

Extra Credit

“Post something contentious—to Facebook or Twitter or Instagram, whichever one you like—something . . . contentious, something that will grab the attention of your social media followers.” This was the assignment.

Professor Gallimore, Rick, was behind his podium and looking straight at my tits when he began to explain this, an assignment the syllabus had only said was “Extra Credit: 10 pts on your final grade.” I snapped out of my trance de jour, my all-consuming breakup. I needed these points, had been a disaster this semester (since everything with Fuckface I was incapable of much decent concentration), was in jeopardy of flunking multiple classes, especially this waste-of-time class with a middle-aged prof who thought he was twenty-five, a total strapper who had us there in masks three mornings a week, hadn’t opted to go virtual the way pretty much every other instructor on earth did.

“And I’d suggest you believe in what you post, it will make it easier to come up with something, but it’s entirely up to you guys. Believe it, don’t believe it . . . But here’s the kicker,” he said, stopping his eyes on one of the boys now (this was his sly-guy maneuver after being caught eyeing up tits: act like he looked at *everyone* the way he did the girls). “And it’s actually

two part: this post must—must—be something that will elicit angry replies. Understand? Not just offend folks, but utter enragement—get me? I want people pissed off!”

A few hands went up.

“Like troll people?” a kid named Fred asked. Fred looked as though he liked this idea—liked to troll people—and I’d assume he needed the extra credit—I’d only seen him four or five times all semester, always in a flat brim hat that wasn’t a home team, hipster glasses that I’d have bet weren’t prescription. His sleeve-style mask, I’d have wagered on too, hadn’t once been washed.

Rick didn’t know what trolling was and laughed when Fred explained.

“Sure, it would probably fall under ‘trolling’ I’d assume. Sure.” He then asked for all hands to go down till he was finished explaining. “The second part . . .” He was sitting on his desk now, feet dangling, his dick and balls all squished together, front and center for the suddenly very wide-awake social-distanced class of twenty-some. “The second part’s the important part: you are *not*—under any circumstances—permitted to reply. Reply nor explain—not even a *like* or sad face or whichever other preferred emoji you have there in your arsenal.” He paused and eased his palms down like a quarterback attempting to simmer the home crowd before changing a play. “Also—also, no explaining to people that this is just for class; no texts or inboxes, a phone call—if you guys still make phone calls—nothing about this being for Sociology, for school. ‘Our asshole Soc prof is giving us ten points if we just say something nuts.’—none of that. After the post your job is *done!*”

Most of the class laughed, led by the flock of old fat ladies in their forties who always sat together and were constantly hee-hawing when the ole douchebuckle was even a smidgen funny.

Rick went on: “I will give you till midnight tonight to get your post up, and starting Wednesday we will take some time at the end of each class to break down this little experiment, put these posts up on the projector and see what’s transpiring, dissect some things, on each of your pages. We’ll do this till the week before finals. Questions . . .? Yes, Luke.”

“How would you know if we told people—like, if I texted my friends and told them that you made us do this, like, how would you know then?”

“I wouldn’t know, Luke. And I would certainly be unable to stop you from doing that. What will be pretty tough for you to do is text or inbox *all* these people and explain things behind the scenes. And if you did indeed accomplish that—text and text and email and DM friends . . . and we’re talking lots of folks, because after you post something as controversial as this—” He stopped himself there, held up a finger and turned away from Luke (Cute Luke I called him) as another component of the assignment seemed to come to his douchebag brain. He was facing the center of the class again, eyes on group of three super pretty girls, friends, in the first row I called the Mean Girls. “Oh, one more thing: I will have to approve your post as one that fits the assignment’s purpose. You will know by next class if your post will get you ten or not.” His head swiveled back towards Luke. “But Luke, if you get in touch with *all*, or a good deal, of these people, alert them that this is just for school, then you deserve the ten points just

for the hard work. That would be quite industrious of you, would certainly exceed any of the effort you've put into this class thus far."

The fat fan club laughed.

"And also, and this is the most important part, Luke—you'd be an asshole for doing that."

