

# Sky Without a Song

*by Paula Ray*

I was the silence on the other end of the line, years ago, when I thought soul was a label that record companies slapped on your ass. He asked me to sing. I felt awkward. Who sings into a telephone receiver to a man they've never met? He waited. I fiddled with the cord. He hung up and I sang some whiney lyric about wanting him back. You know the songs that say the same shit: I'm an idiot. Love me anyway. I'm Velcro with nothing to stick to and you're a nappy surface that gives me a reason to exist. I sat there in silence because I was afraid I'd say something this stupid. But what I should have said was: You are wise to walk away. I'll get over you as soon as I find another patch of rough.

But you never get over an absence; do you? I mean, you can wear the wedding band and do the duty tango with mortgage, insurance, retirement funds, and day-care, but you can never get over a hole so big you thought it was the sky and weather was an unavoidable part of it. All these storms and rainbows are quite entertaining like a light show at a concert. They add ambiance and catch your attention, but you came to hear the music. These displays don't fill the melodic void; they just decorate it with intangible things, temporary things, and you can't walk away humming their song for days afterward.

That's why I broke my dream of finding him into tiny pieces tossed into the night. I let the flakes fall wherever darkness chose to carry them. I still find shards of my perfect partner in various people that enter my life. Sometimes, these people are soldered to each other by age and fear of dying alone. Other times, these particle people have faces of wax that lose their shape. Hoping to leave an impression, I dig my nails into their skull. My fingerprint disappears in the heat of our exchange.

Like most ideals, the sales pitch for soul-mate is folded and stuffed into a spiritual envelope. It's like a wicked stained-glass window that promises something sacred we can connect to beyond the walls of our skin. But here's the truth: There is no such thing as a soul-mate. It's just a face we try to attach to the silence on the other end of the line when we ask the sky to sing.

