

# THE FACTS OF LIFE

BY SAMUEL GRAFTON

THEY called him Smut and Filth because it was his job to reveal the Facts of Life to the freshmen each September.

"There is no smut, and there is no filth, in sex," he would say. He weighed 240 pounds. When he reached the part about smut and filth he became very solemn, like a fat poet declaiming the immensity of night.

Freshmen destined for the theological school would find it very church-like, because of the size of the old gym, and the shaft of light plunging down to the assistant personnel officer's blond hair. The others would smell the dried sweat of thirty classes of athletes.

"College life will have many temptations for you men. I went through it myself, and I know just what each and every one of you has to face," the assistant personnel officer would say.

"I want you to think always of your sister, and how you'd feel if a diseased man were to marry her and drag her down. I want you to come to my office and talk to me whenever you get involved in any of these problems. I want you to stay away from the cheap sort of girls always to be found hanging around a campus.

"Men, I want you to remember this: A professional prostitute is decenter and cleaner than the girl who maintains the appearance of respectability while giving rein to loose morals clandestinely!"

But there was no record that any university boy had ever gone to the assistant personnel officer when he became involved in any of these difficulties.

The man's shape suited his job. His bulk proclaimed him a target for evil that had come through unscathed. No pimple marred his pink flesh. His eyes were small, close together, and high above the ready smile which so often perturbed the areas below.

When he leaned over Miss Black's shoulder, it was perfectly plain he was close to her for business reasons only, and was not even aware of the dab of Narcisse Noir at the nape of her neck.

Miss Black discussed intimate affairs with him.

One day she told him about a wicked man who wanted to week-end with her in New York.

"If you decide to go through with it, it is up to you," he said. "But you must also decide to go through with all the consequences, and not blame anybody but yourself. The responsibility for the decision rests on you, and the responsibility for what comes of it."

It was cozy to be sitting in the little College Hall office with a pretty woman, talking of moral decisions which had to be made.

Miss Black crossed her legs and said earnestly: "I think he had an awful nerve to suggest anything like that to me. Don't you?"

## II

It was the Winter of big trouble on the campus.

Olaf, who had been janitor of College Hall for forty-eight years, died. A serious scandal developed in the girls' dorms. One wing of Turner Hall, built by the Founder, collapsed gently, the process taking two days, during which disturbing editorials appeared in the town newspaper, questioning the soundness of some of the other old buildings. The Depression arrived.

The line of new students, coming to College Hall from all over the cow country, reached only from the dean's office to the driving post in front of the entrance. It had formerly extended to the middle of the grass plot. The shortened line revealed that 180 fewer freshmen had come to be taught, causing a decline of \$59,260 in tuition fees, not counting the expected sophomores, juniors and seniors who failed to show up.

The board of trustees announced a special meeting to discuss economies, and the Governor wired that a shrinkage in the State revenue meant a half-million dollar decrease in the annual appropriation for the university.

Rumor spread that the president was making a list of instructors who could be fired, soon or late, and of activities which could be curtailed.

The assistant personnel officer wrote to the president, pointing out that at a time like the present it was particularly important that the facilities of the university be conserved to those capable of profiting by them, and hoping that the personnel office, which selected worthy students so carefully, would be spared the ax.

The president was a retired business man, and it seemed to him that the major

problem was how to get more students in, rather than how to select them carefully. But because he lived in horror of being considered purely a business man, he spared the personnel office. This caused a good deal of grumbling among some students of Plato and a translator of Beowulf, who were summarily dismissed.

## III

The assistant personnel officer liked everything about the university except some of the younger men in the department of mathematics.

He disliked Goodkin most of all.

Goodkin was whispered by his colleagues to be the worst mathematics instructor in the United States, but even in the swellest fraternities seniors mentioned his name approvingly.

"I dislike co-education," was one of his favorite remarks to his classes. "The girls rouge their lips in front of me, and I forget everything in mathematics beyond the binomial theorem."

Another favorite remark of Goodkin was to this effect:

"Wealthy men eagerly endow traveling scholarships for study in Paris because they get a vicarious thrill thinking of what the scholarship holder can do in Paris when not studying. If a rich man can't enjoy it, it is still something to be able to buy it, if only for another."