Most of the class cracked up at this—twenty some masked morons two weeks before Halloween. It *was* pretty funny. In a way, Luke was kind of trolling Rick right now. (Was trolling still trolling when in-person?)

"Guys, hear me out real fast, OK." When Rick's eyes fell on me again, I looked away, up towards the clock above the door. "This is an experiment, OK." Rick went on. "There is a point to all of this, I promise. No one has to do it. It is 'extra credit.' So don't waste time with emails to the dean saying I'm making you do this or that. I'm a tenured prof anyhow so . . . "

The old biddies baaa'd again.

"But seriously, if you decide to do this—and I think it will be worth your while—then be grown-ups and follow instructions." He paused a second, adjusted his mask, itched his little toolbag beard. "But that said, thanks to Luke, I've just added a third requirement to the assignment: everyone who partakes *must* befriend the Prof here . . . for monitoring purposes. Happily delete me at semester's end. And also . . . we are now, thanks again to our star student of the day, Mr. Luke, limited to Facebook only—that is the only social media this old guy is on." There were sighs, rolling eyes, a few dead stares in Luke's direction. "I'll assume you all have Facebook. And if you don't, you have till Wednesday to create an account, grab enough friends to make the assignment viable. So, two more days, two more days for the Lukes out there who

want to cheat, post a forewarning status explaining how what you will later be posting in no way shape or form reflects who you are and so on and so forth, a status you will subsequently delete before you request my friendship. I am old, guys, but not blind—not yet”

“Baahahahaha”

“Ya know what, thanks to Luke’s display of genius today—you are enlightening me by the second, pal—I am going to rewrite my original rules *even further*. We have”—Rick looked up at the clock—“we have forty-one minutes left here. I didn’t have a lot planned for today’s class and was going to let you guys out early, but thanks to our star student of the day here—Mr. Luke—I just revamped things. Here’s the deal: if you are going to partake in the extra credit, I need you to type your post between now and the bell. So you have . . .” He twisted himself, grunted a bit, as he checked the clock again. His Hitler Youth haircut, his attempt at hipsterhood. I hated this clown. “You now have exactly forty minutes to come up with a status. When you’ve finished and have sent me a friend request, you are then free to go. And for all those who do not want extra credit, are confident in their grades, not worried about the midterm most of you failed, a final examination that 80% of students get a C or below in—you brave souls are free to leave right now. Sound fair, Luke?” Rick stopped a second, thank God, to survey the class. Finally finished talking? Nope. This cretin just couldn’t handle a few seconds without hearing his own voice.

“I will be visiting all of the pages of those I receive friend requests from at some point between now and Wednesday’s class and if you see a *like* from this guy here beneath your status then you got yourself ten points—and that is if, *if* you subsequently follow the very simple additional rules. For those of you who do *not* see my *like*—you guys need, by the end of

Wednesday's class, to repost a status, and that status too will either be accepted or declined via my *like*. Anyone still unclear at that point is more than welcome to come on up here." *Go fuck yourself, Rick*. "OK, sounds like we're all set. Anything else to add, Luke?"

The laughs were inordinately less. I sensed they were as skeptical and weirded out as I was.

"Oh, and one last thing! How could I forget this part. Might want to listen up. I will be choosing a handful of posts—statuses—that I deem extra risky, ballsy, stir up the most trouble—and these students will get *another* ten points tacked on. Twenty points, I'll remind you, is *two* entire letter grades. So for all of you who may need boo koo points—Luke—you now have . . . twenty-nine minutes to get that creativity churning! Yes, Linda."

"Can we use a photo or does it have to be characters, like sentences?" Linda seemed to be speaking on behalf of all three old biddies.

"Good question. A photo can certainly be used, but a message, characters as you put it, *must* accompany this."

Then Stacey, another biddy, chimed in: "So, what would differentiate a twenty-point post from a ten?"

"Another good question. Let's say . . . Flat Earthers. 'The Earth is flat and I can prove this.' Or . . . How about . . . 'Global warming is fake.' Both of these are ten-pointers. Believe me, folks will get pissy over posts like these. But for twenty . . . And no one can use this one now, but here's a good example of a twenty-pointer type: 'Men deserve higher salaries than women for the same work.' Or 'The Holocaust was made up.' These can cause all-out virtual wars. *Facebrawls!* Get where I'm coming from now?"

