

Z
PILOT

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KILLER FILMS
AMAZON STUDIOS

FIRST DRAFT
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FADE IN:

INT./EXT. HIGHLAND HOSPITAL, ASHEVILLE, N.C. - DAWN

CLOSE ON a faded, pink, once-elegant SLIPPER. It lies atop a blackened beam amidst the charred and twisted remnants of what was once the top floor of *Highland Hospital*.

Grey, early morning light. Smoke still filtering through the toppled wooden beams. As Firefighters pick through the rubble, almost in slow motion, there's a strange SILENCE. Their mouths move, but we hear none of this. One picks up the slipper, tosses it aside. Near the burnt out window, dark green canvas tarps cover what are presumably the BODIES of the fire's victims. AS WE begin to RISE above the scene, and we SEE the fire-ravaged remains of what was once a wood and brick plantation-style mental hospital, WE HEAR...

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Things are sweeter when they're lost.
I know-because once I wanted something
and got it. It was the only thing I
ever wanted badly. And when I got
it, it turned to dust in my hands...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GRAVEL PIT, MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA - DAY

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

...He wrote that about me...

CLOSE ON: A smiling FACE looking down at us, backlit by a brilliant blue sky. It's the face of ZELDA SAYRE, 17, stunning, a cloud of blonde curls framing her face.

CHYRON: "Montgomery, Alabama 1918"

Zelda is poised on the top of a HIGH CRANE at the local gravel pit, wearing a striped, thigh-length, wool swim tunic over bloomers.

ZELDA'S VOICE (V.O.)

... Or maybe about us...not that it
matters. Because all that came later.
At that moment, I didn't care about
anything. All I wanted was to be
very young always and very
irresponsible and to feel that my
life was my own...

YOUNG FEMALE VOICES (O.S.)
 "You'll break your neck!" "Zelda,
 don't you dare!" "Come on down,
 now!"

Zelda looks at them defiantly.

ZELDA
 Ishkabibble!

She waves gaily at two young women: ELEANOR BROWDER (18, tall, slim, dark hair, worried) and LIVYE HART (17, dark gypsy looks, loving the moment.) As Zelda pulls off her bathing cap,

ZELDA (CONT'D)
 (singing bawdily at
 the top of her lungs)
 "...He was dirty and lousy and full
 of fleas, But he had his women by
 twos and threes, God bless the Bastard
 King of England!"

In a flash, she strips off her bathing suit and bloomers, and dives *naked* into the water below.

FROM BENEATH THE WATER

As ZELDA BREAKS THE SURFACE, and shoots downward -- lovely, joyful, supremely self-confident...

OPENING CREDITS

EXT. PERRY STREET HILL, MONTGOMERY, ALA. - AFTERNOON

CLOSE ON ROLLER SKATES, WHIZZING on asphalt.

REVEAL: Zelda, hair still wet, careening wildly down the hilly, tree-lined residential area in roller-skates clamped onto black, lace-up Buster Brown boots, HOLLERING at the top of her lungs,

ZELDA
 Let her buck, y'all!

As Zelda dodges the stream of oncoming traffic, Livye, followed at a distance by the nervous Eleanor, who gamely to keep up.

ZELDA (CONT'D)
 Eleanor, stop assin' along!

ELEANOR
 Quit yer hollerin'! You're like to
 get us sent to Glory!

ZELDA'S VOICE (V.O.)
 Life had become spectacular,
 bombastic, almost unbearably exciting..

Zelda reaches the bottom of the hill first, grabs hold of a PASSING MODEL-T, and lets the car pull her back up the hill, laughing as she passes her friends, still on their way down.

EXT. PLEASANT AVE., MONTGOMERY, ALA. - DUSK

Still exhilarated from their adventures, Zelda, Eleanor, and Livye head down the street, in Montgomery's oldest neighborhood, chatting conspiratorially.

LIVYE
 She eloped?!

ZELDA
 Her mama and daddy think she's at her cousin Effie's house for the weekend.

ELEANOR
 Good night, there'll be carrying on at 18 Montgomery Street when they find out!

Zelda grins, catches a firefly in her hand, stares at it.

LIVYE
 Whatever possessed Katie to do such a thing?

ZELDA
 Lust.

She lets the firefly go.

ELEANOR
 Zelda.

ZELDA
 Oh, come on. Y'all saw them at that officers' dance. They were all hot and bothered. You know her daddy was never gonna let her marry a Yankee.

YOUNG MALE VOICES (O.S.)
 Zelda! Hey, hotsy!

The young women turn to see

A WINSTON TOURING CONVERTIBLE

Jammed with four YOUNG MEN, HOOTING and HOLLERING, heading their way.

LIVYE
That John Sellers is such a monkey.

Zelda waves cheerily.

ZELDA
Greetings, my Jellies!

The Jellies wave and WHISTLE, HONKING the horn as they drive past.

ZELDA (CONT'D)
They're sweet, but Montgomery boys are such three minute eggs. I'm tired of their foolishness.

