and encouragements; her beauty was articulated, and expressed vividly whatever it wanted to express.

Beyond that, she was an undeveloped girl, living for the moment on certain facets of René du Cary's mind. There was no relation between herself and Noël as yet except that of fellow pupils—though they suspected each other faintly as competitors for his affection.

"So now," René pursued, "let us get this exact, darlings. Here we have one car, no telephone and three lives. To drive the car we have you"—this to Becky—"and me, and usually Aquilla's brother. I will not even explain the schedule, but I assure you that it is perfect. I worked on it until one this morning."

They sat obediently while he studied it with pride for a moment.

"Now here is a typical day: On Tuesday, Aquilla's brother takes me to laboratory, dropping Noël at her school; when he returns to house, Becky takes car to tennis practice, calls for Noël and takes her to Mlle. Segur's. Then she does shopping—and so forth."

"Suppose I have no shopping?" suggested Becky.

"Then you do 'and so forth.' If there is no 'and so forth,' you drive car to laboratory and catch bus home—in that case, I bring Aquilla's brother—I mean Noël"—he stared at the schedule, screwing up his eyes—"I bring Noël from Mademoiselle's back to school and continue home. Then"—he hesitated—"and then—"

Noël rocked with amusement.

"It's like that riddle," she cried, "about the man who had to cross the river with the goose and the fox and the—"

"Wait one minute!" René's voice was full of exasperated flats. "There is one half hour left out here, or else Aquilla's brother will have to lunch before it is cooked."

Becky, who had been listening with a helpful expression, became suddenly a woman of sagacity and force. The change, expressed in every line of her passionate face, startled René, and he listened to her with a mixture of awe, pride and disapproval.

"Why not let my tennis lessons go this fall?" she suggested. "After all, the most important things are your experiment and Noël's education. Tennis will be over in a month or two. It just complicates everything."

"Give up the tennis!" he said incredulously. "Idiotic child! Of course, you'll continue. American women must be athletes. It is the custom of the country. All we need is complete cooperation."

Tennis was Becky's forte. She had been New Jersey scholastic champion at sixteen, thereby putting the small town of Bingham upon the map. René had followed the careers of his compatriots Lacoste and Lenglen, and he was very particular about Becky's tennis. He knew that already there had been a trickle of talk in the community about himself and Becky—this young girl he had found somewhere or nowhere, and had recently deposited in the keeping of Mr. and Mrs. Slocum on the adjacent truck farm. Becky's tennis had a certain abstract value that would matter later. It was a background for Becky—or rather it was something that would stand between Becky and her lack of any background whatsoever. It had to go into the schedule, no matter how difficult it made things.

René had loved his wife, an American, and after she faded off agonizingly in Switzerland, three years had dragged by before the tragic finality of the fact ceased to present itself at the end of sleep as a black period that ended the day before it began. Curiously crediting the legend that every seven years the human body completely renews itself, she had put a provision in her last sick will that if he married within seven years of her death, the moderate income she bequeathed him should accrue in trust for Noël. What he did after the seven years would be, Edith considered, an act of someone she had never known. The provision had not bothered him. It was rather a convenience to know that marriage was out of the question, and many a trap set for him had gone unsprung during his years as a widower in the college town. The income made it possible for him to stay in research, under the aegis of one of those scientific foundations that gravitated to the university, instead of seeking a livelihood as a pedagogue in a foreign land. In his own line he was a man with that lucky touch. Last year, in cleaning up the junk of someone else's abandoned experiment, he had stumbled upon an entirely new technic in the activation of a catalyst for bringing about chemical reactions. He felt that after another year he would be able to provide for Noël far better than could his wife's shrunken trust fund.

So, for a thousand days he wore his grief down, and eventually he found that his daughter was growing up and that work really was the best thing with which to fill a life. He settled down, and existence became as foreshortened as the rhythm of the college itself.

"My relations with my daughter," he used to say, in those days, "are becoming what you call the Electra complex. If man was an adaptable animal, I should develop a lap and a very comfortable bosom and become a real mother to her, but I cannot. So, how can I put a stop to this father-and-daughter complex we are developing between us?"

