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USA Intervenes in Nigerian Email Scam

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INDIANAPOLIS (CN) - The United States intervened in a Nigerian email scam to try to recover \$237,000 in U.S. bank accounts - a fraction of the money a 20-year-old Nigerian allegedly swiped from a 73-year old woman who was looking for love on a dating website.

On behalf of the elderly woman, Uncle Sam seeks \$65,000 in a Bank of America account in the name of Cars Unlimited; \$71,500 from a Comerica Bank account in the name of Alpha Group Car Leasing; and \$100,000 from a Comerica Bank account in the name of Hilal Charara or Shella Bazzie Charara.

The government says the Indianapolis-area woman lost more than half a million dollars to the scammer, whose name apparently is Ayodele Oslushola Alakija, but who claimed to be a 65-year-old civil engineer named Peter Craig in his love notes to his victim.

The woman, E.M., met Alakija in 2010 through an Internet dating site, according to the complaint. He claimed to be working as an engineer at an oil refinery in Leeds, England.

"Peter Craig," using the email address teasemepeter200@yahoo.com, sent the woman more than 194 email messages between September 2010 and January 2011, the government says. Through email, the two discussed "their lives, families, and pondering a potential relationship."

On Sept. 30, 2010, the woman succumbed to Craig's request to wire him \$1,500 because he had lost his wallet, according to the complaint. Six days later, she wired him another \$1,000 because "his son needed emergency surgery." That was followed by a \$4,000 bite on Oct. 12, \$2,500 more in Oct. 15, and another \$5,000 on Oct. 26. All the money was sent by Western Union.

"Craig also told [E.M.] that he needed money for his business and that he wanted to obtain a loan from her," according to the complaint. "Craig promised [her] a large return on her investment and provided documents showing that he had contracts worth millions of dollars. Craig also provided to [her] loan documents and instructions for wiring the money."

The government says she wired him \$47,600 to a business account at Barclay Bank on Oct. 13, 2010; \$115,000 to a business account at Deutsche Trust Bank on Oct. 21; \$105,000 to a business account at Wells Fargo Bank on Nov. 2; \$205,000 to "Peter Craig's attorney's account" at Bank of America on Nov. 22 (for Cars Unlimited); and another \$32,000 to the same BofA account on Nov. 29.

"Of the \$504,600 that [E.M.] wired to Craig ... \$237,000.00 was wired into the Cars Unlimited Acct. [ending in] 7992, an account that Craig told [E.M.] was his attorney's account," the complaint states.

According to the complaint, Ali Hassan-Nasse Beydoun "was and is the owner and manager of Cars Unlimited," of Detroit; and Hilal Charara "was and is the owner of Alpha Group Car Leasing," of Detroit, which is managed by his brother, Nidal Charara.

The complaint continues its grim litany: \$150,000 wire from the BofA account, in the name of Cars Unlimited ("Beydoun - Cars Unlimited Acct. 7992") to Comerica Bank, in the name of Alpha Group Leasing, on Nov. 22. Craig then had the brass to tell his victim that money was "missing" from the piles she already had sent him, so she wired another \$32,000 to Beydoun - Cars Unlimited on Nov. 29.

In a final act of bravado, which tripped him up, Uncle Sam says: "On December 20, 2010, Ayodele Oslushola Alakija ('Alakija') applied for a visa from the United States Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs. In his application, Alakija identified himself as a 20-year old male, who was born and resides in Nigeria. He listed his email address as teasemepeter200@yahoo.com, the same email address used by Peter Craig."

Uncle Sam seeks forfeiture of the money it has located, which it calls "proceeds traceable to a 'specified unlawful activity'".

The complaint does not state what, if anything, happened to Alakija, nor to Beydoun or the Chararas, who are not named as defendants. 

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