

Excerpts from
THE LIST

Synopsis

Set in a time where gender roles are dutifully enforced, Veronica Dixon is the ideal image of a 1950's housewife. She cooks, she cleans, she takes care of the baby, and, most importantly, she has dinner on the table for her husband when he gets home from his office job. Veronica loves having the perfect family and will do anything and everything in her power to keep it that way -- including murder those who stand in her way. To keep track of her kills, and to relive them after the fact, Veronica writes her victims' names on a list that she keeps tucked away in her favorite cookbook, and describes her endeavors to her baby, August, in lieu of bedtime stories.

CAST

Veronica DIXON

Seemingly normal woman who longs to be the perfect housewife and mother. She will do *anything* to have and keep the perfect family.

Jason Dixon

Veronica's very traditionally attractive husband. He's an oblivious businessman going nowhere fast.

August Dixon

Veronica and Jason's baby. Because of the restricting gender roles society would place on the child, August is never gendered throughout the play.

Doctor Serena Phillips

Obstetrician/Gynecologist for Veronica and Jason. She's the best in her field, but that doesn't mean she's willing to take risks when her patient's health is at risk.

Stephanie

Slutty secretary with eyes for Jason... and everyone else in the office.

Deborah Dixon

Jason's mother. Veronica's monster-in-law. She is very judgemental and believes nothing and no one is good enough for her son -- Veronica included.

ACT ONE, Scene Five

(Lights up in a small, yellow nursery. There is a thick strip of teddy bear wallpaper bordering the room. It's early in the morning. VERONICA sits in a

large wooden rocking chair between a cradle and a bookshelf full of children's stories, feeding AUGUST.)

VERONICA

Oh, which story should Mommy tell you about today, my love?

(The room falls silent as Veronica thinks. She starts to speak and stops herself. She looks disappointed and lost.)

I haven't added anyone to the list since Stephanie.

(Beat. Her expression changes from disappointment to a forced nonchalance.)

That's not to say that I haven't wanted to. But I have standards, you know? I don't remove those people because I *want* to. I do it because I *have* to. I can't afford to let anyone take away my perfect little family. You get that, don't you, Auggie? You understand that I'm a good mommy and that I'm just doing this because I love you and Daddy, and I can't imagine a world without you? I'll tell you, even as much as I disliked that whore in Daddy's office, I almost felt bad about adding her name to the list. Almost. Then I realized I only felt bad because it left Daddy in a difficult position.

(JASON enters.)

JASON

What left me in a difficult position?

VERONICA

Nothing. I was telling August about Daddy's day job.

JASON

Actually, office manager really isn't a difficult position at all. It's pretty simple. I really just write documents and sign papers.

VERONICA

No, I meant...

JASON

Meant what?

VERONICA

It doesn't matter now. You know your job better than I do, honey.

JASON

Speaking of jobs, I do have to get going. Do you think this tie is okay? I have a meeting with Mr. King today. I was hoping to ask if he thought about the promotion more.

VERONICA

Didn't you ask him yesterday?

JASON

Things change.

VERONICA

Did he give it to someone else?

JASON

No, no. He said he's still putting a lot of thought into it and that I'm really at the top of the list, especially since I'm having to provide for August now, too. Say what you want about the man, but I saw a whole new side of him yesterday. He really cares about his employees.

VERONICA

I hope he's not just pulling your leg.

JASON

Well it won't matter if the offer is real or fake if I show up late today and blow the whole deal. Is the tie okay?

VERONICA

The tie looks great, love. You better get going.

JASON

Right. I love you. Goodbye.

(JASON exits. VERONICA turns her attention back to August.)

VERONICA

Do you see what I mean, August? He's stressed over a *tie*. But it's no worry because *I'm* here to help him. He never even needed that secretary, anyways. He only ever needed me. And now you.

(JASON rushes back into the room.)

VERONICA

Did you forget something, love?

JASON

Not just something, something *important*.

(He pretends to search around for the 'something important.')

Oh! That's right!

(JASON kisses VERONICA and AUGUST.)

VERONICA

Always the charmer.

JASON

That's why you love me.

VERONICA

One of many reasons.

JASON

I better get going. Actually, this time.

