

PRELUDE TO FAME
By Zach Powell

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CHARACTERS

GEORGE KELLOGG, 35, animal lover and trainer, college professor at Bloomsburg University, eccentric

LEO RORY, 36, longtime friend of GEORGE, also an eccentric, travels abroad, wealthy

HELEN KELLOGG, GEORGE's wife, cautious and loving

TIME AND PLACE

Kellogg residence, somewhere near Turkey Hill, PA. Early afternoon, Springtime, 1932.

(Sitting in their living room, GEORGE KELLOGG and HELEN KELLOGG listen to soothing jazz music on their radio. GEORGE is in the process of cleaning out his tobacco pipe and HELEN lays comfortably on a couch with one of their four trained huskies. HELEN turns her head to look at GEORGE, who returns her gaze.)

GEORGE

(smiling)
Yes, my dear?

HELEN

I was just wondering if you'd thought about our conversation from the other day.

GEORGE

Oh yes, of course.... Well my dear, I'm afraid four is plenty as far as our canine friends go, besides, I've grown bored lately, and I fear training another pup would only make my boredom even worse.

(GEORGE looks back down at his tobacco pipe and begins to scrape the edges again. HELEN sits up on the couch and the husky jumps down and exits the room. HELEN stills gazes at GEORGE. She clears her throat and GEORGE looks back up, now slightly aggravated.)

GEORGE

(defensively)
What?

HELEN

How can you grow bored? You're constantly working towards *something*. My big, bad, professor of a husband. Tell me, are you bored when teaching your classes?

GEORGE

Not typically, no.

HELEN

How about when you produce plays for your students? I suppose those are boring?

GEORGE

No, of course not. Darling I-

HELEN

-And certainly when you labored so hard to get our beloved huskies to be your University's official mascot. That was boring?

GEORGE

I wasn't aware that a new pup meant that much to you. Is there something wrong with the four we have?

HELEN

No of course not. It's just that...I...you're so busy all the time. It helps having the dogs around, a puppy is so much more energetic though.

(GEORGE taps out his pipe and fills it with tobacco. He lights a match and uses it to start his pipe. As he does so, he walks over to HELEN and sits down beside her on the couch.)

GEORGE

I know I've been busy as of late, but you must understand that we are a respected family in this community now. And I as a professor have responsibilities to both my students and to the University.

HELEN

You have responsibilities to your wife as well.....

(George sighs and puffs on his pipe for a moment.)

GEORGE

I suppose you're right. I'll make more of an effort to be around for you, I wasn't aware how much my absence had affected you.

(GEORGE and HELEN smile at each other. They lean in to kiss, but are interrupted by a knock on their front door.)

GEORGE

(huffs)

Now who might that be?

HELEN

I've no idea, but you'd best go answer it.

(GEORGE sets down his pipe and goes to answer the door. Upon opening it, he saw his old friend LEO RORY. LEO shoots his hand forward for a hand shake which GEORGE gladly returns.)

LEO

Georgie, my boy! How've you been my friend?!

(LEO tackles GEORGE and the two wrestle briefly. HELEN shakes her head in disapproval as the two regain their composure.)

GEORGE

You win again. Anyway, to answer your question, I certainly can't complain. How about you Leo?

LEO

Life abroad may be tiring at times, but I certainly can't complain either.

(Both Laugh.)

GEORGE

So what brings you out here today? Come to rehash our old rivalry again, hmm?

LEO

You could say that. Although, I believe I'm still winning our last bet, I've visited 23 countries, you?

GEORGE

Right.... Oh! Where are my manners, please come in! Make yourself at home. Helen look who it is. Mr. Leo Rory himself has come for a visit!

(LEO and GEORGE walk back to the living room where HELEN sits, having recovered another husky for her lap. The commotion of a guest entering the house brings the rest of the huskies to the living room to investigate. All four of them rush over to LEO until GEORGE blows into a tiny whistle kept around his neck. Upon hearing the whistle blow, the huskies stop in their tracks and retreat to some other room in the house.)

HELEN

Oh, please excuse them, they have more affection to give than any one person can receive I'm afraid.

LEO

Oh no worries Mrs. Kellogg. *(Turns to GEORGE)* I see you're every bit still the trainer, isn't that right Georgie?

(GEORGE and HELEN share a short glance at each other.)

GEORGE

Oh, uh, not as of late I'm afraid.

LEO

Perfect! What say you to a challenge?

GEORGE

Such as?

LEO

I've brought with me a rare mountain lion. I was gifted the magnificent specimen by a friend of mine, but I have no use for it. I figured you could appreciate it more than I.

GEORGE

Well my friend, I certainly appreciate the thought, but I'm not sure what I would do with a mountain lion.

LEO

Train it, of course!

(Leo points to the whistle around George's neck.)

GEORGE

I'm sure training a wild animal like that is a bit more difficult than a husky. Really, I appreciate the thought, but I think I'll have to decline your offer.

LEO

Nonsense! You could train anything if you put your mind to it! I'm just trying to help you achieve the next step in your favorite hobby! Accept this challenge sir, or you risk your very reputation!

(GEORGE meets eyes with HELEN once again, then he shifts his gaze to LEO.)

GEORGE

(nervous)

Well you don't really give me much of a choice, do you? Fine. I accept your challenge.