ELEANOR
They're not so bad. That Harry Gunter is a real hoot.

LIVYE
If you like little boys.

Eleanor ignores this.

ZELDA
What time are we going to the dance tonight, kiddos?

ELEANOR
Where is it?

LIVYE
Old City Hall. I can't be there 'til nine-thirty.

ELEANOR
My daddy won't let me go to a dance down there.

LIVYE
Then don't tell him.

ELEANOR
Zelda, those dances are rough. There's no chaperone --

ZELDA
--That's the point, scaredy-cat.

Zelda looks up as a street light flickers on, and suddenly stops.

ZELDA (CONT'D)

What time is it?
 (before anyone can
 answer)
 Old Dick's gonna pitch a fit.

As she takes off at a run down the street, she turns back over her shoulder, calling --

ZELDA (CONT'D)

I'll meet you in the park at nine-thirty, Livye! So long, Ellie!

She sprints off barefoot, her shoes in her hand.

EXT./INT. SAYRE HOUSE, DINING ROOM - EVENING

A Victorian-style dining room. Polished wood floors, papered walls. JUDGE ANTHONY SAYRE, (60, Thick head of hair, pince-nez on his nose) his wife MINNIE, (57, attractive, plump) and their beautiful married daughters, TILDE (27, dark blonde hair, spectacles) and TOOTSIE (29, dark-haired, a beautiful Gibson Girl) sit around the heavy, wooden table. Tilde holds and jiggles her INFANT BOY, who's starting to get restless. There is an empty place clearly visible. A salad and cornbread go untouched. A grandfather clock TICKS loudly. Finally,

TILDE

Let's just start without her.
 (re: baby)
 Little Henry's gonna bust out crying any minute.

JUDGE SAYRE

In this house, we eat as a family.

MINNIE

Gimme that baby, Tilde.

Tilde hands her baby to her mother, who skillfully quiets the little boy. Tootsie glances at the Grandfather clock.

TOOTSIE

How long we supposed to sit here?
 If we're not going to eat, I've got things to do.

Before the Judge can respond, BANG! The front door SLAMS and Zelda flies into the house, barefoot and breathless. She takes her place at the table, calls to the kitchen,

ZELDA

Katie! I'm here.

She sits back, nonchalantly reaches for a piece of cornbread, aware they're all watching her.

MINNIE
Just in time, baby.

TILDE
Honestly, Zelda.

As KATIE, (27, black, in a maid's uniform), starts to serve the meal. Judge Sayre stares at Zelda's bare feet.

JUDGE SAYRE
Where're your shoes?

ZELDA
In the hall. They're all wet.

JUDGE SAYRE
Am I gonna have to buy you new shoes now? I don't have the money to buy you shoes every--

MINNIE
Judge, let's not talk about this right now.

ZELDA
They're fine, daddy. They just need to dry out.
(to Katie)
I don't have a taste for roast tonight, Katie. Can you make me one of your tomato sandwiches?

JUDGE SAYRE
We've been waiting on you for goin' on twenty three minutes, Zelda. You're going to eat roast like the rest of us.

ZELDA
You didn't have to wait for me.

TOOTSIE
We always wait for you. And then daddy always gets mad when you're late.

JUDGE SAYRE
Because it's rude and inconsiderate.

MINNIE
Did you lose track of the time, dear?

Zelda slathers butter on her cornbread.

ZELDA
I guess I was just having too much
fun.

She looks at him challengingly. This is too much for Judge Sayre. Her blatant defiance.

JUDGE SAYRE
Zelda. Go to your room.

ZELDA
(defiantly)
Why?

JUDGE SAYRE
You seem to forget you're still living
under my roof. Which means I expect
you to act like a human being and
not some swamp rabbit.

Tootsie hides a laugh.

ZELDA
I don't see what you're so angry
about, daddy. I'm here, aren't I?
Why can't we just eat in peace now?
(to Tilde)
Tilde, pass me that ice tea?

As Zelda pours herself a glass,

JUDGE SAYRE
I ask very little of you, Zelda.
But being late for supper is
disrespectful to me, your mother, to
your sisters, to Katie, who's spent
all day cooking this food--

Zelda stands up.

ZELDA
Never mind. I'm not really hungry
any more.

JUDGE SAYRE
Sit down.

ZELDA
You're having a hard time making up
your mind tonight, daddy.

The Judge turns red with anger and frustration.

JUDGE SAYRE

Don't push me, Zelda--

MINNIE

(placating)

Now, Baby--

ZELDA

--Katie, I'll take my sandwich in my room.

As Zelda turns and heads for the stairs,

MINNIE

But, Darlin', we got a beautiful key lime pie for dessert tonight...

But Zelda keeps walking. After a second,

ZELDA (O.S.)

And I'll take a piece of that pie!

Minnie looks at the Judge, who's fit to be tied, picks up a bowl, offers it.

MINNIE

Butter beans, dear?