All three biddies nodded as one, smiling that oh-I'm-so-interested smile; then, almost in unison, they started writing in their marble notebooks.

This guy had to be kidding me with this Facebook shit. Facebook was the only place left I could see Fuckface, who was a big-time Facebooker (gay) and had no doubt posted pics from the wedding he was at with Erin. Erin—aahhh! Just thinking of the name gave me those tingly fingers, that crazy-heavy feeling in my legs. Don't even think about going to his page, I kept telling myself after I'd finally stopped looking up at this moron, his never-ending sermon. (He was telling us now how there was so much fodder out there in these current times—race relations . . . the upcoming election . . . COVID! Blah-blah-blah.) I had my phone out trying to get a head start on this bullshit. But my brain went straight to Fuckface and super-pretty Erin and her whitest teeth and deepest dimples ever and this wedding date they had that all my great and loyal friends just had to tell me all about. “I hate telling you this, Kels, and I know you might get upset . . .” “Kels, please don't be mad at me, but I think it's my responsibility . . .” “Hey girl . . . I just don't want you finding out on Insta or something first so . . .”

About half the class was right up and out the door as soon as Rick was *finally* finished answering the rest of the stupid ass questions, had finally shut the fuck up and let us start. Thirty-two minutes left. The Mean Girls seemed the most interested in leaving, the most uninterested in the extra credit. They peaced out the second he told us to start. Brianna (Breeeee), Kaitlin, and I forget. Typical pretty cunts. Probably old cheerleading teammates at one of the Catholic high schools. They call this place thirteenth grade—it's mostly commuters from the local high schools—and this class pretty much personified a fifth year of high school. Mostly freshman and sophomores. Me and the biddies, who look ridiculous in day classes by

the way, were about the only over-twenty-oners. The Mean Girls were sophomores I think, had been here long enough to know that their extra credit wasn't on the syllabus but had been on the table long before today's announcement. They knew that getting below a C was almost impossible in the class of a male prof like Gallimore. All they had to do was continue doing what they'd been doing since they got to college: going to office hours as much as possible, wearing the tightest stretch pants known to man, letting the Ricks of the college world think—through the body language these bitches mastered after four years of a high school—that they thought he was soooo cool, not *that* old, and that after they'd graduated, were selling Rodan and Fields on social media, it was totally fine for a fortysomething prof to pursue a twentysome alum.

But me, the girl who, ya know, wears sweatshirts to class on chilly mornings, doesn't have my tits out, wear bra tops "because I'm going to the gym after class"—me, I had to do the official extra credit, stay put while they went off to the cafeteria and ate burgers without the buns, had to sit here and log onto my current scariest place on the planet and write some absurd status update that would "enrage people."

For over a week I'd pictured these photos of Fuckface and Erin, so maybe it wouldn't be as bad a direct shot to the heart when I got to his page and saw him and *her*. And it wasn't. There she was. The girl my former future-husband now shoved his cock into. I knew what Erin looked like, had seen them together before I started my unfriend-Fuckface rampage. But the caption above the photos: "Freedom cannot be bestowed — it must be achieved." The fucking loser was quoting Abe Lincoln or some shit because . . . because he didn't have an official girlfriend anymore—a *me* anymore. I felt the hyperventilating thing coming on and the scene in the car came hard: Fuckface looking down at his phone, checking a text, ten seconds after he'd

just told the girl he'd been with since eleventh grade that he "wasn't feeling us anymore." We were out front of my house, getting back from watching the Eagles game at his friend's, and I was telling him about my cousin's wedding in February—could he go? "I dano, Kels. It's, like, a big step . . ." "Big step?" "Yea, like, I wouldn't want to do something that says we're official and then hurt you." "Hurt me? Wait, what?" I'll always be pretty pissed that I even replied to that, that I didn't just laugh then, calmly, walk right out—hindsight can be salt in the fucking wound of a crushing breakup. Four and half years together and we weren't "official?" *I hate you I hate you I hate you!* Instead, like a broken baby bird, I kept talking: "It's just a wedding. We went to four proms together—it's the same as that . . . but less, I dano, less a date than even proms were." "Yea . . ." "You don't want to go on dates with me . . .?" Then like a stupid little girl I started to cry. Then he said it: "I'm just not feeling us anymore." That's when I punched him square in the face. More like a closed-fisted tomahawk, thwack, to the bridge of his nose.

