

Knott Travel

by Joe Alan Artz

Angelynn came in from getting the mail, studying a picture post card.

"The Frinkl's are in Europe," she said.

Leon Frinkl and I had run a roofing business, years back. We'd given it up because we didn't like traveling to the out-of-town jobs.

"Leon's in Europe?" I said. "Give me that." The front of the card showed a big castle where Portugal buried its kings and queens. On the back, Leon's wife Sylvia had written, "Not having the time of our life in Lisbon,"

I studied the picture. "I wonder if the kings are buried separately or in the same bedroom as their queens?" I asked Angelynn.

"You'll have to ask Leon when they get back," she said.

The next post card was of gondolas in Venice. "Have never not enjoyed ourselves less," wrote Sylvia.

"Sylvia can be hard to please," said Angelynn.

"Those boats could use a coat of paint," I said.

The third card came from Athens. On the back, Leon had written, "The most fun we haven't had since Lisbon."

"The Frinkl's don't seem to be enjoying their trip," said Angelynn.

"That Parthenon's impressive," I said, "but there's one just like it in Nashville."

From Sydney we got a post card of the Opera House. "Next time, Australia's the first place we'll choose not to go," the Frinkls wrote.

"It's winter in Sydney," said Angelynn, "Maybe they'd like it better in summer."

"That building looks like bowls stacked in a dish drainer," I said.

"Makes the whitecaps look like soap suds."

"Don't it though?" I said.

The card from Venezuela threw us. "We'll not travel here again soon," Leon had written, Sylvia adding, "Absolutely lovely!"

"Did they like it or not?" asked Angelynn.

The picture was a tall, skinny waterfall coming off a mountain into a jungle.

"Looks like water coming out of a garden hose," I said. "Make it wider and shorter, you'd have something."

"You'd have Niagara Falls," said Angelynn, still puzzling over the back of the card. .

Three days later, the Frinkl's showed up in our driveway, dressed like tourists, with deep tans and a cardboard box of souvenirs. We enjoyed your postcards!" said Angelynn, inviting them in. "How the hell's an ex-roofer afford a trip like that?" I said, mixing drinks.

"Oh," said Sylvia, "didn't you get it? We didn't actually go to any of those places."

"Hell, no," said Leon. "We never left the house."

I stopped in my tracks with the tray of drinks. Leon half rose so he could reached his and Sylvia's.

"She found this place," Leon said, "the Knott Travel Agency."

Sylvia slurped at her vodka tonic. "They had this Five Destination, Three Continent package," she said, handing us a brochure from the cardboard box.

The front of the brochure said, "Why pay to travel places when you can Knott Travel there for a fraction of the cost?"

"We picked a departure date," said Sylvia, "and they sent us the itinerary."

"Made from real airline schedules, with boarding passes and everything," said Leon.

"And on the correct days, they would send us a package of souvenirs and stuff from the next city where we hadn't just arrived."

Leon dug in the box. "Look," he said, "here's a koala bear shot glass that we didn't buy at the Opera House gift shop."

"And here," said Sylvia, "is a cocktail napkin from the hotel lounge in Venice where we didn't have drinks. That stain is real Italian wine."

Leon held out a boarding pass stub. "ATH to SYD. Athens to Sydney. A twenty four hour flight. In the comfort of our own home!"

"But the postcards," said Angelynn. "They had foreign stamps and postmarks."

"Each packet had blank postcards," said Sylvia. "All we had to do was fill them out and put them in a pre-paid FedEx envelope addressed to a person in the city where we weren't..."

"An operative, Syl," said Leon, "They called them 'operatives,' like in a spy novel."

"And the 'operative,'" said Sylvia with a giggle, "would mail them for us."

"You may wonder," said Leon, "if we didn't actually travel to any of these places, how did we get these tans?"

"It had crossed my mind to ask," I said.

"Show them the receipts," said Leon. "The deal they gave us included free passes for a tanning salon."

"But they were only good if it was sunny that day in the place where we weren't," said Sylvia.

"Man, I tell you," said Leon, "You really felt like you weren't there,"

Angelynn fidgeted beside me and sniffled. She had never traveled, and cherished getting postcards. She'd pinned the Frinkl's to a world map, a piece of red yarn leading from each card to its city.

Sensing Angie's disappointment, Sylvia handed her a bulky envelope. "Here's the snapshots we took," she said. "They're for you. We made copies."

Angie took the envelope, tipping her head to the side, "How could you have taken...?"

"It was a vacation!" said Leon, nudging Sylvia. "We had to take pictures!" They drained their drinks and watched expectantly.

Angelynn and I looked at the first few pictures, shuffled quickly through some more, then threw the Frinkl's out of our house. The snapshots were of the Frinkl's going around the world, all right, but in their own bedroom.

I Lysol'd the sofa they'd shared, sprayed foam on the carpet they'd walked on, and put their glasses in Clorox to soak. Angelynn snipped the red yarns with scissors, and fed the world map and

postcards to the shredder. She fed in the snapshots face down, one at a time, wearing a blindfold.

In the uproar, they had left without their souvenirs. I dumped the box into the Weber grill on the deck. I streamed charcoal starter onto the tanning salon receipts and set a match to them. The Frinkl's trip went up in a whoosh of petroleum-laden flames.

All evening, we could not escape the feeling of taint. For Angelynn, the postcards were lies and nearly as repulsive as the snapshots. To me, the cards were just harmless jokes, but I'd roofed with Leon Frinkl, I'd worked twelve hour days with him in ninety-degree heat, tearing off old roofs, nailing down new ones, and I could never forgive him coming into my house with a tan he hadn't earned.