The problem solved itself in its own terms. René was in love with youth, and one day he saw Becky Snyder's beauty peering over the back of a cut-down flivver stalled on the Lincoln Highway. It was an old flivver, even for its old-flivverish function of bearing young love from nook to nook. Jokes climbed feebly upon its sides and a great "Bingham H.S. 1932" defaced—if one can call it that—the radiator. René du Cary, aloof as any university don spending an afternoon on his bicycle, would have passed it with a shrug of amusement, if he had not suddenly perceived the cause of the flivver's motionless position in the road—a deeply intoxicated young man was draped across the wheel.

"Now, this is too bad," he thought, when, with his bicycle in the back seat, he was conducting the car toward its destination. He kept imagining Noël in a like situation. Only when they had returned the young man and his movable couch to the bosom of his family, and he sat with Becky and her deaf aunt on the farmhouse

stoop, did he realize how authentically, radiantly beautiful she was and want to touch her hair and her shining face and the nape of her neck—the place where he kissed Noël good night.

She walked with him to the gate.

"You must not permit that young man to call on you," he said. "He's not good for you."

"Then what do I do?" She smiled. "Sit home?"

He raised his hands.

"Are there no more solid citizens in this village?"

Becky looked impatient, as if he ought to know there weren't.

"I was engaged to a nice fellow that died last year," she informed him, and then with pride: "He went to Hamilton. I was going to the spring dance with him. He got pneumonia."

"I'm sorry," said René.

"There're no boys around here. There was a man said he'd get me a job on the stage in New York, but I know that game. My friend here—a girl, I mean—she goes to town to get picked up by students. It's just hard luck for a girl to be born in a place like this. I mean, there's no future. I met some men through playing tennis, but I never saw them again."

He listened as the muddled concepts poured forth—the mingled phrases of debutante, waif and country girl. The whole thing confused him—the mixture of innocence, opportunism, ignorance. It made him feel very foreign and far off.

"I will collect some undergraduates," he surprised himself by promising. "They should appreciate living beauty, if they appreciate nothing else."

But that wasn't the way it worked out. The half dozen seniors, the lady who came to pour tea on his porch, recognized, before half an hour had passed, that he was desperately in love with the girl, that he didn't know it, that he was miserable when two of the young men made engagements with her. Next time she came, there were no young men.

"I love you and I want you to marry me," he said.

"But I'm simply—I don't know what to say. I never thought—"

"Don't try to think. I will think for us both."

"And you'll teach me," she said pathetically. "I'll try so hard."

"We can't be married for seven more months because— My heavens, you are beautiful!"

It was June then, and they got to know each other in a few long afternoons in the swing on the porch. She felt very safe with him—a little too safe.

That was the first time when the provision in Edith's will really bothered René. The seven specified years would not be over until December, and the interval would be difficult. To announce the engagement would be to submit Becky to a regents'

examination by the ladies of the university. Because he considered himself extravagantly lucky to have discovered such a prize, he hated the idea of leaving her to rusticate in Bingham. Other connoisseurs of beauty, other discerning foreigners, might find her stalled on the road with unworthy young men. Moreover, she needed an education in the social civilities and, much as the railroad kings of the pioneer West sent their waitress sweethearts to convents in order to prepare them for their high destinies, he considered sending Becky to France with a chaperon for the interval. But he could not afford it, and ended by installing her with the Slocums next door.

"This schedule," he said to her, "is the most important thing in our lives; you must not lose your copy."

"No, dearest."

"Your future husband wants a lot; he wants a beautiful wife and a well-brought-up child, and his work to be very good, and to live in the country. There is limited money. But with method," he said fiercely—"method for one, method for all—we can make it go."

"Of course we can."

After she had kissed him and clung to him and gone, he sat looking out at the squirrels still toiling in the twilight.

"How strange," he thought. "For the moment my rôle is that of supérieure in a convent. I can show my two little girls about how good work is, and about politeness. All the rest one either has or hasn't."

"The schedule is my protection; for now I will have no more time to think of details, and yet they must not be educated by the money changers of Hollywood. They should grow up; there is too much of keeping people children forever. The price is too high; the bill is always presented to someone in the end."

His glance fell on the table. Upon it, carefully folded, lay a familiar-looking paper—the typewritten oblongs showed through. And on the chair where Becky had sat, its twin rested. The schedules, forgotten and abandoned, remained beside their maker.

"Mon Dieu!" he cried, his fingers rising to his young gray hair. "Quel commencement! Noël!"