I was looking closely at the wedding pictures now, my own nose nearly hitting the screen, hoping Fuckface had a mark, some swelling (from the tomahawk) to go with the plaid tie I bought him. A fucking wedding! He went to a wedding with a girl he knew for two weeks . . . right after he told his girlfriend of *four years* that a wedding was too much of a commitment. *I hate him I hate him I hate him!*

His nose looked fine. His face looked fucking perfect. I pressed *unfriend*. Ended our Facebook friendship. The final nail.

I looked behind me, then to both sides. There were only six of us left. The biddies—What else did they have to do?—and two boys. Both Cute Luke and Freddie flat brim were typing away. (Fred had a PopSocket with an image of his own face.) Luke was smiling into his

phone. What was this nutjob posting? Since that debacle early in the semester, this kid had shown he was capable of saying almost anything—I was already looking forward to what his status would be.

Luke got super animated one day when class went off course on a COVID debate. He was crazy contentious with one of the annoying ass-kiss chicks, Jenna, who wore disposable gloves and sprayed down her desk and chair with Lysol. She was telling the whole class about how her boyfriend had Corona and how people needed to be more selfless and how Trump was a disgrace—all that political nonsense I immediately check out for. “COVID’s a joke,” Luke blurted out. “How many sick people you know?” “My boyfriend and—” “Is your boyfriend dead, hospitalized? Na. We shut the country down, the economy has been decimated—I need lots of bodies for that shit, not some four-day flues, sick people who don’t even know they’re ‘sick’ unless they get tested. ‘OMG, I tested positive.’” Luke threw his hands up and made a funny face. I chuckled at his girly-voice imitation. Jenna wasn’t laughing. After she’d gotten so exasperated in the middle of her return fire, nearing tears, Big Bad Rick came to the rescue.

“Luke, elaborate on ‘a joke.’ And hasn’t there been hundreds of thousands who’ve lost their lives. Isn’t that ‘bodies’ enough for you?”

“Fake news. I live in in the fifth biggest metro in the nation,” Luke said, addressing the prof now, “I have four social media accounts that amount to, what, three-thousand-ish friends. I have gotten no reports of death—of even hospitalization. Friends of friends of friends of friends. And nothing! And how long’s this been going on now? Eight months? And people love saying they know somebody who has it. Love it. Yet barely a thing. My social media feed, my friends who’ve had shore houses, whose little brothers and sisters have sprayed spit, sweat,

and snot all over each other, unmasked, playing on sports teams. Who's sick, Rick? That's my news—that's how I find out if people are 'truly' getting sick. Not some CNN slanted numbers b.s., some hundred-year-olds in nursing homes with eighty-seven thousand ailments, yet COVID—COVID was what did them in. Get the hell out of here! How are we supposed to trust a news channel with headlines like 'Black Man Shot By White Officer' whenever the guy the 'white' cop shot happened to be black. Sound like a network with an agenda? Wake up!" He turned towards Jenna again. "This crap has been going on, what—eight months, right? People gave up caring back in May. And who's seriously sick? My mom's a nurse—her answer is nobody! Same amount sick as there was two, three, eight years ago." Luke pulled off his mask and the class gasped as if he'd just pulled a gun from his book bag and started waving it around. "And these masks—they are the stupidest part of this whole debacle. Since masks became a thing—a 'mandate'—people think they're invincible. I see it all the time. People even having sex with masks. Mark my words, masks are making this worse. Should have just stuck to the six feet shit."

