

OPINION

Romance scams sure to break your heart

Romance scams occur when a criminal creates a false persona and feigns romantic interest in someone intending to develop a relationship and, in time, scam money from them.

The scammer's social media will be of someone that is attractive, successful, interesting, rich, etc. The photograph on the profile page will certainly have been stolen from another person.

The Federal Trade Commission estimates that around 64,000 Americans lost a total of \$1.14 billion to romance scams in 2023. Victims of this type of scam can be any age, but seniors, especially the widowed and divorced, are frequent targets.

The scam can begin on a dating site, a social media site like Facebook or with a text or e-mail from a stranger. The scammer will pretend to have a great deal in common with their target. He'll shower the victim with attention and compliments. These scammers are masters at manipulating the emotions of their victims. Almost certainly the scammer will tell his or her victim that he or she is in love and the two of them were destined to be together.

Once the relationship has reached a level of trust, the crook will convince the victim to loan or give them money. They will have stories of woe about family members who need medical care, wrecked cars that need to be replaced, costly business setbacks,

CYBER
SECURITY

KELLY BOURNE



back taxes owed, emergency home repairs or money needed to buy tickets to visit you. No matter how much money you lend or give them, there will always be another crisis that only more of your money can solve.

Romance scams continue until the victim runs out of money or figures out that they're being fleeced. At that point, the scammer will "ghost," i.e., ignore all communications with the victim. The scammer is also likely to shut down their social media account(s) they used to communicate.

It may seem that being emotionally manipulated and financially drained would be the worst thing that can happen to a victim of a romance scam, but unfortunately there might be worse to come. Some scammers convince their victims to move money between bank accounts for them. If the victim agrees to do this, they've become a "money mule." Even victims who were tricked into this role can be charged with money laundering by federal authorities.

One huge indicator of a romance scam is that the criminal won't ever meet you in person or on a

video call. Meeting face to face would reveal that they're pretending to be someone else. There will be an endless stream of excuses like illnesses, accidents, computer problems, work conflicts and family emergencies explaining why they can't meet.

Other indicators that you might be the victim of a romance scam include:

■ A relationship that escalates from being strangers to being "in love" in an extremely short period of time.

■ Your new "friend" has interests that are identical to yours. Do you know any two people that enjoy exactly the same music, books, restaurants, movies, sports teams, vacation spots, art, food, etc.?

■ You're spending much less time with old friends, family members, activities, etc. This might indicate that the scammer is working to isolate you.

■ Your new "friend" suggests that you move your conversations to a private platform like WhatsApp. This is a frequent strategy by scammers for several reasons. First, dating platforms are moderated which provides some protection against romance scams and other scams. Second, communications via WhatsApp are encrypted making it extremely difficult for authorities to later track down the perpetrators. Third, giving someone your WhatsApp number reveals more information than should be done early in a relationship.

■ Your new "love interest" tells you they've made a lot of money in certain investments and suggests that you invest in it too.

■ Your new "friend" won't answer questions about their personal life or the background details they provide are vague or inconsistent.

If you believe you're the victim of a romance scam you should do the following:

■ Immediately cut off all communications with the scammer.

■ If you gave them money, contact your bank or credit card provider to see if recovery is possible. If your money can't be recovered, they can help prevent the scammer from stealing any more money from you.

■ If there's a chance that the scammer learned your financial or social media account passwords change them immediately.

■ Report this scam to the FTC at ReportFraud.ftc.gov. Your money may be gone but you can help prevent others from becoming victims.

■ Scammers frequently give or sell their victims' names to other scammers. To avoid being the victim a second time be extremely leery of any calls, texts or e-mail in the future.

■ Victims are often approached with offers claiming to be able to recover money they've lost to a scam for an up-front fee. This is another scam. Don't fall for it! Here are steps that can help

avoid falling for a romance scam:

■ Perform an internet reverse search of your new friend's photograph. If the photo turns out to be someone else, it confirms that you're being scammed.

■ Ask questions about their life and background. Don't accept vague responses or excuses.