The Judge stands, throws down his napkin, heads into his study and SHUTS the door.

INT. SAYRE HOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - EVENING

As Zelda moves down the hall towards her bedroom door, she overhears,

TILDE (O.S.)

You should hear what people say about her, mama...

As Zelda lifts her head even higher, reaches for the doorknob,

ZELDA (V.O.)

I was suffocating. I refused to live the life of my sisters. I didn't fit in here...

She opens the door, steps inside. Slams it behind her.

INT. EXCHANGE HOTEL, BAR, MONTGOMERY - NIGHT

The nicest hotel in Montgomery. A wood-panelled bar in Early English style.

ZELDA CONT. (V.O.)

... And so did he.

CLOSE ON HANDS holding a book -- Sister Carrie by Theodore Dreiser.

REVEAL: A YOUNG INFANTRY OFFICER, chiseled nose, green eyes, blonde hair parted in the middle, sitting at a large table, smoking a cigarette, engrossed in his book. He occasionally sips from a glass of gin.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

... 'Course, my daddy doesn't appreciate all you Yankees swarming downtown like locusts--

The blonde officer looks up. He's seated across from two pretty SOUTHERN BELLES, both in their late teens, dressed to the teeth in organza gowns, being ogled intently by his compatriot, an OFFICER in full uniform. They're all sipping highballs.

OFFICER

(interrupts)

-- So what you doin' here with us?

The belles look at each other, TITTER.

BELLE #1

Nothin' better to do. Right, Merrilea?

MERRILEA grins.

MERRILEA

Un-huh.

OFFICER

This is my first time South of the Mason-Dixon. You honeys ever been anywhere besides Montgomery?

BELLE #1

Well, sure. Been to Jackson, Birmingham... but I like Montgomery. A lot. My daddy says it's the biggest little town in the South. And just as good as Paris, France. Right, Merrilea?

MERRILEA

Un-huh.

The Blonde Officer pulls out his flask, pours some into his glass.

OFFICER
 (trying to fill the
 silence)
 Scott here's a Princeton man.

SCOTT, the blonde officer, nods. His eyes go back to his book.

BELLE #1
 So, whatcha reading?

Masking his irritation, Scott closes the book, looks up.

SCOTT
 Sister Carrie by Theodore Dreiser.

BELLE #
 What's it about?

SCOTT
 About a girl who flees country life
 for Chicago and falls into a wayward
 life of sin in the corrupt city.

Blank stares. Merrilea blinks uncomfortably. The Officer frowns at Scott. This isn't making his job any easier.

OFFICER
 What about you lovely ladies. You
 read any good books lately?

After a long pause, Merrilea pipes up.

MERRILEA
 The Bible...

OFFICER
 (trying to recapture
 the spark)
 The Bible? I like the Bible.
 (to Merrilea)
 Almost as much as I like your pretty
 face.

Merrilea GIGGLES. On Scott, bored and lonely. Picking up his book,

INT. SAYRE HOUSE, ZELDA'S ROOM - NIGHT

A small room overlooking the front porch, decorated with pink and white floral wallpaper, and a white bed with a matalesse bedspread, flanked by a small slat-backed rocking chair and Zelda's grandmother's desk. A chintz-decorated dressing table sits between the two windows.

Zelda stands at the wardrobe mirror, now wearing a different outfit. She checks her hem, rolls up the waistband of her skirt to make it seem shorter. A KNOCK. Zelda ignores this, keeps trying the skirt at different lengths. After a beat, Minnie enters, a piece of pie in her hand. She stops when she sees Zelda's attire.

MINNIE

Baby. You're not going out?

ZELDA

Well, I'm not staying in. There's a dance at City Hall.

MINNIE

The Judge is already fit to be tied.

She offers the pie to her daughter. Zelda waves it off. Minnie sits on the bed.

ZELDA

(re: skirt)

What do you think of this one, mama?
Or should I wear the blue?

MINNIE

I don't know. At least, wear stockings. And please tell me you're wearing a corset.

Zelda ignores this, takes her blouse off, tries on a different one. Minnie takes a bite of the pie herself.

MINNIE (CONT'D)

If you don't wear a corset, people will think you're a --

ZELDA

-- A speed?

(laughs)

Things are different now, mama. Anyway, the War Industries Board told us not to wear corsets.

MINNIE

Not to buy corsets. There's a difference.

Now happy with her outfit, Zelda sits at her dressing table, begins applying rouge and lipstick. Minnie polishes off the pie, puts the plate on Zelda's desk. Then, she leans towards the open window, inhales deeply.

MINNIE (CONT'D)

Good Lord, smell that crape myrtle.
It always reminds me of Mama in the
garden at Mineral Mount.

Zelda stands up, does a quick pirouette in front of her
mother.

ZELDA

What do you think?

She looks at her daughter thoughtfully.

MINNIE

I think you should put on some
stockings.

ZELDA

Oh, mama.

But she relents, begins to pull on a pair of stockings and
garters.

