



DenverDA

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Make Sure Cupid Steals Your Heart Not Your Wallet

“Evelyn” was looking for love...

She thought she found it on Match.com, which quickly moved to Instant Messenger. “He said he was an engineer living in Florida, with his own business, and the father of a son. He wrote perfectly — no ‘scammer grammar.’ He seemed ideal.”

Within two weeks, Mr. True Love had hooked Evelyn. With declarations of love, promises of a life together and a request for money to help secure a job contract in Cairo. After sending \$22,000 in three wires, Evelyn not only lost her heart and money but also her identity. Her sensitive information was sold to other scammers, including identity thieves and other Romeo rip-off artists.

Romance Scams

Conning thousands of men and women each year romance swindles consistently make Top Scams lists. However, these criminals aren’t looking for a soulmate. They’re looking for victims that they can wring every last cent out of.

It goes like this: Scammers scroll dating websites, chat rooms and Facebook, inventing fake identities tailored to the target’s interests. Stealing photographs, often from legitimate modeling websites, they

often claim to be successful businessmen, Russian models, missionaries working abroad and American soldiers, this from last year's [Channel 7](#) report and warnings from the [US ARMY](#) .

First there's wooing, then the undoing: After romancing their victims via phone, text and email, these con artists spring the trap: asking for forever-lost money via wire transfer, either for an emergency or for a plane ticket to meet their "true love." Or they send a check with instructions to forward back a portion of it (the check is fake, and the heartbroken target is responsible for those funds).

So how can you spot a romance scam and avoid falling victim? Here are red flags that the person you're dealing with is after your cash, instead of your heart:

- She requests that you wire money or to cash a check or money order for them. Wire transfers allow swindlers to collect it anywhere in the world (no matter where they claim to be)
- The "relationship" becomes romantic extremely quickly, with quick pronouncements of love or close friendship. They will quickly ask you to leave the match site and go to instant messenger or the like.
- He claims to be a U.S. citizen who is abroad, very wealthy, or a person of important status.
- He claims to be a contractor and needs your help with a business deal.
- She makes excuses about not being able to speak by phone or meet in person.
- He quickly asks you to communicate via email, instant messaging, or text messaging instead of the online dating sites' messaging services.
- She claims to be American, but makes frequent spelling or grammar mistakes that a native English speaker wouldn't.
- Unrealistic photos. Sorry '*Lonely in Portland*', if your catch is "too cute," assume the person used a stolen photo. Male scammers sometimes claim to be female.
- Inconsistent communication. Vague or repetitive email responses could indicate you've been hooked by an organized crime ring, and one scammer picked up where a buddy scammer left off.



Beware of three other Valentine's Day scams:

One-Click Tricks

On Facebook and email, teasing electronic greeting cards, claims of a courier-delivery problems and "love giveaway" hide malware that's unleashed once you click on the detail-promising link. A legit e-card will provide a confirmation code to safely view it as a recognized card company website; don't open e-cards from your personal computer. Courier services won't have your email unless you provided it. Freebies offered on social media and spam emails are typically gotchas, so just avoid them.

Problematic Presents

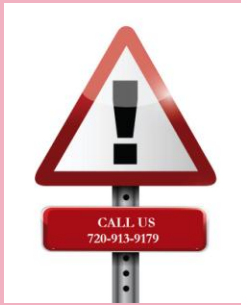
Buying flowers online or via a toll-free number? Be sure the order goes through a local florist, not a warehouse thousands of miles away. Shopping online for jewelry or other gifts? Avoid offers pitched in unsolicited spam emails and stick with recognized vendors. Before clicking on links, carefully read website addresses to spot [copycat websites](#) selling cheap counterfeits. Hover your computer mouse over the link without clicking to see its "real" address. When buying jewelry at a store, make sure you know what you're getting by first reading [advice from the FTC](#) and learning how to spot [fake appraisals](#).

News to Lose?

Scammers follow the news. And lately, police across the country have warned about this possible ploy: A flowers-and-wine basket arrives, but the phony courier claims that a service charge must be paid because alcohol is being delivered. The charge is minimal (under \$5), but the deliveryman won't accept cash, only a credit card. With the account information, the thief can rack up thousands of dollars in fraudulent charges. Although there are no documented reports that this has occurred recently, the bottom line is this scam did happen and could again. It isn't necessary to pay a special charge for delivered alcohol. Besides, are you sure you want to have a sweetheart that sends you a COD Valentine's Day gift?

Love is a powerful emotion. If you've been approached by someone you think could be a romance scammer or if you've already fallen victim, DON'T keep speaking with the person who approached you. Ignore their emails, phone calls, IMs, or other communications. Instead, use the online dating site's abuse flagging system to mark the account as suspicious and file a complaint with our office. (*AARP Bulletin Today*)

Remember, if something is too good to be true, it probably is! And hey, being single isn't so bad....at least for now.



THINK YOU'VE BEEN SCAMMED?
If you suspect you've been scammed or exploited, call our Fraud Hot Line to report it.
720-913-9179

SCHEDULE A SPEAKER

If you would like a Word document version of this newsletter, I'm happy to send along, just email with a request.



Interested in learning more about scams happening in Denver? Do you want to know how to protect yourself from identity theft? Maro Casparian is available for speaking engagements with faith-based organizations, neighborhood associations, PTAs, schools, rotary clubs, etc. Call or email me to schedule a presentation.

And, as always, feel free to forward this email to others to spread the word.

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Email amc@denverda.org me to:
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