A third favorite was:

"The time will come when psychologists will rule the nation, and campaign contributors will pay heavily to have their sons awarded a favorable official government intelligence quotient, without an examination."

The assistant personnel officer was sure there was something wrong with Goodkin. He had seen several like Goodkin

awarded teaching posts in the university. None had lasted long. He knew that Goodkin was heading for a break, and he hoped it would come soon.

Goodkin said to the assistant personnel officer one day: "You know, it is only a matter of twenty-nine years now before you will be known as the grand old man of the university, and will be exhibited to the freshman class like the statue of the Founder."

The assistant personnel officer could take a joke. He laughed.

"By that time, probably," went on Goodkin, "you personnel officers will no longer be wasting your talents on the students. You will be examining applicants for instructorships. You will have a thirty-minute test which will tell you instantly whether the subject is fit to lecture on Kant or the School of Horror. In that day I shall be reduced to selling shoe-strings through the dorms to make a living, and I will have a steady trade because all the seniors will point me out to the freshmen, and whisper: 'He once taught here.'"

The assistant personnel officer smiled deprecatingly.

"The legend on the campus," said Goodkin, "will be that I lost my job because of a girl, but the legend will be wrong. I shall lose my job because a personnel officer will rate me 69 instead of 70 in the moral attitude quiz."

"You don't like me, Goodkin," said the assistant personnel officer. "You've never taken the trouble to understand what we've been trying to do. I'm sorry for both our sakes."

"There's only one thing you should be trying to do," said Goodkin, "and that is to convince some of our noble working-their-way-through-college students that it is better to be a well-fed hobo than a starveling little scholar."

#### IV

The assistant personnel officer could remember hearing audiences clapclapping applause when his father spoke.

His father was always being called upon to say a few appropriate words just before the medal was presented or the cornerstone was laid.

His father was the kind of man who would inform an audience that he had once crossed to Europe on the *Carpathia* with the late Senator Johnson by remarking that he could remember clearly when he had sailed away to the Old World with that estimable statesman aboard that splendid ship.

The assistant personnel officer could not remember a day when his father had not been on speaking terms with at least one Governor in his capacity as executive secretary of the League for Safeguarding the Child, or the Society for Relieving the Industrious Indigent, or the Association for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency.

His father was much in his mind in the days following the talk with Goodkin. He remembered displays of wrath at the breakfast table as his father told of those who were hampering a good work. "Down town", where his father went daily, there were two kinds of men. One kind helped him. The other fought him.

The assistant personnel officer found himself standing in his father's shoes, proving against an enemy that his cause was just.

#### V

Wagner was head of the philosophy department. He was a small, bleached man, generally puffing on a big pipe with the manner of one who had been sentenced

to smoke a huge quantity of tobacco, and was trying to get it over with as soon as possible.

The assistant personnel officer went to lunch with Wagner one day, following his custom of lunching with a new professor or a new student daily, in order to acquire breadth of vision.

"Wagner," said the assistant personnel officer, "I flunked philosophy when I went to college."

Wagner, ignoring the noise of the cafeteria, was absorbed in a speculative problem. He was wondering what Giordano Bruno would have thought of the slim girl in the green knitted suit.

"Why did I flunk philosophy?" challenged the assistant personnel officer. "I was a capable student. Yet I couldn't make the grade. The only possible conclusion is that philosophy should be studied only by a limited few."

"Perfect reasoning," said Wagner. "And I know perfect reasoning when I see it. I once wrote a book on logic."

For a moment it seemed to the assistant personnel officer that the mocking Goodkin, and not Wagner, was sitting opposite him. It was a strange feeling.

"My point is this, Wagner," he went on. "We personnel officers may even have a humble part to play in solving the great philosophical problems, such as what is matter, and so on. Do you follow me?"

"Not all the way," said Wagner.

"Well, if we could only make a canvass of all students entering college, and could measure their philosophic aptitudes, we could route all students with philosophic ability into your department. If every university did that, with machine-like precision, it would constitute a flank attack of our human resources against the major problems of philosophy. We would have a better chance of arriving at truths and

solutions than by hit-or-miss effort through the centuries by anybody who felt interested."

"In other words," said Wagner, "you want to get some system into this thing. Is that it?"

"Right," said the assistant personnel officer.

"Well," said Wagner thoughtfully, "I understand even barbers have to have licenses these days."

