

I've Got a Book of Love

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I first heard it at the mall. It was 2013, and I was rifling through a Forever 21 sweater rack, wondering when Forever 21 had gotten to be so overpriced, when I realized I was actually listening to the store's music. Specifically, something delightful: a persistent bass drum, ascending synths, and the words *I write down! Everything they say! So I don't get lonely when you are away.* This was a song for people preoccupied with the written word. For teens sending high-risk texts. For diarists convinced that they will want to remember this. Their every whim and observation. For infatuation, really. I never was the kind to draw hearts around their names, but I wrote everything down just in case.

Pages from my book of love. Pages from my book of love.

So I wrote those words down and found their source as soon as I got home. The album art was a simple grid of four enigmatic faces. I learned that Book of Love formed in Philadelphia in 1983, then moved to New York and incubated their music with nights at Danceteria and CBGB. While on tour for their debut album, they opened for Depeche Mode. "Book of Love" from that first record functions as a theme song for the band; it was not a single and was never their most popular. It's simple, but that's what makes it so true. The way you repeat and refrain your most irrational thoughts. Catalog your obsessions and immortalize your crushes. Carve initials into a park bench. Raise the stakes because you're bored. Only in this context can *I've got a book of love* sung over a repetitive chant of *pages from my book of love* resonate so deeply. The song is sunny all the way through. To listen is to squint into it. To walk a little faster into the summer after high school. To avoid stepping on the sidewalk cracks. It builds up to a triumphant harmonica solo that soars into an echo chamber of tubular bells and the barely-audible spoken word *I know you'd never try to leave me. 'Cause I've got a chain around your heart and you'll never be free.* Susan Ottaviano's vocal affect, its playful desperation, perfectly captures the drama of teenage angst. Shouting to be heard, at times. Shrugging on different voices. There's a self-aware smile in there, as well a touch of melancholy.

"Book of Love" by Book of Love was not the first song called Book of Love to come into my life, nor the last. In 1982, Lindsey Buckingham begged listeners to tell him who, exactly, wrote the book. His line of questioning leads me to believe that "Book of Love" by Book of Love and "Book of Love" by Fleetwood Mac exist in the same universe: in which someone from Book of Love sends said book to their local library and then Lindsey Buckingham finds this book and is like *Who wrote the book of love? Was it somebody from above?* because neither of them understands how libraries work. The most recent installment comes from the Magnetic Fields in one of their *69 Love Songs*, the sweet and plodding "Book of Love." Stephen Merritt admits *I love it when you read to me. And you can read me anything.* I closed my eyes and breathed along. This is the universe I wanted to live in! Where hearts have pages. Some are tearing but the binding holds and beats.

Book of Love's 1986 interpretation remains my favorite of the three. Its version of adolescent longing is more about the speaker than about any object of affection. The inviolability of the self, its ability to remember and keep going. *If you should ever happen to leave, I'll lend your book to my lovelorn library:* open to the public but whose reference

BOOK OF LOVE OF LOVE



Book of Love
"Book of Love"
Book of Love
04/1986
Sire

system only I can truly follow. Here, the book of love is not pedagogical or all-knowing. It didn't fall from above. Instead, any of us mortal fools can write it into existence: this private talisman, an archive of hope.

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