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## THE COLLAR

### Internet Fraudsters Steal Hearts and Cash

By [LUKE MULLINS](#)

Posted: April 22, 2008

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There was a time when you only had to worry about a potential lover breaking your heart. Now it seems that you've got to keep your eyes on your bank account, too.

As Americans have turned in greater numbers to the [Internet](#) in search of love, scammers have found a fresh batch of potential victims and created a new field of fraudulent activity: "romance fraud: a scam designed to prey on [people's] emotions to get [their] money," CNN reports.

Romance scammers troll dating sites to find potential victims. After convincing them of their love, the scammers start hitting their targets up for [cash](#).

I know, it sounds like regular dating to me, too. But such schemes have apparently triggered steep financial losses, trails of broken hearts, and voicemail boxes full of unreturned calls.

From [CNN](#):

## THE COLLAR

**Luke Mullins** is an associate editor at *U.S. News*, covering banking, real estate, and white-collar crime. He came to the magazine from the *American Banker*, a financial services daily newspaper, after a stint in the Peace Corps in West Africa and 18 months coaching baseball in the Dominican Republic. Mullins earned a master's degree in journalism from Syracuse University in 2005 and now lives in Washington, D.C., where he grew up. He has written about white-collar criminals for the *American* magazine, and his work was included in *20 Something Essays by 20 Something Writers: The Best New Voices of 2006*, a Random House anthology that appeared on the *Boston Globe's* bestseller list.

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Barb Sluppick runs RomanceScams.org, a Web site dedicated to helping victims of romance fraud, like herself. She said the site has had more than 30,000 members since its start in June 2005.

The number of broken hearts aside, romance fraud costs victims millions of dollars each year. Of her 30,000 members, Sluppick said, 883 people have reported their financial losses. They add up to \$8,244,800.05, she said.

So how to prevent yourself from becoming a victim?

RomanceScams.org also lists a few red flags to detect a possible scammer: If their spelling is horrible, they use emoticons heavily and they appear to be available at unusual hours for your time zone, they may be scamming you.

So there yu have it. :( Fair warneing.

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### Spotting 'Scammers'

I used to work for a Bank in East London, UK. Spotting scammers and fraudsters was a part of every day life..

Over the past year I started to use two different web-sites, Tallfriends.com and Parship.com. The first you can get free membership, the second is fee paying and not well known.

At Tallfriends, I was contacted by two people, apparently, women. One claiming to be English but living in the States and the other American. Their Grammar was terrible, evaded all my questions and then came the decider.... " please help me, I am in Nigeria, one for a funeral of her Nigerian born Father (but her picture was of a blonde Anglo Saxon) and the second was staying in a hotel because her boyfriend had "dumped her" (again a picture of a white woman) and can not pay the Hotel Bill....."!

I realised their deception immediately, strung them along, saying that I had sent the money to WU as they had asked. I really wasted their time. What better service to all genuine people than to scam a scammer!



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