VERONICA

I love you.

JASON

I love you too.

(JASON begins to leave but then remembers something.)

Oh! I saw my mother pulling in before I came back in. I'll let her in on my way out.

(He exits.)

VERONICA

Great! *(To the baby)* You know a name I wouldn't be upset to add to my list? Grandma Deborah.

(VERONICA stands and sets AUGUST in the cradle. DEBORAH enters. She is a haughty, well-dressed woman. She adores her son and her grandbaby, but abhors VERONICA, a fact she does not try to hide.)

DEBORAH

What about Grandma Deborah?

VERONICA

I was just telling August how happy I am that you stopped by!

DEBORAH

I'm sure you were.

VERONICA

Could I get you anything, Deborah? I think there's still some coffee left. Or I could make tea if you'd like.

DEBORAH

Perhaps you could some manners?

VERONICA

I beg your pardon?

DEBORAH

We've been over this time and time again, Veronica. I'm Mrs. Dixon to you.

VERONICA

I'm sorry. I thought that being married to your son for four years might finally put us on a first name basis.

DEBORAH

It doesn't.

VERONICA

...Alright.

(An uncomfortable silence falls between the two of them. VERONICA doesn't know what to do with herself. DEBORAH stares at her, expectedly.)

DEBORAH

Veronica.

VERONICA

Yes?

DEBORAH

Take my coat.

VERONICA

Of course.

(VERONICA helps DEBORAH out of her coat. She takes it to the next room and hangs it on the coat rack. She's fuming but tries not to show it. DEBORAH follows, holding AUGUST.)

Actually, I just laid August down.

DEBORAH

And I picked August up.

VERONICA

Honestly, Deborah--

(VERONICA takes AUGUST from DEBORAH goes back to the nursery. DEBORAH follows. As soon as VERONICA lies AUGUST down, DEBORAH picks them back up.)

DEBORAH

Thank God Jason is helping you raise this child.

VERONICA

Excuse me?

(VERONICA takes AUGUST from DEBORAH and puts him back in the cradle again. DEBORAH waits for her to turn and head back to the kitchen, then picks AUGUST back up.)

DEBORAH

It hasn't been even five minutes and you're back to calling me Deborah. I can't tell if you're rude or just stupid.

VERONICA

I'm not going to call you Mrs. Dixon.

DEBORAH

You are.

VERONICA

(Noticing AUGUST.) This is ridiculous.

DEBORAH

This is merely setting an example of respect.

VERONICA

Yes. A poor example.

(VERONICA takes AUGUST from DEBORAH a final time. DEBORAH follows her to the nursery and watches as AUGUST is placed in the crib.)

DEBORAH

Someone needs to teach your child manners. If you won't, I'll have to.

VERONICA

Don't bring August into this. You hated me long before that baby was born.

(VERONICA leaves the nursery and enters the kitchen. Again, DEBORAH follows. She is relentless. VERONICA busies herself putting away dishes, she tries to avoid eye contact with DEBORAH. Her anger rises throughout.)

DEBORAH

So you're not stupid.

VERONICA

I'm not going to let you speak to me like that in my own home.

DEBORAH

You can leave. I won't stop you.

VERONICA

I'm not leaving.

DEBORAH

Well, neither am I.

VERONICA

And if I make you leave?

DEBORAH

I'd like to see you try.

(VERONICA slams a plate down. It shatters. Silence falls. She turns to face DEBORAH.)

VERONICA

I liked that plate.

DEBORAH

Unfortunate.

VERONICA

Why do you come here if you're just going to fight with me?

DEBORAH

I don't come here to fight with you.

VERONICA

Then why do you come?

DEBORAH

I come because I love my grandchild.

VERONICA

Why can't you "love your grandchild" when your son is home?

DEBORAH

I do.

VERONICA

Yet you only come here when he's gone.

DEBORAH

I don't have to worry about Jason.

VERONICA

But you have to worry about me?

DEBORAH

I have to worry about that baby.

VERONICA

August is fine!

DEBORAH

I'll be the judge of that.

VERONICA

You can go look for yourself. I'm sure he's fast asleep by now. I've fed him and changed him already this morning, and he took a bath last night.