## II

With a sort of quivering heave like the attempt of a team to move a heavy load, René's schedule got in motion. It was an uncertain motion—the third day Noël lost her schedule and went on a school botany tour, while Aquilla's brother—a colored boy who had some time ago replaced a far-wandering houseman, but had never quite acquired a name of his own in the household—waited for her two hours in front of the school, so that Becky missed her tennis lesson and Mlle. Ségur, inconvenienced, complained to René. This was on a day that René had passed in despair trying to invent a process for keeping the platinum electrodes nicely blurred in a thousand glass cells. When he came home he blew up and Noël, at his request, had her supper in bed.

Each day plunged him deeper into his two experiments. One was his attempt to develop the catalyst upon which he had stumbled; the second was based on the new knowledge that there are two kinds of water. Should his plan of decomposing electrolytically one hundred thousand gallons of water yield him the chance of

studying the two sorts spectrographically, the results might be invaluable. The experiment was backed by a commercial firm as well as by the Foundation, but it was already running into tens of thousands of dollars—there was the small power plant built for his use, the thousand platinum electrodes, each in its glass jar, as well as the time consumed in the difficult and tedious installation of the apparatus.

Necessarily, the domestic part of the day receded in importance. It was nice to know that his girls were safe and well occupied, that there would be two faces waiting for him eagerly at home. But for the moment he could not divert any more energy to his family. Becky had tennis and a reading list she had asked him for. She wanted to be a fine wife to René; she knew that he was trying to rear some structure of solidity in which they could all dwell together, and she guessed that it was the strain of the present situation that made him often seem to put undue emphasis on minor matters. When he began to substitute moments of severe strictness with Noël for the time he would have liked to devote to her, especially to her lessons—which were coming back marked “careless”—Becky protested. Whereupon René insisted that his intensity of feeling about Noël's manners was an attempt to save her trouble, to conserve her real energies for real efforts and not let them be spent to restore the esteem of her fellows, lost in a moment of carelessness or vanity. “Either one learns politeness at home,” René said, “or the world teaches it with a whip—and many young people in America are ruined in that process. How do I care whether Noël ‘adores’ me or not, as they say? I am not bringing her up to be my wife.”

Still, and in spite of everything, the method was not working. His private life was beginning to interfere with it. If he had been able to spend another half an hour in the laboratory that day when he knew Becky was waiting discreetly a little way down the road, or even if he could have sent an overt message to her, saying that he was delayed thereby, then the tap would not have been left on and a quantity of new water would not have run into the water already separated according to its isotope, thus necessitating starting over. Work, love, his child—his demands did not seem to him exorbitant; he had had forethought and had made a schedule which anticipated all minor difficulties.

“Let us reconsider,” he said, assembling his girls again. “Let us consider that we have a method, embodied in this schedule. A method is better and bigger than a man.”

“Not always,” said Becky.

“How do you mean, not always, little one?”

“Cars really do act up like ours did the other day, René. We can't stand before them and read them the schedule.”

“No, my darling,” he said excitedly. “It is to ourselves we read the schedule. We foresee—we have the motor examined, we have the tank filled.”

“Well, we'll try to do better,” said Becky. “Won't we, Noël? You and I—and the car.”

“You are joking, but I am serious.”

She came close to him.

“I'm not joking, darling. I love you with all my heart and I'm trying to do everything you say—even play tennis: though I'd rather run over and keep your house a little cleaner for you.”

"My house?" he stared around vaguely. "Why, my house is very clean. Aquilla's sister comes in every other Friday."

He had cause to remember this one Sunday afternoon a week later, when he had a visit from his chief assistant, Charles Hume, and his wife. They were old friends, and he perceived immediately the light of old friends bent on friendship in their eyes. And how was little Noël? They had had Noël in their house for a week the previous summer.

René called upstairs for Noël, but got no answer.

"She is in the fields somewhere." He waved his hand vaguely. "All around, it is country."

"All very well while the days are long," said Dolores Hume. "But remember, there are such things as kidnappings."

René shut his mind swiftly against a new anxiety.

"How are you, René?" Dolores asked. "Charles thinks you've been overdoing things."

"Now, dear," Charles protested, "I—"

"You be still. I've known René longer than you have. You two men fuss and fume over those jars all day and then René has his hands full with Noël all evening."

Did René's eyes deceive him, or did she look closely to see how he was taking this?

"Charles says this is an easy stage of things, so we wondered if we could help you by taking Noël while you went for a week's rest."

