

COFFEE, TWO SUGARS

Written by

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INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

ALLY MADDOX (36), in her matching pajamas, tiptoes out of the bedroom in the predawn hours. She retrieves hidden shopping bags, discards receipts in the bottom of the trash can, and places newly purchased decor around the house. The sun begins to rise outside the kitchen window.

MONTAGE - ALLY'S MORNING ROUTINE

- Making biscuits from scratch.
- Packing tidy Tupperware lunches for kids.
- Looking through boudoir photos on her phone.
- Ripping the tag off a new cardigan she's put on.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Forehead scrunched, Ally stares at the color-coded family wall calendar. NICOLE CARPENTER (42) enters the front door without knocking. Ally straightens, a wide grin on her face.

NICOLE

Mornin' sunshines. Y'all 'bout ready? My kiddos are already in the car waiting for you.

ALLY

Thanks for coming.

Ally's three kids scatter from the kitchen, suddenly in a hurry to get ready for school.

NICOLE

What're you focused on so intently? That calendar not color-coordinated to your liking?

Ally begins clearing the plates off the counter.

ALLY

Ugh. I'm just trying to see everything that's hiding between the appointments and activities.

Nicole comes up behind Ally at the sink. Checking for onlookers over her shoulder, Nicole rests her hand intimately on Ally's hip, whispering in her ear. Ally coquettishly smiles. They casually split apart as they hear the CLACK of boots walking down the hall.

PAUL (O.S.)  
Ally! Is there anymore coffee?

PAUL MADDOX (38), dressed for work in jeans and a button-down, carries an array of daily items, including blueprints and an empty coffee cup.

Yearning, Ally, tiptoes to reach her arms around Paul's neck. He quickly kisses her on the cheek and scoots her to the side. He struggles to situate his things on the counter.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
Hey Nicole. What're you doing here so early?

Nicole helps herself to a cup of coffee.

NICOLE  
Oh... Just thought I'd help get these little monsters to school since Ally has ---

ALLY  
--- Since I have that eye appointment. Gotta keep my vision clear for all those pretty paint-by-numbers the kids bring home.

Ally flutters her lashes at Paul and gives Nicole a warning look. Nicole shrugs in confusion. Paul palm-slaps himself on the forehead.

PAUL  
Wait! I said I would take the kids to school today, didn't I? Sorry babe. This new work project is warping my brain.

ALLY  
I kinda figured. That's why I called Nicole...

Ally bites the insides of her checks and, wide-eyed, looks pointedly at Paul.

ALLY (CONT'D)  
...Again.

Paul reaches around Nicole to refill his coffee. As an afterthought, he grabs Ally's empty cup off the counter.

PAUL

Aww... Don't be mad Ally-gator. You know this project will let you finish remodeling the house anyway you want.

Paul proudly hands Ally the fresh cup of coffee.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Here... A fresh cup, just the way you like it.

Ally accepts the coffee and toasts in mock amusement with a twitch of a smile that doesn't reach her eyes. Nicole rolls her eyes behind Paul's back and grabs two sugar cubes.

Kids whirlwind into the kitchen, heading out the door, back packs and lunches in hand.

NICOLE

Looks like the troops are on the move. Guess we're going.

Ally grabs Paul by the shoulders, turns him to her. She goes about tidying him up, wiping leftover shaving cream off his chin, smoothing his hair.

ALLY

After my appointment, Nicole is coming over to help finish painting the bedroom. So, beware of paint fumes when you get home.

Paul wraps his arms around Ally's waste and dips her into a dramatic kiss then turns to leave. He stops midway out the door.

PAUL

You going to the store? Pick up some fish. I'll make your favorite: Paul's World Famous Smoked Salmon.

Nicole drops the sugar cubes in Ally's coffee, then follows Paul out the door. She turns around to whisper to Ally.

NICOLE

Why'd you tell him you're going to the optometrist? And why, after 15 years of marriage, will you not tell him how you like your coffee!

Nicole exits through the front door, shaking her head.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Ally and Nicole have been painting Ally & Paul's bedroom. Plastic wrap covers furniture, paint supplies are scattered throughout. Ally exhaustedly collapses on the floor, paint on her hands and clothing. Nicole enters with two cups of coffee.

NICOLE

Let's toast a job well done.  
Ahem... with two sugars. Cheers!

Sitting on the floor, their backs against the bed, the women toast.

ALLY

Thanks. And thanks for helping me with this project. And for getting the kids to school today. And for --

NICOLE

-- Stop! You know I'd do anything you ask.