DEBORAH

Of course he's fine *now*. Jason's been home all night to take care of him.

VERONICA

I don't need Jason to take care of him! I do it on my own all day. I'm a fine mother!

(DEBORAH scoffs.)

What's that supposed to mean?

DEBORAH

You're a disaster. You have been since the day I met you.

VERONICA

I've done nothing short of what's best for my family.

(VERONICA resumes her work putting the dishes away.)

DEBORAH

If you did what's best, you'd be long gone by now.

VERONICA

I would never abandon them.

DEBORAH

I told my son not to marry you.

VERONICA

I've never understood why you hate me as much as you do.

DEBORAH

I told him you would make a terrible wife.

VERONICA

I am a fine wife!

DEBORAH

Who are you kidding? You couldn't even have kids without wasting his life savings!

(VERONICA is silent. She turns towards DEBORAH. She has a large knife in her hands. She is seething. VERONICA holds the knife to DEBORAH's throat as she slowly backs her across the stage.)

VERONICA

I did everything I could to have this family, and I'm not going to let you ruin that for me. Do you understand, *Deborah*?

(DEBORAH doesn't answer. She's never seen this side of VERONICA. She's terrified.)

Do you understand what I've done for this family? Do you know the extent to which I have gone to keep us together? I have murdered people, Deborah. I have watched the life drain from their eyes. That doctor whose bookcase 'fell' on top of her in her office? She told me I shouldn't go through with the pregnancy. She told me I would be better off terminating. Can you imagine that? After all the hard work Jason and I put into having a family? All the blood, the sweat, the tears? And that bitch just wanted us to murder our baby? *(Beat.)* The police officers ruled it an accident and her family sued the hospital for not having the bookcases properly secured, but it wasn't the hospital's fault and it surely was not an accident. *(Beat.)* And that whore secretary from Jason's office? The one found with her skull brutally smashed in with a paperweight? They blamed the boss's wife for murdering her in a jealous rage, but, those silly little police officers were wrong again. That homewrecker had set her sights on Jason, so I stopped by after hours one night and put an end to all that. I did that for my family. There is nothing I would not do for them. And now I'm going to have to do this for them, Deborah. Do you understand?

DEBORAH

(Terrified) No. N-no.

VERONICA

I think you do, Deborah. I think you understand perfectly well. But just in case you don't, well, I'm going to murder you. And I'm going to make it look like an accident. And those silly little police officers will have no idea. And then, Deborah, I'm going to comfort Jason as he cries over your loss. Because I will *always* do what's best for my family. But before I do, I need to know that you understand. Do you understand, Deborah?

(Beat. DEBORAH doesn't answer. VERONICA screams, needing an answer from the woman before she continues.)

DO YOU UNDERSTAND, DEBORAH?

DEBORAH

I-I...

(DEBORAH begins gasping for air and clutching at her chest. She stutters her speech.)

I un- I understand.

VERONICA

Thank you, Deborah. Knowing I have your blessing makes this part so much easier.

(VERONICA shoves DEBORAH off stage. Several thudding sounds can be heard, leading up the final, loudest thud. VERONICA smiles. She stares off stage for a moment. The baby cries upstairs. All the commotion has woken it. VERONICA spins around and searches through drawers for a pencil. The cries grow louder and louder as VERONICA pulls the list out of her favorite cookbook and writes a new name. She laughs to herself and hides the list again. She stares out into the audience for a moment, grinning. The babies cries have changed to wails. They are unbearable. VERONICA stands center stage with the knife in hand. She practices her 9-1-1 call over and over again, slipping back and forth between feigned anxiety as she speaks with the imagined operator, and stone-cold as she coaches herself along..)

My mother-in-law! She had a heart attack! Please come quick!... No. No. Too Polite... My mother-in-law fell down the stairs! Help me!... Too panicked. It needs a slow burn if they're really going to believe it.... It-It's my mother-in-law. I think-- oh my God-- I think she had a heart attack! Oh hurry! Please hurry!

(VERONICA trails off, grinning. She lets out a triumphant, blood-curdling scream and rushes to the phone. She dials 9-1-1. The OPERATOR's calm tone can be heard throughout the theatre. VERONICA fakes a very convincing panic.)

