

# Echoes

## Lack Character

By KALMAN PHILLIPS

STEVE LOW slouched his long lean body back and looked across his heavy desk uneasily. "What's eating you, Sari? You spread as much sweetness and light as the underside of a coal scow."

The slim-waisted girl slumped in the leather chair observed him with dark moody eyes. Her full lower lip brooded, and her attempted smile was a wan affair. "What would be the matter?"

Her eyes were deep and disturbing when she was depressed. The impulse to go over and kiss her was sat upon -- as all similar impulses had had to be for quite a while now. "Harvey?"

Sari nodded abruptly. "He doesn't love me, Steve. I know it."

"Don't be a fool. He's asked you to marry him, hasn't he?"

"That was two months ago. He's bored with me now. He's drifting away from me. I can feel it. I don't know what to do."

Steve pulled at his ear. "You're really overboard, then?"

Her lips twisted. "Going down for the third time."

Steve went over to her and patted her shoulder. "Don't worry. Give me time to figure things out. I'll fix it."

"With a piece of string and some rubber cement?" She rose. Then she turned to him, smiled and touched his cheek lightly. "You're sweet, Steve. Only --"

"I said I'd fix it, didn't I?" Steve growled. He had to growl to get rid of that funny feeling inside him. "Meet me

at Tony's at four. I'll think of something."

She didn't seem hopeful. "Bye, darling." She went out.

Steve sat down again. Of course he'd fix it. He could analyze people, play on their emotions -- couldn't he? That was why he'd come as far as he had as a lawyer so quickly. Besides, he was always fixing things for Sari.

great mind come up with a solution yet?"

Steve lit a cigarette. "Scoff if you like. Nevertheless, I have both a theory and a plan of action."

"Which are, I suppose, to take a trip and forget the whole thing. No good, Steve."

"Not quite that simple. As a matter of fact, I require more careful personal obser-

Harvey was a rugged looking blond young architect with a quick keen mind, and he liked to talk. Sari, obviously in love, was an excellent listener, hanging on every word as though it were of tremendous importance. And Sari was on his side, completely on his side. Steve became embroiled in quite an argument with Harvey, contending that

-- liked her a lot. And then, suddenly, he found he didn't want to be with her -- felt empty, bored and dissatisfied when they were together. He still liked her, always would like her, for she had been an awfully nice girl. It was just that when they were together, her company tossed a blanket over what was an extremely interesting world. So Steve drifted away. He moved as imperceptibly as possible, but he did.

He hadn't thought much about why he'd lost the lift out of being with her until he had started noticing what was happening to Sari and Harvey. It was the same -- the same thing that had happened in his case. Myra had been in love with him and had lost all character for him.

It was funny how it had happened. Steve had been intensely ambitious, full of ideas about himself and about life. They had had long absorbing discussions about almost everything at first. And then, gradually, the discussions had become ordinary talks, then monologues by Steve, with Myra only nodding agreement. He'd won an award and hurried eagerly to tell her about it. She had been delighted for him, but it didn't really matter to her. She seemed to have accepted him with a completeness that amazed him, and nothing that he did or said seemed to add to or detract from the way she felt about him.

For Steve, who felt he had a long way to go and was very dissatisfied with himself as he was, it wasn't enough.

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***As a lawyer, Steve could settle almost any case, at least to his own satisfaction -- but when it came to love it was another story.***

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He had known Sari five years -- since he'd come to the city to practice after passing his bar exams. She had had the apartment next to his and a casual acquaintanceship started in the elevator, then ripened into warm friendship after several meetings at the incinerator. She had been a mere eighteen, then. Her family, who lived in the West, had sent her East to a school of design. She worked for a fashion magazine now and looked on Steve as a father confessor.

Steve didn't know the exact moment several years back that he had fallen in love with her, but it was getting worse all the time. Her light incredulous laughter when anyone suggested that there might be more than friendship to seeing them together so often had convinced Steve a long time ago that she wasn't for him. Well, he wanted her happy, anyway. He leaned back in his chair and filled his pipe. And then he started to think.

In a booth at Tony's a short while later, Sari looked across at him. "And did the

vation of the actual state of affairs. Therefore, I have already arranged things to that end."

Her eyes looked sideways at him. "Just what are you up to?"

"Well, Jerry and Helen Duncan invited me to spend the weekend at their country place -- from Friday night until Monday morning. They have an embryo-actress cousin visiting them, and, since Helen helps Jerry prepare his lectures at the university over the weekends, they want me to entertain her. You'll get a letter from them tomorrow morning inviting you to come up. Harvey will get a similar letter. I'll drive us up in my car."

Sari shrugged. "I'll go. But what you're trying to prove beats me."

"Patience," Steve advised. He wasn't quite sure himself.

HE WAS surer Friday night after they had got up there, and he had watched Sari and Harvey at dinner and afterward.

architects should be forced by law to plan not only how to build to get the maximum light, but to build so that the surrounding houses wouldn't lose any. Harvey said it was nonsense -- that nothing would ever get done. Steve replied that if it were necessary, it would have to be done. Sari told Steve not to be ridiculous -- that it was silly.

But Harvey didn't. After pondering for a few moments, he agreed that they could plan that way if they knew the other fellow would have to also. Then he smiled at Sari, said, "Thanks, darling, for the support, anyhow," bent and kissed her on the right eyebrow. Sari flushed with pleasure. Steve saw Harvey stifle an unconscious yawn and look over at Helen Duncan's fair-haired attractive cousin, Jeanne, standing by the fireplace. And Steve knew suddenly that his theory would stand up -- and he knew what he had to do. A girl had been in love with him once, when he was in his last year at law school. He had liked Myra

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