

# Invisible Thieves: Online Scams and Digital Dangers

Andrea Coello

## BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What are pop-up ads? Do you click on them or avoid them? Explain.
2. What is an *attachment* to an email? What is a computer virus? Have you ever had one? What happened?
3. As you read, notice the words and phrases *meticulously*, *verify*, *up front*, and *distinct markings*. If you don't know what they mean, use the context to figure it out.

## Nobody Is Safe from Scammers

Technology brings many opportunities, including new ways for people to steal. It turns out, nobody is safe from scammers! Here are three examples from my own life.

### My Parents Missed a Small Detail

When I was a kid, I remember watching my parents use the internet for their retail business that sold spare parts for cars. They were very careful. They always wrote an email to the company and asked about their products and services. My father *meticulously* looked for errors in each piece of information provided by the company's representative. Sometimes, he discovered that the company was fake. Also, my parents looked at the "About Us" section of their website and called them to *verify* they were real.

One day, they seemed worried. My father received an email from a provider in Turkey. This provider asked for half of the payment *up front*. My father did not notice a small change in the company's email address. They used a "0" (zero) instead of an "O" (letter). As a result, my parents sent their money to a different bank account.



When my father tried to contact them again, they never answered. We were sad and disappointed about how some bad people could use the internet to steal from hardworking people.

### I Bought a Phone from a Pop-Up Ad

In a similar experience, I was shopping online for a cellphone. I was looking at Facebook and a *pop-up* ad appeared. It looked real and had pictures of different people buying their cell phones. I contacted them, and they asked for the money *up front*. After I sent it, the account disappeared with

all my money. I was so frustrated. I called my bank to cancel the transaction, but it was too late. The money was gone.

## I Lost My Cat and Found a Scammer

Finally, my last experience was when my cat got lost. I was worried that morning because my cat “Lulu” did not wake me up as he always does. I went to the kitchen to feed him, but he never appeared. I remembered that I saw on the internet a page called *Find Your Pet*. I signed in and personalized my advertisement with Lulu’s photo and my contact information. I sent it to every group on Facebook and gave them some details about my pet.

We started to receive messages about cats around the area. But there was one that shocked us. Someone posted a picture that looked like our cat, but we weren’t sure. So we asked to see a picture of his tail, because the tail had *distinct markings* on it. But the person refused. He wanted us to send him money to see our cat. Fortunately, we realized that he was a scammer and blocked him.

We spent all day looking for Lulu. Finally, my husband pointed to a bush, and there he was! We were so glad to find Lulu safe!

## How to Guard against Invisible Thieves

Be careful! There are so many ways for people to take advantage of you. My recommendations are:

- If you receive an email from someone you don’t know, it could be phishing. Learn how to recognize phishing. You can Google it or start here: <https://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/how-recognize-and-avoid-phishing-scams>.
- Most importantly, do not open *attachments* because they could deliver a virus into your computer. This virus could steal your personal information.
- If you want to buy a product on the internet, and the seller pressures you to deposit money first, you are probably talking with a scammer. Block them immediately!

- If you do not know a lot about computers, just ask for help.

The three experiences I have shared with you here have made me aware of online dangers. I hope, now that you know what happened to me, you can avoid these problems. I hope my tips will be useful for everyone!

### AFTER YOU READ:

1. Notice the structure of this essay. What are the main parts? How does she begin and end the essay?
2. Does the author make a convincing case that there are “invisible thieves” that you need to be aware of? Why or why not?
3. Your friend posts on social media, but it doesn’t sound like them. They are posting photos of free phones and telling people to click a link to access them. What would you do? What would you say to your friend?

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## For Teachers!

**A Lesson Plan:** “Protecting My Information on the Internet,” by María José Bastías. Find it on *The Change Agent* website under “Extras” for Issue #64.

**Free online courses** related to internet security: <https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/>

**BRIDGES: A Digital Resilience Toolkit:** <https://digitalskillslibrary.org/bridges>