LEO

Splendid! I'll fetch my assistant and have him bring it around back. And here, take this, you'll need it.

(LEO hands GEORGE a training whip. GEORGE inspects the whip, then places it on the coffee table.)

GEORGE

Thanks.

HELEN

George, can I speak with you for a minute? In private.

(LEO exits while HELEN and GEORGE remain in their living room. HELEN stands up from the couch and appears frustrated. GEORGE grabs his pipe once again and lights it with another match.)

HELEN

Let me make sure I understand this correctly. You forbid me from getting another husky and yet you'll take this...this beast into our home?!

GEORGE

To be fair Helen, Leo didn't give me much of a choice. Besides, the lion will not be kept in the house.

HELEN

Oh because he threatened your reputation? What does refusing to train a wild beast have to do with your reputation?!

GEORGE

(sighs)

Listen, Helen you wouldn't understand, ok? Don't worry about it, I'll take care of it.

HELEN

Please, try me.

GEORGE

I can't have Leo come back and then deny his challenge! We may be friends, but don't forget how competitive we are towards each other.

HELEN

So this is about some childish game then?

GEORGE

I told you, you wouldn't understand.

(Beat)

GEORGE

What if we got you that pup you wanted? Would that make you feel any better?

(HELEN scoffs at GEORGE and walks out of the living room. GEORGE continues puffing on his pipe in silence.)

GEORGE

What am I to do? I realize I haven't been the best husband as of late, but I can't let Leo see me shy away from one of his challenges. How will I train a mountain lion for that matter? They are certainly not dogs.

(As GEORGE remains trapped in his thoughts, LEO enters the living room again.)

LEO

I know it may be none of my business, but I just saw the missus on my way back in, she didn't look too happy. Everything alright?

GEORGE

Oh it's nothing you have to worry yourself about.

LEO

It's the lion isn't it? I apologize for that.

GEORGE

In part, yes, but it's part of a bigger problem.

LEO

George, I brought that lion here because I knew you were talented enough to take on the challenge. However if it is too much of a burden then I can have it taken back.

GEORGE

No, no. That won't be necessary. I fully intend on training the beast.

LEO

Well, I'm happy to hear that. I should be on my way then. I'll be home for quite some time, so I look forward to seeing your progress. See you soon Georgie!

GEORGE

Until next time Leo.

(GEORGE walks LEO to the front door and they shake hands once again before LEO departs. When GEORGE returns to the living room, he sees HELEN has returned. He walks back over to her and sits beside her.)

GEORGE

Where have the dogs gone?

HELEN

(coldly)

They're resting upstairs.

GEORGE

Ah.

(Beat)

GEORGE

You know, I got to thinking after you left the room before. I know you're not happy about the mountain lion. And to a larger extent my absence as of late.

(GEORGE pauses expecting a response from HELEN, but she remains silent; staring of into the distance. GEORGE grabs HELEN's hands.)

GEORGE

Do you remember how much fun we had training our huskies? Helen, we were so happy. I don't see why this has to be any different.

HELEN

Oh George. *(HELEN hugs GEORGE.)* I don't want that beast in our house though. Or anywhere near our huskies.

GEORGE

I wouldn't dream of it! I love you Helen, and I'm sorry I've been so distant. Perhaps that is the cause of my boredom.

(GEORGE and HELEN kiss.)

HELEN

(whisper)

GEORGE! BEHIND YOU!

(GEORGE turns around to see the mountain lion standing in their living room. GEORGE quickly stands up from the couch and grabs the whip off the coffee table.)

GEORGE

Stay back Helen!

HELEN

GEORGE! GEORGE! THE LION IS IN THE HOUSE!

GEORGE

YES, HELEN! I CAN SEE THAT! Now, get back!

(The Lion begins to creep towards GEORGE and HELEN.)

HELEN

GEORGE! It's getting closer!

GEORGE

Helen, please! Let me think!

(GEORGE advances toward the mountain lion slowly. GEORGE unwinds the whip and sticks the whistle around his neck into his mouth. He begins to blow into the whistle periodically in an attempt to scare off the mountain lion. Annoyed by the sound of the whistle, the mountain lion takes a more aggressive stance. Just before it looks like it is about to pounce, GEORGE swings the whip and the mountain lion retreated a few feet. GEORGE repeated the process until the mountain lion was herded back into its cage. After he finishes, he heads back into the living room.)

HELEN

George! Are you alright? Where did the lion go?

GEORGE

I managed to herd it back into its cage, and I'm fine as far as I can tell.

HELEN

How do you think it got out of its cage in the first place?

GEORGE

The door must have been knocked loose when they moved it. Of course, maybe Leo left it open to test me.

HELEN

Leo might enjoy keeping you on your feet, but I really don't think he would endanger us like that.

GEORGE

You haven't known Leo as long as I have, my dear.

HELEN

Oh! That was so terrifying! Like having front row seats to a Circus!

GEORGE

Now that's a thought.

HELEN

What's that?

GEORGE

If I trained this mountain lion, then I could perform in shows like that.

HELEN

I thought we were going to train it.....

GEORGE

(teasing)

I didn't see you help me get the lion out before.

HELEN

I wasn't ready! Besides, who ever heard of a college professor who also trained wild animals?

GEORGE

(smiling)

I could very well be the first.

(GEORGE and HELEN both laugh.)

[End Play]