OPERATOR

9-1-1, what's your emergency?

VERONICA

It's- It's my mother-in-law.

OPERATOR

Your mother-in-law?

VERONICA

Yes.

OPERATOR

What happened to your mother-in-law?

VERONICA

I don't -- I don't know. We were doing doing the dishes and she just...

OPERATOR

What did she do, ma'am?

VERONICA

She started clutching her chest and stuttering her words. I think it was a heart attack.

OPERATOR

Is she still breathing?

VERONICA

I-I don't know. She- she stumbled backwards and fell down the stairs to our basement! Oh hurry! Please hurry! Please!

*(The OPERATOR's voice fades to the background. The baby wails once more.
VERONICA grins at the audience. Lights down. End ACT ONE.)*

ACT TWO, Scene One

(Lights up on VERONICA and JASON, dressed all in black. They just arrived home from DEBORAH's funeral. AUGUST is asleep in a carrier sitting on the table. JASON, a true mama's boy, is incredibly distraught over the loss of his mother. He seems lost and vacant without her. VERONICA flits between comforting JASON and nervously cleaning the kitchen, though it is already spotless. She feels bad for hurting JASON like this, but is not sorry for her actions. In fact, she is mildly annoyed by his emotional response to the death of his mother.)

VERONICA

I was thinking pork chops for dinner?

JASON

Sounds good.

VERONICA

I can whip up some mashed potatoes.

JASON

Sounds good.

VERONICA

And maybe a nice little side salad, too?

JASON

Sounds--

VERONICA

Good?

JASON

What?

VERONICA

Have you been listening at all?

JASON

... I'm sorry.

VERONICA

It's okay.

JASON

What were you saying?

VERONICA

I was saying I could make pork chops for dinner. With some mashed potatoes. And a side salad.

JASON

Right, right.

VERONICA

What do you think about that?

JASON

I don't know.

VERONICA

But you love mashed potatoes!

JASON

I guess I'm not feeling too excited about anything right now.

VERONICA

Well, I could heat up that tuna casserole that Cindy from across the way brought over last night. Would you like that better?

JASON

It really doesn't matter. I probably won't eat anyways.

VERONICA

You need to eat, Jason.

JASON

I'll try.

VERONICA

That's all I can ask.

JASON

I can't believe she's really gone.

VERONICA

I'm so sorry.

JASON

How will I ever go on without her?

VERONICA

You still have August and I. Focus on that.

JASON

But she was my mother. I never imagined life without her.

VERONICA

You really thought she'd outlive you?

JASON

I don't know I just...

VERONICA

She was stubborn enough, I guess.

JASON

(laughs ironically) She was, wasn't she? *(Beat.)* You know, I can remember one time when she made my father sleep on the couch for a whole month because she lost an argument and he said, "I told you so." I don't even think she knew what the argument was even about by the end of it. She just knew she was wrong and couldn't handle it. *(Beat.)* I just can't believe she's gone.

VERONICA

I know. It's hard for me to believe it too. She was just there one second and then...

JASON

Oh my God. Oh my God, Ronnie! I'm being so selfish. You literally *saw* her die.

VERONICA

I did. I saw it happen.

JASON

How are you doing with it?

VERONICA

I'm okay.

JASON

No, really. How are you *doing*? I can't even imagine how horrifying it must have been.

VERONICA

It wasn't as traumatizing as you would think.

JASON

Please don't minimize what you're going through for my benefit, Veronica. You can talk to me. We can lean on each other through this.

VERONICA

Really. It's okay, honey. One of us has to stay strong.

JASON

I bet you can't get it out of your mind.

VERONICA

Truthfully... I can't. It's like it's been stuck on repeat in my mind. The way she was lying at the bottom of the stairs... that's not an image I'm going to be able to forget any time soon.

JASON

Did she... nevermind.

VERONICA

Did she what?

JASON

It's not important.

VERONICA

You can ask me anything, Jason.

JASON

I'm not sure if I want to know the answer.

VERONICA

Maybe knowing will help? What is it?

JASON

Did she... know she was going to die?

VERONICA

I think she may have.

JASON

Was she complaining about chest pains? Did she mention her arm hurting?