MINNIE

I ran into Professor Weisner at
McCormack's this morning. He says
you haven't been to ballet class for
a couple of weeks.

ZELDA

I'll go back eventually, mama. I
promise. I just don't have time
this summer.

MINNIE

What is it exactly you're doing that's
keeping you from your obligations,
my girl?

ZELDA

I'm doing my patriotic duty.

MINNIE

By going to dances every night and
staying out to all hours?

ZELDA

These boys are facing death in the
trenches of France. It's the least
I can do!

Zelda grabs a pocketbook, smooths her hair, starts for the
door.

ZELDA (CONT'D)

Bye, mama.

MINNIE

Baby. Wait.

Zelda turns back to her impatiently.

ZELDA

What is it? Livye's waiting for me.

MINNIE

Let's not rile the judge anymore tonight. Come here.

Minnie pulls her over to one of the windows, pushes out the screen.

MINNIE (CONT'D)

Just try to be quiet.

Zelda smiles, kisses her mother on the cheek. She sits on the window sill, expertly maneuvers onto the trellis to the side of the front door, and begins climbing down.

MINNIE (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Mind the rose bushes, baby.

On Minnie, aware that Zelda's her favorite.

EXT. OLD CITY HALL, MONTGOMERY - NIGHT

Strains of "Rose of No Man's Land" come from inside the slightly decrepit, red brick hall building as Zelda and Livye approach, arm-in-arm. Zelda stops for a moment, pulls a little flask out of her purse, takes a slug, hands it to Eleanor, who does the same. They laugh excitedly.

ZELDA (V.O.)

"The air smelled of khaki and cigarettes. Life had suddenly become exciting, dangerous; a crazy vitality possessed us. The war came. I couldn't afford to wait, for fear it would be gone forever..."

Enlisted MEN in uniform mill about outside, smoking cigarettes, drinking from flasks, eyeing Zelda and Livye frankly as they approach. Livye hesitates a moment, suddenly fearful, but Zelda grabs her hand and pulls her inside the hall.

INT. OLD CITY HALL, AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

A *privates' dance*. Far more men than women. A BAND made up of enlisted men plays upbeat, fast-paced songs like "Alabama Jubilee" and "Down in Honky-Tonk Town." Fresh-faced Yankee soldiers immediately make a bee-line for Zelda and Livye, whirling them onto the make-shift dance floor. The two young women make brief eye-contact across the room, giddy, feeding off the raw energy of the young men, as they move from arm to arm and man to man.

They slide across the floor with their partners, doing the Shimmy, The Black Bottom, the Bunny Hug and the Buzzard Lope. Blonde curls bouncing, a glint of amused derision flickering beneath long eyelashes, Zelda's in her element, the Queen of the dance floor. The *youth* of the soldiers, their baby-faced intensity and passion somehow brings the reality of the war, in all of its tragedy and waste and horror, even more vividly to Zelda. Suddenly, she's filled with tenderness for each and every one of them.

INTERCUT:

-The FRENZY of the dancing, as girls two-step and twirl cheek-to-cheek with their partners, sweat glistening on their foreheads in the humid room.

- Zelda et al. Passing flasks of gin and corn liquor amongst themselves.

- Furtive necking in the dark corners of the auditorium, the men getting fresher as the liquor flows more freely.

-Zelda stops moving long enough to catch her breath, when the band leader makes his announcement--

BAND LEADER

It's midnight, folks. Last dance.

SOLDIER #1

Make it a hot one, Jimmy!

As the band launches into "Anytime's Kissin' Time," a tipsy RED-HEADED SOLDIER approaches Zelda, takes her hand, is about to pull her onto the floor, when another, even *more* inebriated DARK-HAIRED SOLDIER STRIKES the first soldier's hand away.

DARK-HAIR

Whoa, whoa, fella. She promised me this dance.

RED-HAIR

Your momma's callin'. Beat it, butter-cup.

Zelda tries to intervene.

ZELDA
I can dance with both you boys. No
need to scrap--

But before she can finish, the red-haired guy hauls off and SLUGS the other soldier in the head.

ZELDA (CONT'D)
Oh, my Lord.

A BRAWL erupts. Other soldiers join in. Tables are knocked over, chairs are BROKEN over heads. In the melee, Livye makes her way to Zelda, grabs her hand.

LIVYE
Let's get out of here.

She pulls Zelda towards the exit, and out the door.

EXT. OLD CITY HALL - NIGHT

Zelda and Livye burst into the fresh air, half-laughing, half-terrified.

LIVYE
Good night, those boys are crazy-nuts!

Zelda looks around -- a few privates stand around, smoking and swigging from flasks.

ZELDA
It was glorious. I never had so much fun.

LIVYE
We gotta get home.

PRIVATES (O.S.)
Ladies.

They turn to find TWO PRIVATES, LLOYD HARPER, 22, tall gangly, not very attractive, and HAROLD STUBBS, 19, shorter, a little disheveled.

