

Southern Belle Burning  
Brittany J. Barron

Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald was identified as being one of the nine women who died on the upper floors from smoke inhalation [at Highland Hospital, a mental health facility, on March 10, 1948]; she was taken to Maryland for burial beside Scott. Ironically, she was about to leave the hospital . . . she was just days from resuming her life in Montgomery, the place she still considered home.  
— Linda Wagner-Martin, *Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald: An American Woman's Life*

I'm in Montgomery again, I think  
when the red face of flame beats my skin

it's July in Alabama:  
coal-choked meat  
salty-sweet sweat  
barn burner days

or, the flickerings are side effects  
of electromagnetic therapy—  
visions flashing across the ceiling  
blackening it with memories

now I'm a Southern Belle  
in a corset  
now I'm a bride  
in a wedding dress  
now I'm a mother  
in a hospital gown  
now I'm a patient  
in a straitjacket

this is the way I burned:  
not with a bang  
but a siren call