Annoyed, René answered abruptly: "I don't need a rest and I can't go away." This sounded rude; René was fond of his assistant. "Not that Charles couldn't carry on quite as well as I."

"It's really poor little Noël I'm thinking of as much as you. Any child needs personal attention."

His wrath rising, René merely nodded blandly.

"If you won't consider that," Dolores pursued, "I wonder you don't get a little colored girl to keep an eye on Noël in the afternoon. She could help with the cleaning. I've noticed that Frenchmen may be more orderly than American men, but not a bit cleaner."

She drew her hand experimentally along the woodwork.

"Heavens!" she exclaimed, awed. Her hand was black, a particularly greasy, moldy, creepy black, with age-old furniture oil in it and far-drifted grime.

"What a catastrophe!" cried René. Only last week he had refused to let Becky clean the house. "I beg a thousand pardons. Let me get you—"

"It serves me right," she admitted, "and don't you do anything about it. I know this house like my pocket."

When she had gone, Charles Hume said:

"I feel I ought to apologize to you for Dolores. She's a strange woman, René, and



she has no damn business butting into your affairs like this!"

He stopped. His wife was suddenly in the room again, and the men had an instant sense of something gone awry. Her face was shocked and hurt, stricken, as if she had been let down in some peculiarly personal way.

"You might not have let me go upstairs," she said to René. "Your private affairs are your own, but if it was anybody but you, René, I'd think it was a rather bad joke."

For a moment René was bewildered. Then he half understood, but before he could speak Dolores continued coldly:

"Of course I thought it was Noël in the tub, and I walked right in."

René was all gestures now; he took a long, slow, audible breath; raising his hands slowly to his eyes, he shook his head in time to a quick "tck, tck, tck, tck." Then, laying his cards on the table with a sudden downward movement of his arms, he tried to explain. The girl was the niece of a neighbor—he knew, even in the midst of his evasive words, that it was no use. Dolores was just a year or so older than that war generation which took most things for granted. He knew that previous to her marriage she had been a little in love with him, and he saw the story going out into the world of the college town. He knew this even when she pretended to believe him at the last, and when Charles gave him a look of understanding and a tacit promise with his eyes that he'd shut her up, as they went out the door.

"I feel so terrible," mourned Becky. "It was the one day the water at the Slocums' wouldn't run at all, and I was so hot and sticky I thought I'd just jump in for two seconds. That woman's face when it came in the door! 'Oh, it's not Noël,' she said, and what could I say? From the way she stared at me, she ought to have seen."

It was November and the campus was riotous once a week with violets and chrysanthemums, hot dogs and football badges, and all the countryside was a red-and-yellow tunnel of leaves around the flow of many cars. Usually René went to the games, but not this year. Instead he attended upon the activities of the precious water that was not water, that was a heavenlike, mysterious fluid that might cure mental diseases in the Phacochoerus, or perhaps only grow hair on eggs—or else he played valet to his catalyst, wound in five thousand dollars' worth of platinum wire and gleaming dully at him every morning from its quartz prison.

He took Becky and Noël up there one day because it was unusually early. He was slightly disappointed because Noël was absorbed in an inspection of her schedule while he explained the experiments. The tense, sunny room seemed romantic to Becky, with its odor of esoteric gases, the faint perfumes of future knowledge, the low electric sizz in the glass cells.

"Daddy, can I look at your schedule one minute?" Noël asked. "There's one dumb word that I never know what it means."

He handed it toward her vaguely, for a change in the caliber and quality of the sound in the room made him aware that something was happening. He knelt down beside the quartz vessel with a fountain pen in his hand.

He had changed the conditions of his experiment yesterday, and now he noted quickly:

Flow of 500 c.c. per minute, temperature 255°C. Changed gas mixture to 2 vol. oxygen and 1.56 vol. nitrogen. Slight reaction, about 1 per cent. Changing to 2

vol. 0 and 1.76 vol. N. Temperature 283°C. platinum filament is now red-hot.

He worked quickly, noting the pressure gauge. Ten minutes passed; the filament glowed and faded, and René put down figure after figure. When he arose, with a rather far-away expression, he seemed almost surprised to see Becky and Noël still there.

"Well, now; that was luck," he said.

"We're going to be late to school," Becky told him, and then added apologetically: "What happened, René?"

"It is too long to explain."

"Of course you see, daddy," said Noël reprovingly, "that we have to keep the schedule."