HAROLD
(offering a Lucky
Strike)
Cigarette?

LIVYE
We don't smoke.

She grabs Zelda's arm.

LIVYE (CONT'D)
C'mon, Zelda.

LLOYD
It's awful late. Why don'tcha let
us walk you ladies home?

ZELDA
(challenging)
Why should we?

LIVYE
Yeah. Why should we? We can walk
ourselves home.

LLOYD
Because you're not gonna find two
more amusing fellas in this whole
group of regimental monkeys. I can
tell you that.

Zelda smiles.

ZELDA
You don't seem that funny right now.

Harold pulls out a flask.

HAROLD
That's what the gin's for.

LLOYD
So, how's about it, ladies?

Zelda and Livye exchange a look.

ZELDA
All right. But no gettin' handsy.

As she and Livye start off, and the privates hurry after
them, amazed at their good fortune,

EXT. MONTGOMERY INTERSECTION - NIGHT, A LITTLE LATER

As Livye and her "date" head down W. Jeff Davis Avenue,
towards Livye's house, and Zelda and Lloyd turn up Pleasant
Avenue to her home, Zelda calls after the two.

ZELDA
No goin' to the devil, Private Harold.
Remember, all our daddies tote guns!

LIVYE
 (turns back)
 You watch yourself, Zelda!

ZELDA
 I'm fixin' to.

Zelda and Lloyd walk in awkward silence for a beat. Finally, he pulls out his pack of Lucky Strikes, is about to light up,

ZELDA (CONT'D)
 You got one of those for me?

Lloyd shakes out a cigarette for Zelda, lights it for her and hands it to her. He lights his own. As they walk and smoke in the moonlight, Zelda looks at him.

ZELDA (CONT'D)
 So, where you from, Private Landon?

LLOYD
 My name is Lloyd.

ZELDA
 But I like Landon. It suits you.

LLOYD
 (Shrugs)
 Chicago. Just outside of Chicago, actually.

ZELDA
 Where they sending you, Landon?

LLOYD
 Just received orders to join the 67th in Long Island. Then we're on to the Marne to fight the Huns.

Zelda studies his face for a moment.

ZELDA
 France... Aren't you just terrified?

LLOYD
 Hell, no. I've never been abroad. This is my first time out of Chicago. I'm ready to see the world. My ma keeps sending me these letters telling me to see the Eiffel Tower and the "Arch du Triumphe," or however you say it.

(MORE)

LLOYD (CONT'D)

But she doesn't understand that I'm gonna be covered in mud in some trench on the front-lines not on a Grand Tour.

(beat)

They try to have us write our Last Will and Testament before we go. But I ain't gonna do that. Seems like bad luck to me.

Zelda senses the fear behind his words. She reaches out and touches his arm.

ZELDA

(gently)

Nothing's gonna happen to you.

LLOYD

Yeah. I know.

They walk in silence for a beat.

ZELDA

I'm gonna leave Montgomery.

LLOYD

You are? Where you gonna go?

ZELDA

Baltimore? Philadelphia? Someplace that's not the South.

LLOYD

I like the South. The women are beautiful and the food is aces.

ZELDA

I'm sick of all these old buildings, old houses, old people... Everything's old here. I want to go someplace shiny and new that's not obsessed with the past.

She puts out her cigarette on a fence post. Points to her house.

ZELDA (CONT'D)

This is it, Landon.

Lloyd walks her up the front porch, stands near the door, looks at her longingly.

LLOYD

I don't even know your name.

ZELDA
Miss Zelda Sayre.

LLOYD
(trying it out)
Zelda.

On an impulse, she stands on tip-toes, pulls him close, kisses him passionately. He is stunned. After a second,

LLOYD (CONT'D)
Well, Miss Zelda Sayre. Do you think you could wait for a fella like me?

ZELDA
Probably not. I don't wait for anyone.

She opens the front door, then turns to him, with a sincerity that surprises us.

ZELDA (CONT'D)
Good luck in France, Landon. I hope you get to see the Eiffel Tower.

Zelda shuts the door and goes inside. Lloyd stands there for a moment, still basking in the splendor of her presence. After a moment, the PORCH LIGHT turns off.

INT. SAYRE HOUSE, FOYER - NIGHT

As Zelda takes off her shoes and starts up the stairs,

JUDGE SAYRE (O.S.)
(evenly)
It's 1:30 in the morning.

Zelda turns to find her father in his silk robe, standing in the doorway of his study, which looks out on the porch.

ZELDA
I'm sorry, daddy. I was with Livye. We went for a walk. We lost track of time.

JUDGE SAYRE
Zelda, why must you always lie?

ZELDA
I'm not lying. I'm just trying to live my life.

JUDGE SAYRE
I saw you kiss that Yankee.
(MORE)

JUDGE SAYRE (CONT'D)

And I can smell the gin and cigarette
smoke all over you.

ZELDA

(fuck off)

Oh, Ishkabibble.

