



Chapter One: Introduction to Cryptocurrency Scams

Picture this: You are scrolling through your social media feed, and a kaleidoscope of perfectly curated lives flashes by. One of your friends just vacationed in Bali, another finally landed their dream job, and others are not far behind showcasing their parties and achievements. However, beneath all the shiny exterior is a hidden truth that many may not realize. Today's world is spinning faster than ever, thanks to technology.

Technology has woven the world into an intricate tapestry and brought forth numerous benefits. From changing the landscape for businesses and industries, connecting loved ones with a simple touch of a screen, to information flowing freely at our fingertips and exciting opportunities blossoming overnight, everything is easy and convenient. However, this convenience comes with a price. In this shiny digital playground, a sinister shadow lurks—the ever-evolving realm of online scams where fortunes are lost and trust evaporates into thin air.

These digital predators wear several hats—prince charming offering eternal love in exchange for a small investment, the tech-savvy scammer promising to crack your luck, and the merciless impersonator mimicking your bank to siphon your hard-earned life savings. The stories are countless, and each leaves a trail of devastation. Unfortunately, these digital predators cunningly exploit the elements that make technology extremely alluring: convenience, trust, and the insatiable human desire for a better life. These online scammers slither through social media feeds, emails, and phone lines, pretending to be legitimate businesses or friendly faces offering life-changing promises. Similar to how dazzling filters distort reality on our screens, online scams mask their evil intentions with a cover of credibility.

Now, the million-dollar question is, why are we so vulnerable? Think of your grandparents' or parents' advice—“If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is.” I can't emphasize enough how that wisdom becomes paramount in the digital world. The undeniable allure of instant gratification, fear of missing out, or misplaced trust is what makes us easy targets. The harsh reality is that we have become so accustomed to the convenience technology brings we often forget the human

element behind the screen. There is no warm handshake and no sweet, reassuring smile. All that lies is an impeccably crafted persona designed to exploit our vulnerabilities.

Online scams are not only about financial loss. They are about the brutal erosion of trust, which is the basic foundation of any human interaction. Imagine the level of disappointment of an entrepreneur whose life savings and emergency funds were robbed in the blink of a digital transaction thanks to a phony scheme. Suddenly, dreams are shattered, and a sense of betrayal creeps in. Oftentimes, the scars of these scams run deeper than skin deep. They leave victims feeling violated and questioning their own judgment. Day in and day out, innocent people like you and me get caught in this mess.

Before I get into all the nitty-gritty details of my story, let me tell you something that may just calm you down. You do not have to suffer the same fate. In fact, you have the chance to sharpen your digital awareness and equip yourself for the battle against online scams by understanding the tactics used by virtual con artists. So, as I narrate what happened to me in hopes of spreading awareness and education, I hope you join me as I embark on a journey into the labyrinthine world of online scams. By the end of this book, I will delve into the strategies used by digital tricksters, analyze real-life examples, and help you hone your detection skills. Most importantly, I will also teach you to have enough knowledge to protect yourself and your loved ones. Remember, in the fight against online scams, the greatest weapon to have is awareness.

2019 was the year when the buzz around Bitcoin was impossible to ignore. News headlines and social media screamed about its meteoric rise, and promises of digital gold filled the air. Like so many others, the concept behind it was intriguing to me, too. In May, my husband, who was back then a friend, was looking to invest in the stock market and asked about my thoughts on investing in Bitcoin. My knowledge at the time extended only as far as a glimpse of the “Buy Bitcoin” option on my Cash App.

Despite my very limited understanding, a spark of curiosity ignited in me. After all, I craved financial freedom, and investing in Bitcoin seemed like a golden ticket that would allow me to pursue my dreams without the constant pressure of waiting for a paycheck. Intrigued by its potential and hopeful for the treasures, I decided to take a leap of faith, purchase a Bitcoin, and monitor the fluctuations.