"Of course, of course. Go along." He kissed them each hungrily on the nape of the neck, watching them with pride and joy, yet putting them aside for a while as he walked around the laboratory with some of the unworldliness of an altar boy. The electrolysis also seemed to be going better. Both of his experiments, like a recalcitrant team, had suddenly decided to function, realizing the persistence they were up against.

He heard Charles Hume coming in, but he reserved his news about the catalyst while they concentrated upon the water. It was noon before he had occasion to turn to his notes—realized with a shock that he had no notes. The back of the schedule on which he had taken them was astonishingly, inexplicably blank; it was as if he had written in vanishing ink or under the spell of an illusion. Then he saw what had happened—he had made the notes on Noël's schedule and she had taken it to school. When Aquilla's brother arrived with a registered package, he dispatched him to the school with the schedule to make the exchange. The data he had observed seemed irreplaceable, the more so as—despite his hopeful "Look! Look! Come here, Charles, now, and look!"—the catalyst failed entirely to act up.

He wondered what was delaying Aquilla's brother and felt a touch of anxiety as he and Charles walked up to Main Street for lunch. Afterward Charles left, to jack up a chemistry-supply firm in town.

"Don't worry too hard," he said. "Open the windows—the room's full of nitrogen-chloride."

"Don't worry about that."

"Well—" Charles hesitated. "I didn't agree with Dolores' attitude the other day, but I think you're trying to do too much."

"Not at all," René protested. "Only, I am anxious to get possession of my notes again. It might be months or never, before I would blunder on that same set of conditions again."

He was hardly alone before a small voice on the telephone developed as Noël calling up from school:

"Daddy?"

"Yes, baby."

"Can you understand French or English better on the phone?"

"What? I can understand anything."

"Well, it's about my schedule."

"I am quite aware of that. You took away my schedule. How do you explain that?"

Noël's voice was hesitant: "But I didn't, daddy. You handed me your schedule with a whole lot of dumb things on the back."

"They are not dumb things!" he exclaimed. "They are very valuable things. That is why I sent Aquilla's brother to exchange the schedules. Has that been done?"

"I was gone to French when he came, so he went away—I guess on account of that day he was so dumb and waited. So I haven't got any schedule and I don't know whether Becky is coming for me after play hour or whether I'm to ride out with the Sheridans and walk home from there."

"You haven't got any schedule at all?" he demanded, his world breaking up around him.

"I don't know what became of it. Maybe I left it in the car."

"Maybe you left it in the car?"

"It wasn't mine."

He set down the receiver because he needed both hands now for the gesture he was under compulsion to make. He threw them up so high that it seemed as if they left his wrists and were caught again on their descent. Then he seized the phone again.

"—because school closes at four o'clock, and if I wait for Becky and she doesn't come, then I'll have to be locked out."

"Listen," said René. "Can you hear? Do you want me to speak in English or French?"

"Either one, daddy."

"Well, listen to me: Good-by."

He hung up. Regretting for the first time the lack of a phone at home, he ran up to Main Street and found a taxi, which he urged, with his foot on an imaginary back-seat accelerator, in the direction of home.

The house was locked; the car was gone; the maid was gone; Becky was gone. Where she was gone he had no idea, and the Slocums could give him no information... The notes might be anywhere now, kicked carelessly into the street, crumpled and flung away.

"But Becky will recognize it as a schedule," he consoled himself. "She would not be so formidable as to throw away our schedule."

He was by no means sure that it was in the car. On a chance, he had the taxi drive him into the colored district with the idea that he might get some sort of orientation from Aquilla's brother. René had never before searched for a colored man in the Negro residential quarter of an American city. He had no idea at first of what he was attempting, but after half an hour the problem assumed respectable dimensions.

"Do you know"—so he would call to dark and puzzled men on the sidewalks—"where I can find the house of Aquilla's brother, or of Aquilla's sister—either one?"

"I don't even know who Aquilla is, boss."

René tried to think whether it was a first or a last name, and gave up as he realized that he never had known. As time passed, he had more and more a sense that he was pursuing a phantom; it began to shame him to ask the whereabouts of such ghostly, blatantly immaterial lodgings as the house of Aquilla's brother. When he had stated his mission a dozen times, sometimes varying it with hypocritical pleas as to the whereabouts of Aquilla's sister, he began to feel a little crazy.