I was smiling now thinking of this exchange turned rant. COVID was certainly contentious. "**Masks are beyond dumb . . .**" I started to type. But then I thought about my Facebook friends, all the Jenna clones who love to speak their minds as if they matter one fucking bit. A month of notifications, the diatribes, the tag-teamers who'd come at me with nasty names, without my being able to respond. No thanks.

Politics? I could keep it simple. Simple could "elicit anger." "**Anyone who votes is a total retard.** Boom! All the red and blue sheep, plus the pc police who literally think words like retard are criminal. Twenty-pointer! Na, leave out *retard*. I even think that word is awful. Maybe less

of an attack in general would be better. Rick didn't say it had to attack per se; he said "piss people off." I didn't mind some weirdos from grade school or creeps I barely knew unfriending me—bye-bye, fuckers!—but I didn't want to get egged or worse one day getting into my car—I've heard stories . . . not for bonus points in a soc class that won't ever matter. Nope. I wasn't as brave as Luke. Say what you need to say without attacking people, Kelsey, I was telling myself. Race Relations . . . Protests . . . **"Here's a protest: Don't vote! Stay home! Take a good look at Seattle, the way people took over an entire neighborhood, created this lawless zone where people have been hurt and even killed. Look right here in Philly, the Parkway, the encampment down there, the violence. Yet the president will not or cannot stop this. The leader of the free world can't/won't keep you safe. What's the point in voting if the biggest wig there is is useless. Drain it all! Be an adult; wake up on Nov 3rd and pull the lever for YOURSELF, make this day the first damn day of being the person you want to be—whoever's in office won't be doing that for you."**

I stopped and thought about the length. I had been typing this pretty quickly, believed every word I was saying. But it was getting a little long. Me and my friend Sarah are always calling wackos who write long posts "Seemores" since that is what it says—*see more*—when you run out of room. "That chick is a total Seemore psycho!" "Best way to know you shouldn't date a guy—if he's a Seemore." No, it was too good an inside joke for me to become one—a Seemore—myself. I started backspacing. Any sort of politics was a bad idea.

Religion. **"There is NO god."** The lowercase g in itself would incense people! But Facebook was where I was friends with so many old people. My parents' friends were always sharing dumb Trump and Religion and Military support memes. And these assholes were on

there all day long, liking my pics and check-ins two seconds after I'd post. (They call us tech obsessed, yet their bored asses are just as dependent!) They are so stupid! Most of them are racist, too, and it shows loud and clear on social media. Oh look, here's a shared meme of a cop playing basketball with a black boy the day after a black guy was killed by a white cop—50 loves and likes from all their other bot baby boomers with "Thin Blue Line" and "Back The Blue" backgrounds. But was it worth ten—even twenty points—to have my mom call me downstairs one night and tell me how she's worried about me, how Mrs. Gallagher or Mrs. Prendergast or Mary Lou O'Holleran saw my status update and was just too concerned not to let her know? (Even fifty-year-old girlfriends are tattletale cunts pretending to be loyal.) Here's a good status, a stone cold twenty-pointer: **Every female deserves a nice punch in the jaw from a man now and again.** I hated my parents' friends. The do-gooder nonsense. The phony Catholic crap. I'd love to "anger" them. **"All you Catholics, you preservers of morality. Remember when you guys went down to the Parkway in droves, by the hundreds of thousands—millions maybe—to protest the pope, all those thousands and thousands of pederass priests the Church had been harboring, to support those poor innocent children? Oh, wait . . . Hypocrites!!!!!"** Now this was a winner! I could even add a pic of the flocks and flocks of the tiny-brains, waving, being blessed with air prayers as the head molester protector drives past in his popemobile. Nope. Twenty points wasn't worth my mom, the questions that would then lead to more questions, inevitable questions about Fuckface—Where he's been? Were we fighting? Did I want to talk?

Shut the fuck up!

Two more people left class. It was 9:39—six minutes till the bell. What was I doing? I hadn't even been able to pull the trigger on friend requesting the prof. Every time I looked up at him grinning into his phone, I envisioned him jacking off to my senior portrait or some shit. I wanted to wing something straight at his nutsack.