She turns and walks up the stairs, which infuriates her father
even more.

JUDGE SAYRE

(calling after her)

You come back here, Zelda Sayre!
I'm ashamed that a daughter of mine
is just a little hussy, kissing
strange men in front of all our
neighbors with absolutely no sense
of propriety.

At this, Zelda whirls on him from the top of the stairs.

ZELDA

Isn't that the way hussies do?

She turns, heads down the hallway defiantly to her room.

JUDGE SAYRE

You just think you can do anything
you please.

(almost to himself)

But that's not the way life works.
Trust me. I know.

We SEE the fear in his face, for his daughter's future, her
unawareness of her own vulnerability. *It keeps him awake at
night.*

INT. SAYRE HOUSE, ZELDA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Zelda furiously applies cold cream, scrubs off her make up,
not wanting to allow her father to ruin her night, her grand
adventure.

She flops on her bed, pulls out her diary, starts writing
furiously. In her loopy script, WE READ: *"Mama says conflict
develops the character."* She stares at it for a long
moment, then angrily crosses it out several times, then slams
the book closed, flops back on the bed, stares up at the
ceiling, allowing herself to calm down.

ZELDA (V.O.)

Despite all the conflict and crushing
disapproval, I quietly expected great
(MORE)

ZELDA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 things to happen to me. And no doubt,
 that's one of the reasons they did...

EXT. COMMERCE STREET, MONTGOMERY - DAY

Zelda dressed in her long, blue serge skirt and sailor-collared blouse, dreamily makes her way down the business district of Montgomery, looking in the windows of the stores. She stops in front of *Baxter's*, the high-end women's clothing store, stares at the mannequins in the window, in fancy evening wear. An OLDER WOMAN passes by, sees Zelda, smiles.

OLDER WOMAN
 Mornin', Zelda.

ZELDA
 Howdy, Mrs. Milford.

MRS. MILFORD
 How's your mother?

ZELDA
 Fat, fine and dandy.

Before Mrs. Milford can respond, Zelda heads inside the store.

INT. BAXTER'S, MONTGOMERY - DAY

She walks up to a wax mannequin wearing a raspberry-colored printed crepe dress banded with velvet. Its length is conspicuously shorter than Zelda's skirt.

WOMAN'S VOICE O.S.
 Isn't it divine? Would you like to
 try it on?

Zelda turns to see a snooty SALESWOMAN in her 30s, very fashionably dressed.

ZELDA
 I don't know.

Her glance falls on another dress.

ZELDA (CONT'D)
 (she points to another)
 I might like this green one.

She walks over to a green silk dress with a dropped waist, translucent beading all over the skirt, a satin sash and the same short length. She touches the skirt lovingly. It's dazzling.

SALESWOMAN

(eye-balling Zelda's outfit)

You sure your mama would let you wear a dress that short?

Zelda sees this for the slight it is, responds, unfazed. Putting on airs.

ZELDA

Bless your heart for your concern, but honestly, I'm looking for something a bit more *au courant*.

SALESWOMAN

This is exactly what Coco Chanel showed in Paris this Spring. It's hard to get more *au courant* than that, dear.

ZELDA

(shrugs)

You're right.

(sighs)

I'll probably have to go to New York if I want to buy something that's more up-to-date than these old things.

(looks at the store clock)

Oh, Lord. Look at the time.

Zelda dashes out of the store, leaving the Saleswoman looking after her miffed.

EXT. COMMERCE STREET - DAY

Under a brooding summer sky, Zelda runs down the street, turns the corner onto Dexter Avenue, just as the skies open up. Zelda futilely tries to cover her already wild curls, but then gives up, laughing, lets the rain drench her as she slows and saunters down the sidewalk, relishing the coolness of the shower.

INT. RED CROSS OFFICE STAIRWAY, MONTGOMERY - DAY

Zelda rushes up the entry stairs, BURSTS into...

INT. RED CROSS MEETING ROOM, MONTGOMERY - DAY

... Where long tables are filled with Montgomery's social elite, young and old. The walls are plastered with Red Cross posters urging "Join Now!" And "What Are You Doing to Help?"

The door closes with a BANG and everyone looks up as Zelda enters, stands there, dripping wet.

She mouths "sorry," to Livye, who waves her over to one of the tables, which is filled with young women, who barely raise an eyebrow at her state. As Zelda approaches, Eleanor hands her a dish towel for her hair, indicates Zelda should sit across from her.

ELEANOR

(sotto)

Just in time. Mrs. Baker's been fussing about tardiness all morning.

MRS. BAKER, a formidable, white-haired matron in a steel-grey belted suit stands in front of the room, staring sternly.

MRS. BAKER

Good morning, everyone. The war continues, and so we must continue-- indeed, redouble -- our efforts for membership and productivity.

Some of the younger girls CHEER.

MRS. BAKER (CONT'D)

Today, we will work on leg and body bandages....

She reaches for a long sheet of white fabric, holds it up.