## VI

The assistant personnel officer's temper crumpled as the months wore on in the stinking year of Depression. He snapped at Miss Black, and was vicious with young applicants taking their personal interviews as preludes to admission into the university. Goodkin had once seemed to him chief of the scoffers at his work. Most of the faculty had treated him with respect and consideration. Change developed. Goodkin was no more unfriendly, though no less cynical. But some of the others not only took on Goodkin's satiric attitude to personnel work, but passed far beyond it into bitterness. Their feeling toward the assistant personnel officer was less completely integrated than Goodkin's and much more unpleasant.

Stronger and stronger was the feeling in the assistant personnel officer that he was being weighed in the scales daily, much as they weighed babies over at the university hospital, but not with the same tenderness.

His very first year on the job he had inaugurated his smut and filth lectures, to a scattering of applause.

During his second year he sent form letters to all girl students, warning them of the pathological and psychological dangers of sin. Again he had been applauded, save by Goodkin.

He had pulled his first dud in the third year. He had written to the dean of the college. "Dear Doctor," he wrote:

You know the work I am trying to do. I believe I could get better results if I could offer scientific proof to the young men and women of the university that what you and I call the moral life confers distinct practical benefits.

I propose an investigation, as a means of securing this scientific proof. It is my plan to have competent examiners, male and female, conduct personal interviews with 100 men students and 100 young women students, selected at random from the list of matriculates.

These students are to tell the examiners frankly whether or no they have ever overstepped the bounds of strict celibacy, and how many times.

With this data on hand, we could give personality tests to the 200 students, and see how the personalities of those who have transgressed compare with the personalities of those who have not.

If we can show a wholesomer mental life in the case of the virginal girls and continent young men, we shall be able to go to all students with the scientific data they respect, and warn them of the dangers of moral excesses.

The dean had immediately replied that the plan was not approved. The assistant personnel officer was so stunned that he made no other contribution to the Better Life during the rest of the third year.

But now it was the fourth year, and something must be done. The assistant personnel officer thought it out, and came to a conclusion.

## VII

He went to Miss Cann in a high state of excitement.

He marched into her office with his head at the same angle as the head of one of his forebears had been held when Saracen Palestine finally came into sight.

"Miss Cann," he said, without introduction, "I want to talk to you. I've got an idea. I want you to help me."

Miss Cann was a slight, girlish person of forty-two whose official title was dean of women.

The assistant personnel officer, full of his idea, plunged on.

"It seems to me, Miss Cann," he said, "that the time has come for us to apply business methods to our work. And the first business principle is coöperation and joint action."

At this point a strange feeling invaded and filled the assistant personnel officer. It was a feeling that he had forgotten something: not quite so strong and definite a feeling as if he had forgotten his trousers, but a feeling of the same order. He had forgotten that though this interview would be a conference between an assistant personnel officer and a dean of women, it would also be a talk between a man and a woman.

How will she take it? he wondered. This is delicate.

"I want to make myself clear," he said. "I must speak of things that normally wouldn't be spoken of between myself, as a man, and you, as a woman. But I feel sure of your professional attitude and understanding."

I am now professional, thought Miss Cann. I didn't think this morning would turn out so well, she thought. No, I shouldn't think that, she thought.

"We've been too smug," said the assistant personnel officer. "Too complacent."

"How do you mean?" asked Miss Cann.

"You know," said the assistant personnel officer, "that there is a certain amount of sexual irregularity on the campus. Not only between boys of the college and town women, but between boys of the college—and girls of the college."

Miss Cann adjusted her cut primroses. I am professional, she thought. A man is talking to me about men and women sinning.

"It's so hard to regulate their conduct," she said. "They resent advice. All we can do is educate them, and show them —"

"Miss Cann," said the assistant personnel officer, "when a young man of this school is immoral with a girl student, it is my failure and your failure. We are jointly responsible."

Miss Cann thrilled to her new responsibility. She had once taught history in a high-school, but it was nicer to sit in a chintz office and be responsible.

"I want to suggest," said the assistant personnel officer, "that we work out a joint and coöperative programme, attacking the problem from both ends, yours with the women, and mine with the men."

"I'll be happy to help," she said.

That evening she dressed carefully, putting a bit of perfume under her ears, as the evening paper advised.

