

Lauren Proves Magic is Real Episode Six:

“PERFORMANCE REVIEW”

KEITH:

June 17, I have just arrived at my house in DC. The front door is hanging open on one hinge, which is not something that happens naturally. Through my spectral lenses I can see magical blast marks on the doorframe where a spell was used to penetrate the NIAD security.

I would not normally enter the building alone—but my cat is in there.

And—Jesus, I really hope the neighbor kid wasn’t here when this happened.

Okay, I’m across the threshold now and I can see that there has been little disturbance in the living room, but a faint trail of residue leads upstairs.

Let the record show that I have drawn my mage pistol and am walking up the stairs.

(shouting)

Federal Agent! Any beings occupying this building show yourselves immediately!

(silence, except for sound of Keith’s own recorded voice quietly playing one of his earlier reports.)

Holy crap.

Okay, it looks like the catsitter Lauren somehow found and got into my laptop even though it was hidden with an invisibility spell—note to screen her for mage or sorcery skills—
(meow)

Cheeto! Oh kitty! Where's Lauren? What happened---

Now that I'm closing the laptop I can see a note written on a piece of yellowed parchment that says if I want to see my daughter again I will report for my performance review immediately to Room 666 under the Lincoln memorial. And there is a phone number, which I am calling now.

MAGE X:

Hello Agent Curry. I trust you received your summons?

KEITH:

I have. And congratulations on your awful tactics. I will certainly be taking this up with my union rep.

MAGE X:

NIAD administration is perfectly within its rights to acquire and hold leverage in order to encourage rogue agents to come in from the cold.

KEITH:

I'm not a rogue agent.

MAGE X:

You refused to report to a mandatory performance review.

KEITH:

I was caught up in a case.

MAGE X:

You have not reported for a performance review for three years.

KEITH:

Well, I didn't have the greatest time at the last one and I'm topped out in my pay grade so...

MAGE X:

Whether you comply with our summonses is not your choice!

****Obey us!****

KEITH:

I want to talk to Lauren.

MAGE X:

Who?

KEITH:

The little girl you snatched, who, by the way is not my daughter. You kidnapped the neighbor kid.

I don't have a daughter.

(muttering)

Do some research...

LAUREN:

Hi Mr. Curry um...how are you?

KEITH:

I'm good. Are you okay?

LAUREN:

Yeah, I'm in kind of a sack but it's pretty roomy...and it smells like socks in here. Are you...um...on your way?

KEITH:

Yeah, I'll be there very soon to bring you back.

(end recording)

KEITH:

I have just arrived at the Lincoln Memorial. Before I go down into the mage headquarters I've got to check in with family headquarters.

(sound of phone dialing)

GUNTHER:

You have reached Gunther Heartman. I'm not able to take your call right now, but please leave a message and I'll get back to you.

(chime)

KEITH:

Hey Gunther, I know you're super-busy with your field assignment but I wanted you to know that I'm about to walk into what seems like some kind of trap. Long story short is I can't wait for backup but if I'm not home when you get this message I'm at mage HQ possibly getting fired or maybe incinerated. However, if I *am* killed I totally want you to go find the people who did it and avenge me, okay? Avenge me good. I love you.

Bu-bye.

I am now entering the NIAD entrance and going downstairs. There is no one else present since everybody in this section either knocks off at five or doesn't rise from the sarcophagus until the moon reaches its zenith.

(sound of echoing footsteps)

And here I am at room 666. There's a sign on the door. It says:
WARNING! Diplomatic Portal to the Realm of Eternal Night. No unauthorized access. So I guess I'll try the door. It's open. I can see that the lock has been taped open. Wow. Top notch security protocols guys.

(sound of door opening, weak sloshing)

KEITH:

(whispering)

This chamber seems much bigger than it should be able to be. It's very dark and smoky and there is a large, iridescent pool...and there are two robed figures...

(SWOOOOOOOSH HHHHH!!!! Sound of a flare being lit.)

KEITH:

Jesus, that's bright!

MR. X:

Welcome Agent Curry

KEITH:

(using his best "phone voice")

Hey guys, you know on the way over here I was thinking and I couldn't help wondering why you didn't snatch up Gunther instead of Lauren but then I realized that detaining a big, heavily armed goblin would be too easy for mages of your caliber. Better to challenge yourselves with a harmless 12 year-old-girl.

MAGE X:

She's not harmless. She's a sorceress.

LAUREN:

I am? Sweet!

MAGE X:

Silence!

LAUREN:

Sorry!

KEITH:

Did you put Lauren in a bag? Come on man, I'm here. Let her out of the there and you can get on with the reprimand or...whatever this is.

MAGE Y:

Certainly.

(sound of footsteps)

LAUREN:

Thank you Mr. Curry! I just wanted to let you know that I did not open the door for them. I mean stranger danger right?

KEITH:

What is that stuff all over you?

LAUREN:

They sprayed me with this stuff that makes my fingers feel numb.

KEITH:

What did you two do to her?

