

Cunning Cons - From The Oprah Show

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Julia, a legal secretary, was tired of the New York dating scene, so she decided to look for love online. She soon met a man who said his name was Scott. He told her he was a young widower from

California who was volunteering at an orphanage in Nigeria. "I was very touched. That said to me that this is someone who has a lot of love in his heart," Julia says.

Julia says she and Scott made an immediate connection. After a month of daily e-mails and instant messaging, Julia says they began to fall in love. When Julia discovered she had skin cancer and had to have surgery, Scott was supportive and loving, even from 5,000 miles away. Julia was thrilled when Scott proposed a few weeks later. "He said, okay, so shop for your dress. Money is no object. As soon as I get there, we're going to be married," Julia says. "I felt like Cinderella."

After sending him money to help support his orphanage, Scott asked Julia to put on a white dress and meet him at



the airport. She waited for six hours, and her Prince Charming never showed up. "My heart was broken. I was devastated," she says.

In order to find out more information

about Julia's scammer, Sid visited a website that reports information about online dating cons. There he found the alleged con man listed, along with several of his aliases. Sid says the handsome, blond man Julia thought was her boyfriend is actually a model who isn't involved in the scam. "What scammers do is they steal photos from online modeling sites," Sid says.

Each month, thousands of people—men and women—get caught in similar traps, Sid says, and the scammers know how to work their victims. "From the outside you may say, 'How did she fall for that?' But you heard Julia. She was being wooed every day—e-mails before work, after work. [She] probably expressed that she liked children. He has an orphanage," Sid says.

Sid says the scam artists often pose as rich American or British businessmen living overseas who charm their victims, gain their trust and then have some sort of financial need—often money for surgery or passport cash to fly to the United States and get married. He says the con artists claim to be paid in U.S. postal money orders and ask the victims to cash them and wire over the cash. "Once you send the money, you don't hear from them. Or they're brazen enough to actually call you and say, 'I scammed you,'" Sid says.

Julia says the victims can be any age, gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation, and scam artists target them in many different venues—from dating websites to gaming chat rooms. According to Sid, the FBI estimates that about half the victims of these kinds of scams are male. They are oftentimes conned by men posing as female Russian models.

From:

http://www.oprah.com/money/credit/200704/money_20070413_284_112.jhtml

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