It was colder. There was a threat of first winter snow in the air, and at the thought of his notes being kicked out into it, buried beneath it, René abandoned his quest and told the taxi man to drive home, in the hope that Becky had returned. But the house was deserted and cold. With the taxi throbbing outside, he threw coal into the furnace and then drove back into the center of town. It seemed to him that if he stayed on Main Street he would sooner or later run into Becky and the car—there were not an unlimited number of places to pass an afternoon in a regimented community of seven thousand people. Becky had no friends here—it was the first time he had ever thought of that. Literally there was almost no place where she could be.

Aimless, feeling almost as intangible as Aquilla's brother, he wandered along, glancing into every drug store and eating shop. Young people were always eating. He could not really inquire of anyone if they had seen her, for even Becky was only a shadow here, a person hidden and unknown, a someone to whom he had not yet given reality. Only two things were real—his schedule, for the lack of which he was utterly lost and helpless, and the notes written on its back.

It was colder, minute by minute; a blast of real winter, sweeping out of the walks beside College Hall, made him wonder suddenly if Becky was going to pick up Noël. What had Noël said about being locked out when the school was closed? Not in weather like this. With sudden concern and self-reproach, René took another taxi and drove to the school, but it was closed and dark inside.

"Then, perhaps, she is lost too," he thought. "Quite possibly she tried to walk herself home by herself and was kidnaped, or got a big chill, or was run over."

He considered quite seriously stopping at the police station, and only decided against it when he was unable to think what he could possibly report to them with any shred of dignity.

"—that a man of science, has managed, in one afternoon, in this one little town, to lose everything."

### III

Meanwhile, Becky was thoroughly enjoying herself. When Aquilla's brother returned with the car at noon, he handed over Noël's schedule with no comment save that he had not been able to give it to Noël because he could not find her. He was finished with European culture for the day, and was already crossing the Mediterranean in his mind while Becky tried to pump further information out of him.

A girl she had met through tennis had wangled the use of one of the club squash courts for the early hours of the afternoon. The squash was good; Becky soaked and sweated in the strange, rather awesome atmosphere of masculinity, and afterward, feeling fine and cool, took out her own schedule to check up on her duties of the afternoon. The schedule said to call for Noël, and Becky set out with all her

thoughts in proportion—the one about herself and tennis; the one about Noël, whom she had come to love and learn with the evenings when René was late at the laboratory; the one about René, in whom she recognized the curious secret of power. But when she arrived at the school and found Noël's penciled note on the gatepost, an epidemic of revolt surged suddenly over her.

Dear Becky:

Had daddy's schedule and lost it and do not know if you are coming or not. Mrs. Hume told me I could wait at her house, so please pick me up there if you get this?  
Noël

If there was one person Becky had no intention of encountering, it was Mrs. Dolores Hume. She knew this very fiercely and she didn't see how she should be expected to go to Mrs. Hume's house. She had by no means been drawn to the lady who had inspected her so hostilely in the bathtub—to put it mildly, she was not particular about ever seeing her again.

Her resentment turned against René. Looked at in any light, her position was that of a person of whom he was ashamed. One side of her understood the complications of his position, but in her fine glow of health after exercise, it seemed outrageous that anyone should have the opportunity to think of her in a belittling way. René's theories were very well, but she would have been a hundred times happier had they announced the engagement long before, even though every curious cat in the community stared at her for a month or two. Becky felt as if she had been kept in the kitchen, and she was developing a sense of inferiority. This, in turn, made her think of the schedule as a sort of tyranny, and several times lately she had wondered how much of herself she was giving up in the complete subservience of every hour of every day to another's judgment.

"He can call for Noël," she decided. "I've done my best all through. If he's so wise, he ought not to put me in such a situation."

An hour later, René was still unable to think where he had put her at all. He had planned the days for her, but he had never really thought before about how she would fill them up. Returning to his laboratory in a state of profound gloom, he increased his pace as he came in sight of the building, cursed with a new anxiety. He had been absent more than three hours, with the barometer steadily falling and three windows open; he could not remember whether he or Charles was to have spoken to the janitor about continuing the heat over the week-end. His jars, the precious water in his jars— He ran up the icy stairs of the old building, afraid of what he was going to see.

