

UNDERSTATEMENT OF THE CENTURY

By Deborah Karczewski

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CAST: NATALIE and KIM

(Two chairs are preset on stage. In one sits NATALIE reading or pantomiming reading a magazine. KIM walks nervously toward an imaginary door stage right of the chairs. SHE is carrying or pantomiming carrying two heavy suitcases. SHE raises her fist to knock and then stops herself. With a determined demeanor, KIM finally works up the nerve to knock. NATALIE, "hearing" the knock, approaches the "door" and pantomimes opening it.)

NATALIE: Yes?

KIM: Hello.

NATALIE: May I help you?

KIM: Is...does...Mr. Stephen Limmer live here?

NATALIE: Yes, but he's not here right now.

KIM: Oh...OK...um, can you tell me when he'll be back?

NATALIE: Not until late.

KIM: Late.

NATALIE: Yes.

KIM: Well, I...you see, the cab just left...so...

NATALIE: *(tentatively)* Kim?

KIM: Yes...I...

NATALIE: *(uncomfortably)* We were supposed to pick you up at the train station tomorrow.

KIM: I know ...Change in plans.

NATALIE: You're not supposed to be here 'till tomorrow.

KIM: Natalie?

NATALIE: Yes...I am.

KIM: Um ...hi.

NATALIE: My parents aren't home. They won't be back until much later.

KIM: Oh...Is there...somewhere I can wait? *(no answer)* Maybe a coffee shop or something?

NATALIE: I'm not ready for this, Kim.

KIM: ...Is there...like...a library or someplace nearby?

NATALIE: You were supposed to give us another day.

KIM: I know.

NATALIE: We were supposed to meet you tomorrow.

KIM: *(losing her cool)* I hear you, Natalie, but I was anxious, OK? It's not every day you meet your father, OK? And I'm standing here in your doorway with two suitcases that weigh a ton! And it's 20 degrees out here! And the cab has just taken off! And I don't know where the

heck I am, OK? So just tell me where I should go to wait – and I'll wait. Can you do that?

(Snapped back into reality, NATALIE ushers KIM into the living room and pantomimes shutting the door.)

NATALIE: Oh God, I'm sorry. Here, let me take one of those suitcases. Come on in, Oh God, I'm sorry. I'm such an idiot. You can leave your bags right here. ***(babbling)*** Good. Now, how about a seat? ***(KIM sits.)*** Good. It's just that we thought you'd be coming tomorrow, and I wasn't expecting you yet, you see...and...and...Can I take your coat?

(KIM either takes off or pantomimes taking off winter clothing, which SHE places on the back of her chair.)

KIM: No, thank you. I'm fine.

(The girls look at each other uncomfortably in a long pause.)

NATALIE: So...

KIM: Yeah...

NATALIE: Dad will be so surprised that you're here.

KIM: Do you think he'll be mad?

NATALIE: Oh no! Just surprised, that's all.

KIM: I guess it was stupid of me. I just couldn't wait another day.

NATALIE: Sure, I understand.

KIM: Natalie?

NATALIE: Yes?

KIM: How...how old are you?

(The age can be changed to suit the actresses.)

NATALIE: Sixteen.

KIM: Me too.

NATALIE: When's your birthday?

KIM: April 7.

NATALIE: Mine's May 20.

KIM: Weird.

NATALIE: That's the understatement of the century.

KIM: I'm sorry.

NATALIE: It's not like it's your fault.

KIM: No, I guess not.

(There is a long uncomfortable pause.)

NATALIE: Kim, I...I'm sorry about your mother.

KIM: (**choking back emotion**) Thanks.

NATALIE: Dad said it was an accident, but he didn't go into the details.

KIM: She almost never made deliveries herself. She was a florist, you see, and the regular delivery guy called in sick at the last minute. It was already dark, and the roads were pretty icy. She was rushing to finish all of the day's delivery orders on time. (**bitter humor**) Long story short: the van skidded into a tree and the tree won.

NATALIE: I'm so sorry.

KIM: (**sniffling back tears**) We're saying that a lot, aren't we?

NATALIE: How did you find out about my... about our...

KIM: Father?

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