She left her room in a mess, for the first time since she had become dean of women. Two senior girls spied her in the corridor, and both told her she looked pretty.

In the lobby of the central women's dorm four girls in semi-evening awaited their young men. All four were charming.

At the curb a yellow roadster, with black trimmings that made it resemble a meadow lark, suddenly gathered itself up, and lanced down the road. Through the rear window could be seen a blonde girl head, splendidly framed in yellow steel and glass.

The University Special, the trolley that careened into town after crossing the campus, held her up at a corner. It was filled with girls and boys, most of them laughing.

She thought of a silly song. "And the night shall be filled with music." Once, more than twenty years ago, she had strolled at night on the campus of another Western university. The night had been filled with music.

One of the fraternity houses was brightly lighted. A wuff of reiterative music came through the windows. A boy in a dinner jacket glanced down from the stone porch at Miss Cann, recognized her, and smiled. She smiled in return.

The assistant personnel officer was already waiting for her in the reference room of the library. He had arranged sheets of blank paper on the table, and pencils.

He rose as she came in, and then sat down, a trifle before she did.

"The way to start," he said, "is with an outline. I think we ought to write down every idea we can think of, before we try to lay out a programme. We must find something that will appeal to my men and your girls."

The girls seem happy, she thought. The men seem happy. Why, this is Saturday night, she thought. I haven't thought of Saturday night as Saturday night for years, she thought.

The wuff of music from across the way became stronger for an instant. The assistant personnel officer lifted his head and listened to it. His eyes became worried.

"We're in the wrong place," he said suddenly, "to do the work we want to do."

"What?" she asked, startled. She heard the music again. The right place, she thought, is across the way. "What?"

"The sociology books are in McHenry Hall," he said. "Let's go there."

He swept up his papers, and she followed him, catching her stocking and making a run as she rounded the corner of the table.

# THE FEUD IN THE ROTUNDA

BY ALBERT HALPER

I WAS standing in line in the main Post-office, checking in with the 6:15 P.M. shift, and had my badge in my hand all ready to show to the clerk at the detail-desk when I felt someone looking at me, so I turned my head.

The long line of men behind me curled around the trucks loaded high with second-class matter which stood waiting until the first-class mail should be worked off. Far down the immense room I could see the fellows on the other shifts sorting the mail like fury, their arms working as smoothly as machinery. The hard rattle of the cancelling machines steadied into a drone like machine-gun fire. I kept looking back toward the row of time-clocks, along the file of the two hundred men in my shift, and pretty soon I spotted O'Donnell, the supervisor. The man ahead of me, a Filipino student studying dentistry during the day, had been telling me a funny story and I had been smiling, but as soon as I spotted O'Donnell I straightened out my face and started frowning seriously.

I was almost to the detail-desk—we were crawling forward very slowly—when O'Donnell barked behind me: "437." That was my badge number. I stepped out of line quietly and walked over to the big parcel-post conveyor belt where the supervisor stood waiting for me.

O'Donnell is an ex-marine. He stands about six-feet-two in his socks and in his youth he must have been magnificently built, but now he has a belly and his

cheeks sag a little, though he is not more than thirty-six or so. On the floor of the Postoffice, where over a thousand clerks sort mail all night long, he is considered a hard-boiled overseer, but I had his number right away. I had his number because one day when I was sitting in the canteen trying to gargle the hot coffee that they serve you in pint milk bottles, O'Donnell passed my chair and saw the title page of a book I was reading, "A Short History of Ireland," and he stopped to talk to me. He asked me a few questions about names and dates, and when he found out that I knew who Parnell was his face beamed and his cheeks grew a trifle pink. So I had his number right away, and I knew his sternness was just a front.

After that he used to stop me once in a while and we talked together, and pretty soon, whenever I would check in at the detail-desk I'd noticed that the clerk on duty would look up quickly when I gave my number and then would give me a soft detail. I rarely was told off to load trucks, and I was detailed down on the tunnel platform only once, to receive heavy catalogue matter from the big mail-order houses.

But now, as O'Donnell barked out my number, he stood there looking as tough as nails. He never called me by name: all of us were merely numbers; the mail-cases were numbered, the cancelling machines were numbered, the foot-and-a-half space in front of the huge sorting tables where