MRS. BAKER (CONT'D)

We begin with unbleached calico. One of you holds the bulk of the fabric and feeds it through as needed. That person is the rollee...

As she continues on with instruction and demonstration, Zelda squeezes water from her hem onto the wooden floor. Eleanor leans over, whispers.

ELEANOR

(sotto)

How'd it go last night?

ZELDA

I'll tell you later.

ELEANOR

That sounds interesting.

ZELDA

Not to the Judge.

Zelda reaches over, grabs a loosely tied bundle of fabric from one of several baskets lined up on the floor behind her. Untying the calico bundle, she hands Eleanor the fabric's loose end.

ZELDA (CONT'D)

I had a letter yesterday from Arthur Brennan.

Eleanor looks down at the fabric, confused.

ELEANOR

Thumbs under or four fingers under?
Who's Arthur Brennan?

ZELDA

Fingers. That boy in Atlanta with the rich daddy. He enlisted. He's down in El Paso. Sent me his pin and said he'd write every day.

ELEANOR

You don't even like him.

ZELDA

I know.

They laugh. Mrs. Baker looks over at them sternly.

MRS. BAKER

Chatter later, ladies. Important though your affairs may be, our brave young men would appreciate your giving their welfare more speed and attention.

They go back to rolling the bandages, then Eleanor leans forward again.

ELEANOR

What're you wearing to the dance tonight?

ZELDA

At the Country Club? I'm not going to that thing.

ELEANOR

But it's a benefit. For our boys.

ZELDA

I know. I'm just tired of that set. I've dated every single one of them. They're just so safe and predictable. That's why last night was so fun. At least they're men.

ELEANOR

What else you gonna do? Stay home and read a book?

Before Zelda can answer, MRS. RIGGS, 60s, well-dressed, leaves her table, makes a beeline for Zelda.

MRS. RIGGS

Oh, Zelda. Just the person I was hopin' would be here.

ZELDA

Hello, Mrs. Riggs--

MRS. RIGGS

I'm in charge of entertainment at the benefit tonight, and we'd so love it if you could come and perform one of your little ballet solos for the crowd. They're always such a hit with the young people. Right, girls?

One of the other girls smiles, teasingly, knows Zelda's tired of being the entertainment.

GIRL

That's right. I couldn't think of anything better than watching Zelda do her little dance.

Zelda makes a face at her, turns back to Mrs. Riggs.

ZELDA

Let me talk to Mama, see what she thinks.

MRS. RIGGS

All right, dear, you let me know.

As she heads off, Eleanor leans over to Zelda.

ELEANOR

C'mon, Zelda. Just do it.

ZELDA

I haven't practiced for weeks, Ellie. Don't wanna look like an idiot.

ELEANOR

So, what? You'll be the best looking idiot in the room.

OFF ZELDA, ambivalent,

PRE-LAP:

MINNIE (O.S.)

I think it's a wonderful idea. You're a beautiful dancer.

REVEAL:

INT. SAYRE PARLOR, MONTGOMERY - DAY

Zelda stands in front of her mother, who sits in a chair crocheting, while Judge Sayre tries to stay out of any conversation, reading the newspaper.

MINNIE

And all those boys you like will be there. Leon Ruth, Dan Cody, John Sellers...

ZELDA

I'd rather drown myself than spend another minute with those spoiled, bloated, Montgomery boys, mama. Not one of them has read a book or has any opinion about anything, unless it's football or the latest automobile.

MINNIE

That's not fair, baby. That John Sellers is right smart. So is Peyton Mathis. He already has his own business.

The Judge can't help himself, puts his paper down.

JUDGE SAYRE

I don't like that Mathis boy. He's too old to be gallivanting with you and your group.

ZELDA

He's a rooster, anyway.

MINNIE

(confused)
What does that mean?

JUDGE SAYRE

I don't need to hear about this. I just don't want you taking up with that Mathis boy.

MINNIE

Judge, Sarah Briggs is really in a fix. She needs Zelda to be the entertainment tonight.

JUDGE SAYRE

Zelda's old enough to make her own decisions.

As he stands, folds his paper and heads for the washroom,

ZELDA

Thanks, daddy.

Zelda looks at her mother. Sees the disappointment in her face, her mother's own dashed dreams of artistic success. Doesn't want to hurt her.

ZELDA (CONT'D)

But I don't have anything to wear...

Minnie smiles.

MINNIE

You just leave that to me, baby.

ON MINNIE, thrilled,

INT. MONTGOMERY COUNTRY CLUB, BALLROOM - NIGHT

Darkness. MURMURS of anticipation. A SPOTLIGHT finds ZELDA, in a newly-sewn, sparkly silver tulle skirt and silver slippers, gracefully poised *en pointe* in the center of the dance floor.

As the ORCHESTRA launches into "Dance of the Hours," by Ponchielli, Zelda begins to dance. She is talented, graceful, breathtaking.