MAGE Y:

Calm down it's only neutralizer. It will come off in the shower.

KEITH:

Who are you? I want to see some ID.

MR. X:

You do not need to see our identification. You're here to talk about the reports you made regarding Agent XXX.

KEITH:

He paid foreign creatures to assault an innocent kraken for his own personal gain.

MR X:

No, Agent Curry, that was a mistake on your part.

KEITH:

That's not the way I recall that happening

MR. X:

You were wrong, Agent Curry. Your mistake ruined another man's life. The guilt of it must be unbearable. You will apologize and resign.

KEITH:

(as if in a trance)

I ruined his life...?

LAUREN:

Don't listen to them, Mr. Curry. There are weird, glowing squiggles coming out of that short guy's mouth.

MR. X:

You will rescind your statement about Agent X. Look...your phone is already in your hand. Time to make everything right.

LAUREN:

Mr. Curry! Fight! Get out of here you dirty squiggles. Shoo!!!

MR. X:

I ordered you to be quiet, girl!

KEITH:

You know, I don't like the tone of your voice. And...I don't think you're even a NIAD agent.

MR. X:

****If you don't resign you'll have to take your own life****

LAUREN:

Stop drawing your gun, Mr. Curry!

KEITH:

Ugh.....graaaaaaaa

MR. X:

****It is useless to resist my command. You don't have any magic in you.
You can't break free.****

KEITH:

(breathing heavily)

I may not have magic—but what you don't understand about me is that I
can say no to anything. So...this is for you, whoever you are...

LAUREN:

Wow! Mr. Curry, you have the longest middle finger I've ever seen. You
look so heroic doing that!

KEITH:

(breathing heavily)

Go on, Lauren, do it too! Put your whole heart into it! All your power.

LAUREN:

Are you sure?

KEITH:

(barely alive, struggling)

Yeah.

LAUREN:

Okay!

(sound of massive sound effect—like the sound of a sparkly rainbow shooting out of a 12 year old girl’s middle finger.)

Wow! It looks like a rainbow! But it’s fading so fast. And my fingers are starting to tingle again.

KEITH:

(whispering)

It’s the neutralizer undoing your power. Listen, you stay here. I’m gonna go get those guys.

(Louder)

Okay you two I’m tired of playing. Let’s see who you really are.

(sound of footsteps)

MAGE X:

****Come no closer!****

MAGE Y:

You’ll regret it.

LAUREN:

Watch out Mr. Curry! There’s something in the water!

(sloshing squelching noise—sound of neutralizer being sprayed on MR. X)

MR X:

(Squealing)

KEITH:

Take off that hood!

(struggle)

Oh. I see.

You this isn't a review at all. It's payback. And you're not with NIAD at all. Here's a pro-tip for you, gnome: real NIAD agents don't wear paper crowns.

GNOME KING:

It's my regal headgear.

KEITH:

Yeah, you can wear it during your arrest. So, who is this other guy?
Somebody you met inside?

BARTHOLOMEW:

I'm Bartholomew Atsworthy!

KEITH:

Not ringing a bell.

LAUREN:

Mr. Curry! It's the guy who paid the mermaids to beat up that nice kraken!

KEITH:

Right. Good memory.

LAUREN:

Well, I just listened to it this morning.

BARTHOLOMEW:

Now it's time for you to pay, Agent Curry, with your life.

(sound of incantation etc)

KEITH:

So I take it you two are choosing not to surrender yourselves? Cause you are committing several major offences right now.

LAUREN:

Yeah! You guys better just stop whatever it is that you're doing! Mr. Curry is friends with a lot of magical people he knows a BUNCH of other agents and a phoenix and a scary boo hag and if you hurt him they're going to come and kick your butts.

GNOME KING:

No one is going to come save either of you now.

KEITH:

All right. That's it. I'm shooting you.
(epic sound of mage pistol souping up)

LAUREN:

Wow! That gun really glows!

KEITH:

Cover your ears, kid.

(loud report—sound of GNOME KING GETTING SHOT then second report and sound of ricocheting)

LAUREN:

Those bullets are bouncing around like pinballs.

KEITH:

Maybe opening fire in a round room isn't the best idea.

BARTHOLOMEW:

(chanting louder and louder then)

Rise! Rise and devour my enemy.

LAUREN:

What's that coming out of the water?

KEITH:

Oh, crap.

(sound of slithering, slimy creature)

LAUREN:

It's got my leg!

KEITH:

Oh no you don't!

(sound of mage pistol firing again—slithery shrieking)

How can no one else be hearing this? Help! I need assistance! Anybody!

(sound of PHOENIX appearing.)

LAUREN:

It's the phoenix!!! Yikes that's hot!

PHOENIX:

You have called for help, Keith Curry?

KEITH:

Yeah! Get that guy! And whatever that tentacle thing is too!

PHOENIX:

As you wish.

(whooshing, sound of BARTHOLOMEW'S screams as he sizzles to a crisp.)

LAUREN:

I think I'm gonna throw up!

