

Avoid Romance Scams in the Cyber Love Age



Valentine's Day has only just gone. The one day of the year when schmaltzy dedications of love are not only not frowned upon but actively encouraged. Not everyone is lucky in love though and, in the eternal quest to find Mr or Miss Right hides a sinister online world where the vulnerable and lovelorn can get very easily burned.

There was a time, long in the past, where the local singletons would go down to the disco or local dance in order to find that special someone; those days are definitely gone. The most popular way these days to find love is online, which has seen a surge with applications such as Tinder and Plenty of Fish, now offering instant, on-the-move match-making. Online

provides a way for those unable to cultivate a social life, for work or personal reasons, to find instant gratification, although it does have its pitfalls.

The main problem with online is simple; you just never know to whom you're talking. Of course, the picture may say that you're talking to a Kelly Brook lookalike or someone who makes Jamie Dornan look like a minger, but if you've not actually *seen* the person in the flesh it's difficult to tell. Here's a quick guide on the how dating scammers work and how to stay safe.

1. Dating scammers are devious. Their usual modus operandi starts off with the profile. The pictures are more often than not plucked off some website which features the most beautiful people. Sometimes they'll even take pictures of actual celebrities and pass it off as themselves, relying on their intended target to not be media savvy and recognise their picture as a complete fake (this might sound stupid but there are people out there just that naïve unfortunately). A great site is tineye.com where, if you save the persons picture, you can then upload it to see if it's anywhere else online.
2. They'll tailor their 'interests' to suit the target. These people know that they want to target the bored, lonely and easily fooled who may not get out much, so they'll use interests which could be considered the type of things that lonely single people may do i.e. watch TV, read. In other words, interests for one.
3. They'll start showering you with charming words and compliments, sometimes within days of their first message, using 'baby' and 'darling' and wanting to stray away from the dating site and talk in a more 'personal'

setting i.e. Whatsapp or giving you a phone number to call, and even laughing at your jokes (when in fact they're really laughing at you). A simple trick is finding out early if you're being conned is, if they claim to be from an English-speaking country yet use strangely-broken English in their typed conversations, then it's safe to assume you're being had. If you suspect this, ask for a voicemail and if they refuse – delete their profile and number.

4. After a while of talking, it's time for them to drop the boom. You'll get frantic email/text/call claiming that your beloved is in financial trouble, getting hassled by an ex or family member, or is having a legal issue and needs money to help them out. They may even ask for you to give your bank details. Needless to say, get rid of the rose-tinted glasses and get rid of the number. They may become more insistent should you initially refuse, using phrases like 'I thought you loved me' or 'I thought we were friends' to elicit a guilt. Don't give into it!

It goes without saying that some online romances are actually genuine, I know of one couple who met online and are happily married these past five years, but being aware of the pitfalls never does any harm because not everyone is just that nice. so, if you're a sexy singleton this Valentine's Day don't be put off going out; put down the tub of Haagen –Dazs, turn off Bridget Jones' Diary or the football. Get on the glad-rags to find the love of your life – preferably