One closed jar went with a cracking plop as he stood panting inside the door. One thousand of them glistened in tense rows through three long rooms, and he held his breath, waiting for them to go off together, almost hearing the crackling, despairing sound they would make. He saw that another one was broken, and then another in a far row. The room was like ice, with a blizzard seeping through eight corners of every window; there was ice formed on the faucet.

On tiptoe, lest even a faint movement precipitate the nine hundred and ninety-seven catastrophes, he retreated to the hall; then his heart beat again as he heard the dull, reassuring rumble of the janitor's shovel in the cellar.

"Fire it up as far as you can!" he called down, and then descended another flight so as to be sure he was understood. "Make it as hot a blaze as possible, even if it is all"—he could not think of the word for kindling—"even if it is all small wood."

He hurried back to the laboratory, entering again on tiptoe. As he entered, two jars beside a north window cracked, but his hand, brushing the radiator, felt just

the beginning of a faint and tepid warmth. He took off his overcoat, and then his coat, and tucked them in across one window, dragged out an emergency electric heater, and then turned on every electric appliance in the room. From moment to moment, he stopped and listened ominously, but there were no more of the short, disastrous dying cries. By the time he had isolated the five broken jars and checked up on the amount of ice in the others, there was a definite pulse of heat coming off the radiators.

As he still fussed mechanically around the room, his hands shaking, he heard Noël's voice in a lower hall, and she came upstairs with Dolores Hume, both of them bundled to the ears against the cold.

"Here you are, René," Dolores said cheerfully. "We've phoned here three times and all over town. We wanted Noël to stay to dinner, but she keeps thinking you'd be worried. What is all this about a schedule? Are you all catching trains?"

"What is what?" he answered dazedly. "You realize, Dolores, what has happened here in this room?"

"It's got very cold."

"The water in our jars froze. We almost lost them all!"

He heard the furnace door close, and then the janitor coming upstairs.

Furious at what seemed the indifference of the world, he repeated:

"We nearly lost them all!"

"Well, as long as you didn't—" Dolores fixed her eyes upon a vague spot far down the late battlefield of gleaming jars. "Since we're here, René, I want to say something to you—a thing that seems to me quite as important as your jars. There is something very beautiful about a widower being left alone with a little daughter to care for and to protect and to guide. It doesn't seem to me that anything so beautiful should be lightly destroyed."

For the second time that day, René started to throw his hands up in the air, but he had stretched his wrists a little the last time, and in his profound agitation he was not at all sure that he could catch them.

"There is no answer," he groaned. "Listen, Dolores; you must come to my laboratory often. There is something very beautiful in a platinum electrode."

"I am thinking only of Noël," said Dolores serenely.

At this point, the janitor, effectually concealed beneath a thick mask of coal dust, came into the room. It was Noël who first divined the fact that the janitor was Becky Snyder.

#### IV

Under those thoroughly unmethodical circumstances, the engagement of René and Becky was announced to the world—the world as personified and represented by Dolores Hume. But for René even that event was overshadowed by his astonishment at learning that the first jar had burst at the moment Becky came into his laboratory; that she had remembered that water expanded as it froze and guessed at the danger; that she had been working for three-quarters of an hour to start the furnace before he had arrived; and, finally, that she had taken care of the furnace for two years back in Bingham—"because there was nothing much else to do."

Dolores took it nicely, though she saw fit to remind Becky that she would be somewhat difficult to recognize if constantly observed under such extremely contrary conditions.

"I suppose it all has something to do with this schedule I hear so much about."

"I started the fire with the schedule," remarked Becky, and then amended herself when René jumped up with a suddenly agonized expression: "Not the one with the notes on it—that was behind the cushions of the car."

"It's too much for me," Dolores admitted. "I suppose you'll all end by sleeping here tonight—probably in the jars."

Noël bent double with laughter.

"Why don't we? Look on the schedule, daddy, and see if that's the thing to do."

"On Schedule" was written at "La Paix," on the outskirts of Baltimore in December 1932. The Post paid \$3000. After Zelda Fitzgerald entered Johns Hopkins Hospital in February, Fitzgerald rented "La Paix." Although he was making his successful effort to complete *Tender Is the Night*, it was necessary for him to write stories for ready income.

This story draws upon Fitzgerald's experiences as a sole parent while his wife was hospitalized and was also a private joke about his own penchant for making schedules. René is a widower; commencing with "On Schedule" the mothers in Fitzgerald's domestic stories are either dead or hospitalized, reflecting his own domestic situation.