KEITH:

Don't look at it.

LAUREN:

It smells like barbecue.

KEITH:

Try not to smell it either.

PHOENIX:

It is done. My debt to you is repaid.

KEITH:

What do you mean?

PHOENIX:

While I was trapped in the body of a pigeon I grew so weak I almost gave up hope and forgot my true name. But you fed me everyday. Wondrous dishes the like of which I'd never known, so I thank you.

KEITH:

I do make a pretty good blintz.

PHOENIX:

Farewell.

(whooshing sound of PHOENIX leaving.)

LAUREN:

Wow!

KEITH:

And that, Lauren, is why we DO feed the pigeons!

LAUREN:

Is it okay if we go home now?

KEITH:

Sure. Let's get out of here.

(sound of a few footsteps some alarms starting to ring, troops being marshaled. Keith mumbling something like, "yeah they're in there. Thanks.")

By the way, Lauren, I couldn't help but notice that you'd gotten into my computer.

LAUREN:

Yes. Are you mad?

KEITH:

I'm more surprised, since you're not supposed to be able to see it.

LAUREN:

I'm sorry. I promise not to podcast your case files any more.

KEITH:

You were doing what? Oh, hell...

LAUREN:

On the bright side, you got a lot of listener interest. And a couple sponsors!

KEITH:

God, I'm going to be in trouble. And so are you.

LAUREN:

I said I was sorry! It's just that sometimes I'm not very good at asking for permission or following rules. But you're not exactly a great role model for that either.

KEITH:

You're really pushing your luck here kid.

LAUREN:

Sorry. Does this mean I can't watch Cheeto anymore.

KEITH:

Nah, you can. You're the only cat sitter he likes.

LAUREN:

Yes!

(sound of a few more footsteps)

Mr. Curry?

KEITH;

Yeah?

LAUREN:

When I grow up, I think I'm going to be a food inspector, just like you.

KEITH:

Nah, Lauren, you're going to be a sorceress—maybe the greatest that ever existed.

LAUREN:

Do you think that means I can skip the rest of seventh grade?

KEITH:

I'll put in a good word for you.

(end recording sound)

Closing notes incident report surrounding breach of security on my NIAD account by 12 year old neighbor kid.

Yeah, it was embarrassing, but Lauren has now been inducted into the NIAD junior agent program and is safely learning to use her sorcerous powers in a ways that are both intentional and legal.

And I've changed my password.

Regarding persons whose identities were exposed or otherwise compromised by Lauren's weekend podcasting spree: the propaganda team has run the usual spell algorithms to scrub the files and delete comments so no long-term damage seems to have been done, though Mr. Colby has elected to change his identity and will be moving to a new school where he hopes to continue to improve the standardized test scores on the earthly plane.

(musical cue)

KEITH:

August 23: Performance Review for Keith Curry about to commence.

Present are my immediate supervisor and my union rep.

BOSS:

For God's sake Keith you do not need to make your own recording of this.

KEITH:

I personally find it helpful.

REP:

He is within his rights.

KEITH:

That's great. Let's get this started. First of all I'm so excited to be at a real evaluation instead of that assassination attempt earlier. I'm still not super-stoked on the idea that a couple of guys can bribe their way into NIAD, though, but I accept it's not my case and I'll just have to let the internal investigation run its course.

BOSS:

How noble of you.

KEITH:

So I'd like you to start by telling me one thing I'm doing well and should continue with. And then if you'd tell me one thing I could do that will help me be more effective.

BOSS:

Why are you acting like you're in charge here?

KEITH:

I'm not? I mean I just assumed—since it's all about me.

BOSS:

Really. Well, let's see the one thing that you seem to be doing well is closing cases.

KEITH:

Thank you.

BOSS:

And the one area where you could use some development is working toward complying with even one of the two thousand regulations governing our department. You could file for warrants, call for back up,

or cooperate with other government agencies. You might also think about securing your computer so that little kids can't hack into it, refraining from making deals with otherworldly powers without prior authorization, and wearing appropriate office attire.

KEITH:

Hey now, there's nothing wrong with my attire.

BOSS:

It's ugly.

REP:

That's a matter of taste. Everyone knows Agent Curry has no fashion sense, but he hasn't violated the dress code.

KEITH:

Did you have to put it that way?

BOSS:

Fine. I'll concede the point.

KEITH:

So, am I getting a raise?

BOSS:

You're just barely not getting fired. Straighten up or you're out.

(sound of footsteps leaving, door opening and closing.)

KEITH:

I feel like that went well.

REP:

(heavy sigh) See you next year, Curry.
(again door opens and closes.)

KEITH:

(whispering)

Not if I see you first.

Episode One: "Performance Review" was written by Nicole Kimberling and Ginn Hale. Music and soundscape by Tommy Jordan.

This week's episode features the voices of Ginn Hale, Tommy Jordan, and Ian EveryHope.

The Keith Curry Files was created by Nicole Kimberling and is a co-production of Shepherd Boy Records and Blind Eye Books.