FIND MINNIE, sitting at a table ringing the dance floor next to the Judge, transfixed by her daughter's beauty and grace. They're surrounded by the *crème de la crème* of Montgomery society, as well as a number of Officers from nearby Camp Sheridan. As Zelda twirls, performing her solo on the dance floor,

A MAN ENTERS THE BALLROOM -- AN OFFICER. STRIKINGLY HANDSOME, WITH BLONDE GOOD LOOKS AND AN AIR OF SOPHISTICATION, DUE IN PART TO HIS IMPECCABLY-TAILORED UNIFORM and MUSTARD-COLORED BOOTS. We recognize him as SCOTT, the blonde officer in the bar.

Curious about what everyone's watching, the Officer makes his way through the party-goers and stands at the edge of the dance floor, watching Zelda, intrigued.

When it's over, as Zelda is surrounded by a SWARM of admirers, The Officer turns to a local COLLEGE BOY.

SCOTT
Who is that saint?

COLLEGE BOY
That's Zelda Sayre. And she's no
saint, Goldilocks.

He LAUGHS. The Officer smiles to himself, watches as Zelda's engulfed by her throng of callow, young suitors.

VARIOUS YOUNG MEN (O.S.)
Wonderful performance! Sublime!
You were great, Zelda! Can I have a
dance? Hey, I asked her first!...

Scott sees her boredom, her ennui with her role as their adolescent object of desire.

Zelda senses something, LOOKS UP and their eyes meet. Something about him... his aloof, inquisitive elegance. His incisive gaze.

ZELDA (V.O.)
"There seemed to be some heavenly support beneath his shoulder blades that lifted his feet from the ground in ecstatic suspension. As if he secretly enjoyed the ability to fly, but was walking as a compromise to convention.."

They stare at each other, recognizing something mysterious, yet familiar in each other.

Before either can make a move, the ORCHESTRA kicks into a TWO-STEP and a DOUGHBOY steps up, claiming Zelda's first dance.

DOUGHBOY
May I?

As he two-steps Zelda across the floor, Scott watches, eyes never leaving her face. Zelda is whirled around the dance floor, by first one admirer, then another, and another, eventually losing sight of Scott.

She finally ends up in the arms of the aforementioned PEYTON MATHES, handsome, well-bred, and a good ten years older than she is. As their dance ends,

ZELDA
Thank you, Peyton.

Then, Zelda catches sight of Scott, watching her from across the room.

Spontaneously, she leans in, kissing Peyton long and hard, acutely aware of Scott's intense gaze. When Zelda and Peyton break, she looks up. *But Scott's gone.* She's disappointed. Peyton takes her hand, starts to pull her towards the exit,

PEYTON

Zelda, you got me all steamed up.
Let's go for a ride.

Suddenly, there's a tap on Peyton's shoulder.

SCOTT (O.S.)

Sorry, old man, this is my dance.

Zelda looks over to see SCOTT, in all of his elegant, greyhound leanness, planted beside her. As Peyton reluctantly acquiesces, Scott offers his hand to Zelda, who coolly hides her excitement.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

I'm Scott Fitzgerald.

Zelda hesitates a second, studying his face, then takes his hand. As the orchestra launches into "Beautiful Ohio," and couples start to twirl around them, they begin to waltz.

ZELDA

What do you think about free love?

SCOTT

"Free love?" You mean like Blake or Shelley's concept of--

ZELDA

Yes. And Isadora Duncan. She vowed never to marry. Had two children out of wedlock, you know.

He's surprised at Zelda's bold words.

ZELDA (CONT'D)

They both died. It was quite tragic.

SCOTT

I didn't know.

Zelda touches his hip pocket.

ZELDA

That whiskey?

He nods. Pulls a flask out of his pocket.

SCOTT

Can I get you some ginger ale?

ZELDA
I'll take it straight.

Zelda takes a swig, grimaces, hands the flask back.

SCOTT
So, what's this about Isadora What's-her-name? You mean the dancer.

ZELDA
Yes, of course. The dancer.

SCOTT
You ever see her dance?

ZELDA
No. But I like her style. She's dark and wild as sin.

SCOTT
And you?

ZELDA
(a beat)
Well, I'm the only girl in town with style -- if that's what you mean.

Scott smiles. Zelda holds out her hand for the flask again.

ZELDA (CONT'D)
Maybe just another little one.

He hesitates, then hands it over. Zelda drinks, coughs a bit, clearly not that used to drinking.

SCOTT
Sure you don't want me to get you some punch to hide the taste?

As Zelda hands the flask back, she looks him square in the eye.

ZELDA
Don't treat me like a girl, Mr. Scott Fitzgerald.

Before Scott can respond, a COLLEGE BOY cuts in on them.

COLLEGE BOY
Zelda, you promised me this dance.

Zelda leans in towards Scott.

ZELDA
(deadly serious)
I'm not like any girl you ever met.

As the College Boy dances Zelda off across the room,
ON SCOTT, transfixed. Damned sure she's right.

THE END