I dipped my toes into the world of cryptocurrency with a modest amount of \$11.00. It was not a gamble; instead, it was an experiment that offered a chance to learn and observe this digital phenomenon firsthand. Watching the price fluctuate on the screen soon became a new kind of thrill, like a rollercoaster ride of ups and downs that held an odd fascination. With the passage of time, my curiosity spiked, and I delved deeper. I devoured articles and gathered more information on the subject matter.

The allure of passive income has always been of great interest to me, in addition to my regular employment, and has captivated me more than anything else. The idea of earning on the side without the constant tiring grind of a traditional job resonated with me deeply. Alongside my usual work, the prospect of a steady income stream fueled by crypto looked like a magic key that would secure a

comfortable future. Conversations with my husband shifted gears. We did not only talk about individual investments; we began brainstorming ways to leverage cryptocurrency's potential in the long run. The shared dream of owning a new home felt far more attainable.

However, the road to financial freedom with crypto was not paved with digital gold. We discovered the complicated and volatile nature of the cryptocurrency market. The learning curve was very steep and filled with constantly evolving trends. We also learned about distinct coins, blockchain technology, and different ways to generate passive income with crypto, such as lending, staking, and liquidity pools. Needless to say, each option came with its own set of risks and rewards and demanded careful research and a calculated approach.

During this period, I received an intriguing message from someone claiming to be a "Priceline representative." The offer seemed promising: they were looking for Americans aged 20+ to help optimize hotel bookings and reviews. The position was freelance, non-technical, and offered flexible hours—just 1-2 hours daily. The company even provided free training, and the work could be done remotely. It seemed like a win-win situation. After a brief conversation, I accepted the offer and the proposed working hours. The so-called "representative" explained that the role involved uploading data to improve hotel visibility and performance. Little did I know, this is where my journey would take a dark turn, leading me to become a victim of a scam.

To give you a little background about myself, I attended the University of Texas at Dallas from 2012 to 2014 as a full-time Information Technology and Systems student. I was also working full-time in accounting and finance in parallel. Although my schedule was challenging since I was working during the day and attending classes in the evening, I had a passion and thirst to succeed and prove myself. So it kept me going. During the last three semesters, none of my courses were offered in the evening. Luckily, I had a great manager who really wanted to see me climb to the top and succeed. She allowed me to attend school during business hours and work in the afternoons despite the job's typical 8 to 5 schedule. As a result, I started work at 6:00 am, left at 9:30 am for school, and returned to the office around 4:00 pm to finish my shift, Monday through Thursday.

While working in accounting, I sought an internship in my field of study, Information Technology and Systems, since I did not want to graduate without any relevant experience. Unfortunately, no opportunity was immediately available locally. As a result, I desperately accepted an overseas internship program offered by my school. In 2014, I had to resign from my accounting and finance position and subsequently travel to Ireland, where I was placed in a web development role in alignment with my field of study. After successfully completing my internship in Ireland, I returned to the US and found another job in accounting while I continued my university studies side by side. I was scheduled to graduate in December of the same year in 2014.

Three weeks after starting my new accounting job, I woke up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom. When I returned to bed, I quickly checked my phone, as per my habit, and saw a text message from an unknown number. The message was as follows: "Hello, are you looking for a job? Dell is hiring recent graduates for full-time positions in their payroll with benefits. If you're interested, please call me as soon as you see this message. Manish."

My first instinct was to ignore the message, thinking it was a scam. But then, I said to myself that I had nothing to lose. Therefore, the next day, I decided to call the number during my break time at work. My phone call was answered by a man who introduced himself as Manish. His company provided talent hiring and training services for technology companies and had partnered with Dell's Services division to fill a few roles.

He said, "Interviews are being conducted today. If you're interested, come to my office right now to discuss it further." His office was located about 15 minutes from my job, and I contemplated whether to go or not. I was about to leave work to head to school, but then I decided to skip the first class to meet Mr. Manish. Arriving at Mr. Manish's office, he led me to a room that, at first glance, appeared to be a classroom. There was an aisle in the middle with chairs on each side, about three to four chairs in every row, and a large whiteboard stood at the front of the aisle.