■ Search the internet to see if this person has a presence online. Is it consistent with what you're being told? If he or she has no online presence at all, that's also suspicious.

■ Refuse to give or lend money to someone you haven't met yet in person.

■ If you feel the relationship is getting too intense too quickly then back away from it either temporarily or permanently.

Being the victim of a romance scam can happen to anyone. It's nothing to be ashamed of. Victims include people that are educated, sophisticated, technically savvy, young and old. If you suspect that it's happening to you then reach out to a close friend or relative and get their opinion.

Researching the individual and any financial investments they recommend online is also a good idea.

Kelly Bourne is the author of "Ransomware, Viruses, Social Engineering and Other Threats: Protecting Your Digital Assets." He lives in Omaha, NE, and may be reached at kcbourne@cox.net.

LAW & ORDER

Sibley woman hurt in crash near Ritter

A Sibley woman was injured in a two-vehicle collision about 2:10 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 30, about a mile northeast of Ritter.

Eighty-five-year-old Raymond Lyle Buse of Brookings, SD, was driving a 2007 Buick Terraza east on Northwest Boulevard when he pulled out onto the Highway 60 expressway and his minivan struck a southbound 2011 Ford Escape driven by 68-year-old Julie Beth Johnson of Sibley, according to the Iowa State Patrol.

Johnson was transported by the Sheldon Community

Ambulance Team to Sanford Sheldon Medical Center.

Her vehicle was totaled.

The Buse vehicle received an estimated \$5,000 damage.

Buse was cited for failure to obey a stop sign and yield the right of way.

Passed-out man arrested for OWI

A 42-year-old rural Hartley man was arrested about 5:45 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 31, near Allendorf on charges of first-offense operating while under the influence and possession of an opener container of alcohol.

The arrest of Travis Jay Johnson stemmed from a

report of a northbound 2002 Chrysler Town & Country being driven erratically on Highway 59 near Highway 9 north of Allendorf, according to the Osceola County Sheriff's Office.

The van was reported as swerving and traveling in the opposite lane before stopping in the middle of the highway.

Witnesses said the driver, later identified as Johnson, moved to the passenger seat, and parked the vehicle in a field driveway on the 1300 mile of Highway 59 about three miles north of Allendorf.

A deputy found Johnson passed out in the van, according to the incident

report.

Johnson had bloodshot/watery eyes, impaired balance, slurred speech and the odor of an alcoholic beverage and failed field sobriety tests, according to the incident report.

Teen arrested for OWI in Sheldon

An 18-year-old Sibley resident was arrested about 8:05 p.m. Monday, Sept. 1, in Sheldon on a charge of first-offense operating while under the influence.

The arrest of Juan Carlos Martinez stemmed from the stop of a 2012 Chrysler 300 for an equipment violation,

speeding and erratic driving on Ninth Street at the intersection with Washington Avenue in Sheldon, according to the Sheldon Police Department.

The odor of marijuana was detected coming from the vehicle, and Martinez had bloodshot/watery eyes, according to the incident report.

Sibley woman hurt in Sept. 1 collision

One person was injured in a two-vehicle collision about 10:45 a.m. Monday, Sept. 1, at the intersection of Jackson Avenue and the Highway 60 expressway near Carnes.

Seventy-one-year-old Emmagene Marie Martin of Cherokee was driving north on Jackson when she attempted turn left onto the expressway and her 2013 Kia Forte collided with a southbound 2000 Chevrolet Corvette driven by 72-year-old Darlene Ann Janssen of Sibley, according to the Sioux County Sheriff's Office.

Janssen was transported by the Orange City Ambulance to Orange City Area Health System for treatment of her injuries.

Martin was cited for failure to yield upon entering a highway.

The two vehicles were totaled.

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America



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CLOSED

The Osceola County courthouse will be closed on Wednesday, September 17, 2025, from 8 am - 10 am for active shooter training.

Jayson Vande Hoef
Chairman, Osceola County Board of Supervisors



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