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## Now adulterers can say it with a card

### With the Secret Lover Collection, now adulterers can say it with a card

By Alex JohnsonReporter  
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It is a sentiment guaranteed to melt the coldest heart:

“Just when I thought I would never find my true love — you came along ...”

It is a greeting card, decorated with a depiction of purple flowers. Inside:

“My soul has been searching for you since I came into this world.

“All my life I have had this emptiness inside, like a part of me was missing and I was incomplete ...

“And now I can’t imagine my life without you ... Even if I have to share you.”

*Even if I have to share you?*

This, clearly, is not a card for the wife.

#### **Pssst: I love you. Don’t tell anyone**

In fact, it is specifically for anyone but the wife. Called “My Lover,” the card is one of 24 in the Secret Lover Collection, published by a former advertising executive in Bethesda, Md., named Cathy Gallagher. If you are having an extramarital affair, Secret Lover cards can make it an affair to remember.

Gallagher hit upon the idea a couple of years ago. Like most couples, she and her husband had friends whose marriages had been affected by extramarital affairs, with all their attendant “conflict and emotional intensity,” she said in an interview.

“I’m thinking, ‘So how do these people communicate? It’s a *secret* love affair,’” Gallagher said. “So I

thought, ‘Oh, my gosh, what better can you do than give someone your sentiments in a greeting card? How special is that?’”

After two years of market research revealed an unfilled need, she said, the cards debuted to enormous curiosity this year at the annual National Stationery Show in New York.

Barbara Miller, a spokeswoman for the Greeting Card Association, a national trade group, confirmed that the collection was, indeed, unique.

“Ms. Gallagher thought she saw a specific niche there, and she’s going after that particular niche,” Miller said. “Whether or not it proves successful I guess we’ll all have to wait and see. ... It’s obviously a business decision on her end.”

#### **How big a market?**

Secret Lover claims on its Web site that its research shows that 60 percent of American men and 40 percent of women “are involved in or have been

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involved in an affair.”

The most recent surveys, by the National Opinion Research Center at Chicago University in 2002 and the Kinsey Institute in 1994, indicate that slightly less than a quarter of men and about 12 percent of women have strayed from their marriages. But public opinion experts caution that respondents have a strong incentive to lie, so Gallagher's numbers could well be close to the truth.

Either way, that's millions of ring-doffing would-be customers for Secret Lover. “It was unbelievable in terms of the numbers of people,” Gallagher said.

But it remains an open question whether Secret Lover can indeed profit from sin. While Gallagher is negotiating with retailers and says prospects are bright, some retailers have said they would avoid the line for fear of alienating their customers, while others have said their customers probably wouldn't want to buy the cards in a public store.

The company's e-commerce site did not open until this week, so sales figures there aren't yet available, but Gallagher said that more than a million unique visitors had stopped by the home page since May and that e-mail sales were strong.

“The question for me then becomes does the promotion of such a Web site make adultery more acceptable,” said Dr. Trina E. Read, a Canadian sexologist and columnist. “I would guess not because even though a lot of people are doing it, there is still a huge negative societal connotation.”

#### **Celebrating adultery?**

Gallagher says she doesn't talk about the social implications: “I'm neither a crusader nor an advocate for this lifestyle. I'm a businesswoman.” As for her critics, she says, “People are entitled to their opinions.”

But specialists in family and marital relations have their doubts, noting that the divorce rate has risen above 50 percent in recent years.

“It seems to me really crude to use a greeting card to celebrate what, in the 16th century, was an offense by which you would be publicly hanged in the town square,” said John Mayoue (pronounced May-you), a divorce and family lawyer in Atlanta.

Dr. Robert R. Butterworth, a psychologist in Los Angeles who specializes in reactions to traumatic stress, could only laugh when told about the Secret Lover Collection.

“I can see trouble ahead,” he said. “This will be a boon for marriage therapists all across the nation, because [the cards] are going to wind up in the wrong hands. They're going to go to the wrong address, and they're not going to self-destruct.”

#### **When is a secret not a secret?**

For the Rev. Laurie Sue Brockway, an interfaith minister in New York, the point of sending your secret lover a Secret Lover card is hard to grasp.

“It's not cute. It's sad,” said Brockway, author of “Wedding Goddess: A Divine Guide to Transforming Wedding Stress Into Wedding Bliss.” “I thought the idea of having a secret lover was just that — it is secret. These cards negate the idea of sneaking around. They leave a paper trail.”

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And that, said Mayoue, the divorce lawyer, is not a smart thing for an adulterer to do.

With cell-phone records, Mayoue said, he can "circumstantially prove the adultery." But with greeting cards, "I'm not just going to prove it circumstantially; it'll be graphic. I would ask them which card this person chose and what the sentiments were, and then I'll have it in their own words.

"If I'm the company, I'm probably going to have a full-time lawyer on staff just to respond to subpoenas," he said. (Gallagher said she'd already thought of that and did have lawyers on call.)

Butterworth, meanwhile, said the unforeseen consequences of sending a card to your lover could go much deeper than just an expensive divorce settlement or public embarrassment, especially because "the recipient may not welcome it."

"What those cards are saying is: 'Oh, my God, they're getting romantically involved. I'm getting really scared now,'" Butterworth said. "... Women are sometimes afraid to break it off because they are afraid of what [the other party] will do."

His solution? "I'd feel a little better if they also had a division of 'breaking it off' cards. ... Maybe they should have a couple [of cards] that say, 'We had a great time, but I realize that we need to move on.'"

Secret Lover has it covered: For \$3.99, you can tell your paramour: *I can't go on like this ...*

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