VERONICA

It was very strange, honestly. She never complained about symptoms, but she definitely knew something was wrong. I could see it in her eyes.

JASON

I thought you were doing the dishes when she had the heart attack.

VERONICA

(beat) I-I was. I turned around right as she stumbled backwards. We were carrying on a conversation and I heard her gasp and I turned around.

JASON

So you... you actually *saw* her.

VERONICA

I saw everything.

JASON

What did she look like? When she died, I mean. Was she scared?

VERONICA

Oh, Jason, I'll never get that image out of my head. The way her face screwed up in fear. She was terrified.

JASON

Is that when you dropped the plate?

VERONICA

(Trying to remember what she told the police) It must have been. I-I honestly don't know, Jason. It all happened so quickly.

JASON

Poor mother. Poor you! I'm so sorry. Why didn't you tell me this sooner?

VERONICA

I don't know. I guess I just didn't want to remember it. And I didn't want you to have to remember it, but now neither of us can forget.

JASON

It's like a nightmare.

VERONICA

A dream, truly.

JASON

I just... I can't believe she's gone.

VERONICA

You said that.

JASON

I know.

VERONICA

If it helps, I never thought she'd leave, either.

JASON

She was my mother, Veronica.

VERONICA

You said that, too.

JASON

I don't think it's really sunk in yet.

VERONICA

It will. And when it does, I want you to come to me. I'll always be here for you.

JASON

I think I need to go lie down.

VERONICA

Should you really be alone at a time like this?

JASON

I don't know.

VERONICA

Do you want me to come with?

JASON

I don't know.

VERONICA

Do you want me to wake you for dinner?

JASON

I don't know.

VERONICA

Is there anything you do know?

JASON

I know she's gone.

VERONICA

She is.

JASON

I know things will never be the same.

VERONICA

Change can be good sometimes.

JASON

She'll always be... missing.

VERONICA

She'll be here in spirit.

JASON

You think so?

VERONICA

Do you think your mother would ever leave us alone?

JASON

I think she'd like to watch over us. August especially.

VERONICA

She most certainly would.

JASON

Can we make sure August knows her? Can we tell a story or two from time to time?

VERONICA

I'm sure we could.

JASON

Maybe you can start tonight with one of your bedtime stories?

VERONICA

I think I know just what to say.

JASON

Sounds good. *(Beat.)* I'm going to go lie down.

VERONICA

I'll wake you up when dinner is done.

JASON

Okay.

(JASON begins to exit. As he makes it to the door, VERONICA calls out.)

VERONICA

I love you, Jason.

JASON

I love you, too.

(JASON exits. VERONICA busies herself in the kitchen as the lights fade. When they come back up, she is in the nursery, rocking AUGUST back and forth in the large wooden rocking chair. She speaks softly to him.)

VERONICA

Daddy wanted me to tell you all about Grandma Debbie tonight. She's probably rolling around in her grave right now, knowing I'm going to raise you to call her "Grandma Debbie." She was an evil woman, Auggie. She was. She was disrespectful and rude. The only reason I regret adding her name to the list is because it has made Daddy act funny. All he does now is cry and sleep. He's just like you now, except you're an *actual* baby. It's almost like he's *sad* that she's gone. Which is ridiculous.

(AUGUST fusses.)

Shhh, shhh. It's nothing to fuss over, my love. I'm sure Daddy will be back to normal in no time. His love for us will pull him together. He really does love you. I love you. And I love Daddy, too. You know, Grandma Debbie put some things into perspective for me. I've decided to turn a new leaf, my love. I'm going to work harder than ever now. I'm going to rid this world of anything that could hurt you and Daddy. I added some categories to my list. I just feel as though I need to be ready for anything now. Who knows when I'll need to take action? Now we have "People I've Killed," "People I Want to Kill," and "People I May Have to Kill Someday, But Will Be Sad About." ... There's only one name on that last one.

(AUGUST cries. VERONICA takes a moment to soothe him. Once he settles, she continues.)

Not to worry, my love. It's not you. I could never hurt you. Never in a million years.

(AUGUST coos. A long silence falls.)

It's Daddy.

(Lights Down.)