Nicole gives Ally a lingering sideways look. Ally blushes and looks away.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

I've got a question though. Why the hush-hush about the photo shoot? Paul would be stoked if he knew your little hobby has accidentally turned you into the most requested boudoir photographer in the 'burbs.

ALLY

(sighing)  
I don't know. It's complicated.

NICOLE

Ok...?

ALLY

Ok, so... Paul has this picture in his head about who I am. The problem is, it's a picture from 15 years ago.

Ally shifts to a crisscross position directly in front of Nicole.

ALLY (CONT'D)

I used to take my coffee black and pick out the kids' clothes and plan Sunday School lessons and volunteer at school, and blah blah blah. And I liked it. All of it.

NICOLE

But?..

ALLY

But... I'm afraid once he gets a glimpse of the real me... Like, the more he *sees* me, the less he'll *want* me.

NICOLE

Honey... That's ridiculous! You make money photographing middle aged woman au naturale, so that when they are *seen*,  
(wiggles her eyebrows)  
they are *wanted*.

Ally chuckles to herself. Nicole takes Ally's hands.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

Listen... Paul deserves some credit. Give the man a chance to make his own decision about getting to know this *real* you.

Nicole wipes a smudge of paint off Ally's cheek. Her hand lingers.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

Because, I know you, Ally, the real you. And I love you.

Nicole takes a deep breath, hesitating; her thumb brushes Ally's lips.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

I see the real you and I want more.

Nicole leans forward, gently kisses Ally. Ally turns her head away from the kiss and drops her eyes.

Nicole clears her throat and let's go of Ally's hands. Ally's eyes slowly make their way to Nicole's face.

Ally assertively puts her hands on either side of Nicole's face, lustfully kissing her. Nicole responds in kind, the two falling into a lying position on the floor.

Behind a partially closed door, the women's bare feet, entangled, knock a near-empty paint can over.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Paul pushes open the bedroom door, finding Ally and Nicole, post-passion, sitting on the floor. Both women are slightly disheveled, whispering closely, caressing hands.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Paul enters from the hallway. Ally is cleaning up dinner.

PAUL

Kids are in bed. I told them you'd tuck them in when you're done.

Paul reaches for a dirty dish. Ally snatches it out of his hand.

ALLY

I got it. I'm almost done. Just sit down.

Paul, reluctantly moves to the coffee maker, turns it on.

PAUL

Ally, what is going on?

ALLY

What do you mean?

His back to Ally, Paul takes a shaky breath. Ally, shoulders rigid, mercilessly scrubs the dishes, staring into the soap suds.

PAUL

I mean I'm not stupid.

The sound of the single-serve brew is all that is heard. Paul fills two cups of coffee.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Did you even have an eye appointment yesterday?

Ally momentarily raises her eyes. Paul offers her a cup of coffee. Discarding the dishes, Ally accepts the coffee.

Paul swallows hard and leans against the counter.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Earlier... in our bedroom. What did I come home to?

ALLY

You came home to freshly painted walls.

Reaching behind him, Paul grabs the sugar cubes.

PAUL

Bullshit. Quit hiding things from me, Ally.

Paul drops two sugar cubes into Ally's cup, coffee splashes.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I know you.

Ally, mouth agape, stares at her coffee. Paul sits down, elbows on knees, hangs his head, sighs, and takes several deep breaths. Ally deflates.

ALLY

I don't know what you came home to.

PAUL

Please. Just stop lying. I know what I saw --

ALLY

-- I mean... I'm not the person I used to be. The person you want me to be. I haven't been her for a long time! You just don't want to see me.

Rapidly shaking his head, Paul stands up, eyes wide. He rakes his hand through his hair, making a circle where he stands.

PAUL

I don't see you? Are you kidding me?

Still shaking his head, Paul makes another, slower, circle where he stands, hands on his hips.

Things slowly come into focus for him: the new decor, the color-coded wall calendar that doesn't include Ally's appointments, Ally's camera sitting on the counter.



FLASHBACK MONTAGE -- PAUL'S REVELATION

-- Ally & Nicole caressing hands.

-- Ally, smiling, editing photos on her camera.

-- Nicole's hand on Ally's hip at the sink.

-- Ally picking at her dinner.

BACK TO SCENE

PAUL

You didn't touch your dinner  
tonight.

Paul swallows, not meeting Ally's eyes.

PAUL (CONT'D)

You always say how much you love my  
Smoked Salmon.

Ally takes a steadying breath, tears silently rolling down  
her cheeks. She looks anywhere but at Paul.

ALLY

Paul... I've never liked salmon.

Paul, fists clenched, blinking away tears, stares at the  
ceiling. He takes a hitching breath, his hand covering his  
mouth.

PAUL

Oh. Ok.

**THE END**