“How do fruitcakes like Rick Gallimore get tenured, make 90 grand/yr just to be perverts?” That would piss off no one but Rick. Four minutes left. Racism . . . Cop bashing . . . Sex. Sex certainly got people's attention. But what pissed them off about sex? **“Porn is Dumb.”** Hmm. Now that might . . . Na, that wasn't getting anyone angry, though pretty much every guy I knew would silently be outraged. It would get LOLs if it got anything at all. Not what the Tenured One was looking for.

I peeked up, as I had been every few minutes, and called out without even knowing I'd started talking, “Excuse me, any areas you could suggest that you, ya know, would piss people off?”

Rick's eyes rose from his phone, a creepy smile. “Well, what pisses *you* off, hun?”

“You do.”

I guess the *hun* numbed the part of my brain that would normally have stopped me from saying what I truly felt at that exact millisecond.

“Me? Is that right?”

“*This*. I meant to say *this*.” I tried a little laughy thing like the Mean Girls do, fluttered my eyes, pushed my tits out. “Not *you*.” I smacked my head a little as if indicating my brain had short-circuited.

“Didn't sound like that's is what you meant, sweetie. You—”

“Her name is Kelsey.”

It was Cute Luke. Not smiling anymore. He was squinting up at Rick, that face he had the day he ranted.

“Excuse me, son.”

“It’s Luke, Rick. You’re Rick, I’m Luke, that is Kelsey. You knew me name twenty minutes ago when you bullied and embarrassed me in front of thirty people.”

“Listen, pal. I have put up with your—”

“Put up? Because I debate and don’t sit here like a drone letting you preach—that makes you have to ‘put up’ with me. I have ‘put up’ nineteen-hundred out of pocket—I work two jobs, Rick, just to take these three credits you work so hard to repay me in wisdom with. I simply chime in when you invite us to.”

Rick was shaking his head, pursing his lips. Silence. The whole room was silent. The five students, me included, looked back and forth between Luke and Rick. The silence was wild! Who would speak next? First Rick: “Sounds like you and your friend here don’t want to be a part of this assignment—or this class—”

“Oh no, Rick, that’s not how this works. You don’t get to decide on my fate because you didn’t like me correcting you for disrespecting Kelsey. This isn’t high school, my friend. Me, you—we’re both adults. I’ll check the code of conduct, but I am pretty sure you can’t toss me for simply telling you this girl’s name isn’t ‘hun’ or ‘sweetie.’ That’s called prejudice, Rick. Tenure doesn’t give you that right. Nope. I do not believe so. But it’s cool. I’m droppin’, Rick.” Luke stood. “See Prof, I’m not the smartest dude in the world, which means I’m not the first to see through you, your whole m.o.. And that likely means when I talk to the dean, I won’t just be

some spoiled snowflake millennial looking to blame somebody else. I think they'll be listening when I tell them some things I know about you that you'd be pretty surprised are out in the open." Luke stopped in the doorway, his mask now at his neck—one last word: "I'll bet Kevin Spacey and Matt Lauer thought they had limitless protection in their industry too, Rick." He left.

I felt like Dorothy Boyd from *Jerry Maguire*. I had to follow him out, honor what he did, his courage, then run away with him. I grabbed my school bag and went fast down the aisle and out the door, caught up as Luke was nearing the stairwell that led downstairs and out to the quad. I told him thanks—"thanks so much"—that it meant a lot to have someone stick up for me. We walked. Side by side, down and out the doors and past the giant Lion statue. We'd never spoken till now but no introduction was necessary. We had skipped a whole slew of steps it seemed. He was shier one-on-one, grinned into the ground when I asked him if he'd really check the code of conduct. Mums were planted all along the path we were heading down. Not till later, way later, weeks and weeks after, did I realize that neither of us were wearing our masks, that we walked half the campus and on into the cafeteria without the facial coverings that were mandated and policed and taken very, very seriously. Only after our dozens of dates, B's we both received despite our failing grades, after Christmas and New Year's together, after my cousin's wedding where Luke accompanied me, only then, now, sitting alone and thinking about the day of the extra credit, daydreaming, do these details seem important enough to really remember, remember how Luke and Kelsey came to be.