Eager to learn more about the job details, I followed him to the front of the classroom, where he asked me to sit down. I chose the first chair in the first row on the left side. I noticed inscriptions related to a software application on the whiteboard, and an amount of \$4000 was circled in black marker. I thought to myself, "He's certainly going to ask me to pay this amount. I don't have the money, and why should I pay to work?"

He then explained his partnership with the hiring company and that his team was going to provide training on PeopleSoft technical skills, database and SQL concepts, and PeopleSoft administration. Normally, the training costs were \$4000, but his company would offer it for free. He explained that the first step was to interview with the hiring company. If the company thought I was a suitable fit, they would approve me to start the training. Upon successful completion of the training, there would be a second-round interview to determine if I would be offered the job.

I was at ease with the idea of not paying any money. He said the interviews were being conducted that same day and asked if I could meet with the hiring company that afternoon, as it was the last day of interviews. Since I did not have any available slots of free time with my busy schedule, I asked him if I could come in for the interview the following day. Mr. Manish was kind enough to give me his business card and asked me to send him an updated version of my resume. I thanked him and told him I would send my resume as soon as I arrived at school.

Later in the afternoon, I got a call from him notifying me of my confirmed interview with the hiring company for the following day at 10:00 am. I was extremely grateful and excited about the opportunity. The next day, I went to the interview. Although I was supposed to be interviewed by a panel of four people, a member of the interviewing panel could not make it. I thought the interview went well, but I was unsure whether I would be selected for the training. Mr. Manish called me in the afternoon, saying he had great news. The hiring company had selected me for the training, and I jumped with excitement. He congratulated me and informed me that I would start training the following day.

It was supposed to be fast-paced training. They offered remote sessions on weekdays and in-person sessions on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. I was now admitted to this training and ready to hit the ground running. However, the reality of my time constraints hit me like a big yellow school bus. In

addition to the training, I was still working full-time and attending school full-time. Somehow, I managed to attend two weeks of training, but the hectic routine took a toll on me. I was barely getting four hours of sleep, became super exhausted, and would sleep in work and class. In fact, I even skipped a few classes during the first two weeks of the training.

Consequently, I was unable to complete some of my assignments because I could hardly keep up. The main condition for getting the job was to graduate with good grades, even if I successfully completed the training.

Not to mention, I also needed to work to pay my bills. When I weighed everything, I realized that if I did things correctly without skipping school, work, and training, I would be five hours short each week. Obviously, my health was the first priority, my job and school were second, and the training was last. Thus, with a heavy heart, I decided to inform Mr. Manish about my decision to quit the training.

On Monday, November 24, 2014, at 10:16 pm, I emailed Mr. Manish that I had to quit the training due to my challenging work and school schedule. Simultaneously, I thanked him wholeheartedly for the opportunity he offered me to work at Dell and stated that I was hopeful for another similar one post-graduation. Soon after, he asked me to connect with him on a call to discuss further. The major chunk of our conversation was about when I would graduate.

Right after graduation, I approached him, and thankfully, he promptly arranged a remote, fast-paced training session for me since the other candidates had advanced far ahead of me, and he could not put me in the same class as them. Without further ado, I started taking remote sessions every evening after work. After the training was completed, the hiring company scheduled an interview, and by the grace of God, I was offered a position as an Enterprise Resource Planning Analyst. That is how I kick-started my professional career in IT.

So, I have been working for a while and have about three businesses that I used to work at in the past. I know that opportunity does not always knock on your door and presents itself naturally. You have to work hard and put yourself in the right places in order to attain certain things. I have always been someone on the lookout for golden opportunities to make passive income. The idea that effort invested upfront could generate ongoing returns was mind-blowing and revolutionary. It was similar to planting a seed that would blossom into a self-sustaining source of income. My motivation propelled me to explore various avenues.

It was as if the stars had aligned, and I was reached out to by someone who suggested investing in data optimization to increase and improve company rankings. After several discussions, I thought it was appealing and asked several questions. The way it was explained to me, I thought it was a legit business to be involved in, and so I took the plunge.