

TOO GOOD to be TRUE?

Donna thought she'd landed a real catch in James, a tall, dashing, successful former war hero ...

Tapping away at my computer, I couldn't help but smile. "This guy seems nice," I mused, reading an ad from James Alwyn Montgomery, an Australian living in the US.

It was May 1996 and I was nearly 40, single and living in the State of New Jersey, USA. Having kissed some real frogs, I was still looking for my prince, so now I was giving internet dating a go.

James described himself as a "Sean Connery look-alike", said he'd worked in Hollywood and was now an entertainment businessman. "Why not?" I decided, emailing him.

He quickly replied. Over the next few weeks, emails flew between us. James said he was married but had been widowed.

The grieving is complete, he reassured me in an email.

In his late 40s, he was old enough to have served in Vietnam.

I was with the US and Australian Special Forces, he continued, sending me a medal citation for the Victoria Cross.

As an American, I didn't realise how rare that was, and I was impressed. On July 21, two days after my 40th birthday, I met him for brunch at a local cafe.

The Sean Connery resemblance ends with the beard, I thought. I didn't find him attractive at all.

The first thing he did was pull out a wedding album! Pointing to a photograph of his wife, Gale, he said, "She died two months ago."

This worried me. "It's way too soon. You're not ready," I told him.

He looked at me with big, sad eyes and said, "In Vietnam, I lost lots of friends. I learned to move on. Gale would have wanted me to."

My heart went out to him. As he talked about Gale, his travels and his business deals, I was drawn in.

There was an aura of

power about him; he was charming, charismatic and very dynamic.

What an exciting man, I thought. Intrigued, I agreed to a dinner date.

After that, things moved fast. He bombarded me with calls, compliments, faxes and little gifts.

We'd only known each other a few weeks when he said, "I love you Donna."

I didn't love him, but being pursued by such a dynamic man felt fantastic.

I can't believe he's interested in me, I'd marvel.

In August, he called and asked, "Donna, will you do me the honour of becoming my wife?"

I was overwhelmed. Nobody else is asking, I thought, as I told myself I could grow to love him.

"Yes," I gushed.

We married at a Sydney registry office in October and had a second wedding in the US with my family, who seemed to like him.

It was so romantic, everything I'd dreamed of. James moved into my home - I had a successful copy-writing firm and owned my own house.

Then, soon after, he asked



We first married in Sydney ...

to borrow some money. "I just need some cash to tide me over until the deal I'm working on comes off," he said, promising to pay me back straightaway.

I believed in him and gave him whatever he asked for.

He spent lots of time in meetings, sometimes flying to them. I paid, confident his deals would work out.

All through 1997, I invested my savings in James's deals. I even took out a loan against my home.

By 1998, I was having trouble paying off the debts he'd notched up. And I was now desperately unhappy with the state of my marriage - I'd finally concluded I was being used.

"We've got financial

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James faked his military service ID

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problems and it's all your fault," I yelled at him during one argument.

"You're screaming like a fishwife," he said, accusing me of having no faith in him. I felt guilty and doubted my own feelings.

I tormented myself with thoughts like, What kind of wife gets rid of her husband because his business plan isn't working?

By February 1999, I'd 'invested' more than

I'll just do a Google search of James's name

\$260,000 in James's deals.

While he was away on business that month, I went to his strongbox to get my jewellery.

The box was stuffed full of papers, including a birth certificate for a little girl born the year before in Florida. James was named as the father! There were photographs of him with her in the box.

I felt hurt and betrayed but also relieved. Now I've got a legitimate reason to leave him, I thought.

I wrote him a note: *We've a problem. Her name is*

James called me on Valentine's Day. "It's not what you think," he protested. "The mother is a lesbian and wanted me to do her a favour."

It was laughable. "I want a divorce," I said. Wondering if there were other women, I searched James's paperwork at home. It was a revelation.

There were photographs, letters and emails from over 30 women.

I called one. "I gave James \$130,000 and never got a cent back," she sobbed.

He hadn't just cheated on me, I realised. He'd conned me too!

And not only me. There was a woman in California who'd given him \$325,000.

Another was left \$260,000 in debt. He'd got \$169,000 from his dead wife's parents. There was a string of people he'd conned.

I'd lost \$295,000, some of which he'd spent flying around the country having affairs with other women – up to six of them I reckoned.

James failed to show at the divorce hearing in September 2000. The judge ordered that he pay me my \$295,000 plus \$1.3 million

in damages. I got \$672 from him.

"I've been so foolish," I wept to friends after going bankrupt.

I went to a therapist, and as I described James, the therapist said, "I think he might be a sociopath."

A sociopath, I learned, was someone without a conscience. It was James to a tee.

"I won't get caught again," I told friends and family. "I know the signs now."

Six months after my divorce, I met and fell in love with a wonderful man, Terry Kelly.

We married and, with Terry's help, I began working on a website about sociopaths. "Other women and men, too, need to be warned about people like James," I told him.

In 2003, my lawyers traced James to China, but couldn't get my money from him.

By November 2004, my website www.lovefraud.com was nearly ready for launch.

"I'll just do a Google search of James's name," I decided one day.

Up flashed a page from Charles Sturt University in Bathurst, NSW, announcing New Man at the Helm.

It was a press release stating he'd been made



James marched on Anzac Day

manager of the university radio station. In his photo he looked just like Santa, heavier than he was before and with white hair.

Found you, you bastard, I thought.

I told my lawyers in Australia who pursued him for payment of the money he owed me. When he couldn't pay I had him legally declared a bankrupt.

Meanwhile, I realised that, like everything else about James, his military record was probably a lie, too. So I called ANZMI, an Australian organisation which investigates military impostors.

"All his military claims are fake, he never served in Vietnam," they reported back. "The Victoria Cross citation is forged. He was never in the Special Forces."

In August 2005, James was exposed in the Australian newspapers. There was even a photo of him marching in an ANZAC Day parade.

"He didn't just steal money, he stole the honour of brave men," I told my husband.

James was fired. The last I heard, he was in Australia, posing as a retired academic and calling himself Dr James Montgomery.

It terrifies me that he's still at large. If I've got one thing to say to the women of Australia, it's beware of James Montgomery.

Donna Andersen,
New Jersey, USA.



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