

Love Scam

Dear C and Dr. B,

My head is still reeling over this and I have not quite been able to reorient myself.

It all started a year ago, after my divorce. I was feeling dejected and lonely. I wasn't ready to date yet so instead I joined an online pen pal service. I was matched up with a man from a small village in Africa, and over the last year we became good friends. He helped me a lot in my recovery from a pretty bad divorce, and I helped him as much as I could, as life was pretty tough for him as well in a different way. I never felt taken advantage of - I sent him some money because I felt it was the least I could do. It was nothing big, he was grateful and I thought that was it.

Then three weeks ago the shit hit the fan - I got a call from some international lawyer's office saying that I had sent money to a terrorist organization and I was being investigated. They said they were specialists in representing this kind of thing. They had a lot of personal information about me and they had my pen pal's name and number as well. They said that I could be in a lot of trouble, and they wanted \$5,000 as a retainer! My heart almost stopped.

Luckily my brother said it sounded fishy and had me call the FBI. They directed me to the Love Scam site they'd created. That was when I discovered the entire script my friend used was there with minor story line adjustments. Since then I have been in contact with many other women who had used similar dating web services and had been taken for a lot of money.

I guess I was lucky... but at the same time I am feeling like I've just had a whole second loss. In my marriage, my ex was a complete cheating bastard and now someone I trusted as my best friend turned out to be a scammer and a liar as well. How many times can I be betrayed? I am not sure I can ever trust a man again. - Betrayed Becky

Dr. B says:

Can you trust men? Yes and no. Some people are good, trustworthy and have an inner set of guiding morals. Many more are good only when there is direct accountability, clear expectations and consistent boundaries. A few people are bad seeds no matter what.

Often the worst people appear as the best. They are predators, and like all predators they are good at luring out their prey. But remember this: if it seems too good to be true, it isn't true. If you find yourself making small compromises in your integrity and boundaries, or reaching into your pocketbook, you are probably being lured. If you find yourself becoming ever more isolated, and discouraged from hanging with your family or friends, the net is closing around you.

As long as there has been an internet, there have been internet scams. The web provides both access and anonymity - a dangerous combination. Remember, the only predator that preys on humans is other humans. This love scam script hasn't changed in 20 years. It remains effective because humans are wired to believe in something no matter what evidence there is against it.

Falling for a love scam doesn't mean you are naïve or stupid. It just means you are human. Women in

our culture are conditioned to sacrifice, nurture, and put others needs before their own. These are the ingredients for an imbalance of power within relationships and an unsuccessful outcome, despite our cultural myth of happily ever after. The technical term for such relationships is “codependent,” although I prefer dysfunctionally stable. Other cultures have an entirely different set of expectations and relationship skills, but this is what is taught in our culture.

C says:

Honestly Becky? You’ve got to be at least a little naïve to start sending money to a man you’ve never met. But I’ve learned to never underestimate the brain-numbing power of human loneliness.

A divorce, especially one that was fueled by betrayal, can leave anyone aching and vulnerable. Every lonely person in the world wants to believe that there is someone out there who really understands. Divorced, betrayed women are as vulnerable as teenage girls, no matter what their age. You are bruised and yearning for validation and warmth. You are a sitting duck. So listen up.

Trust is not just about who you are with... it’s about who YOU are. Right now, you are someone who can be lied to. Until you change that, you can’t trust anyone. You need to sharpen your awareness - make sure that the people you confide in are real. You fell for a fantasy. Do not ever again blindly believe what people say - watch what they do. Ask questions. It’s up to you.

You can visit Dr. B’s blog at drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com