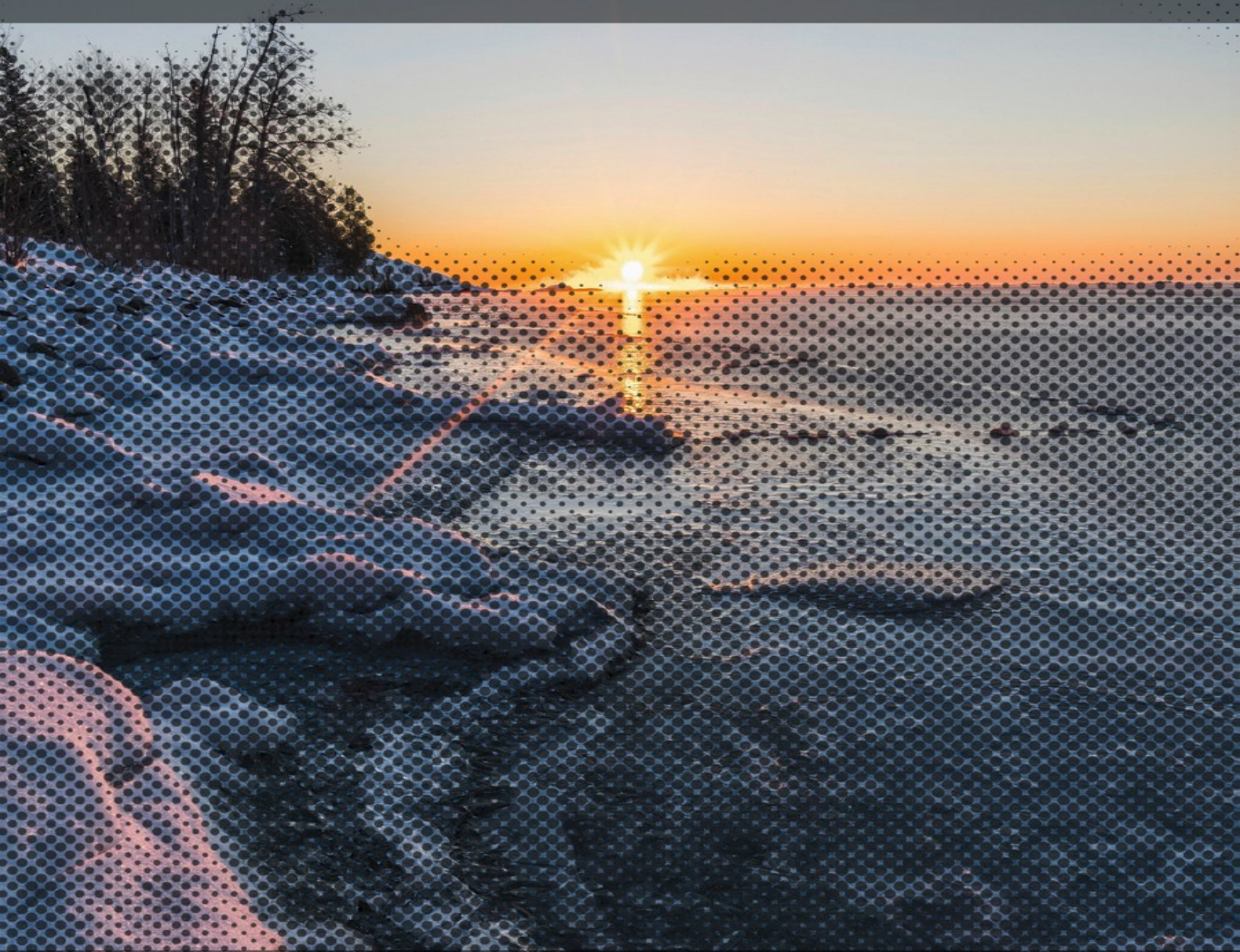


**Arthur Leo Zagat**



*The Two  
Moons  
of Tranquillia*



**Arthur Leo Zagat**

# **The Two Moons of Tranquillia**



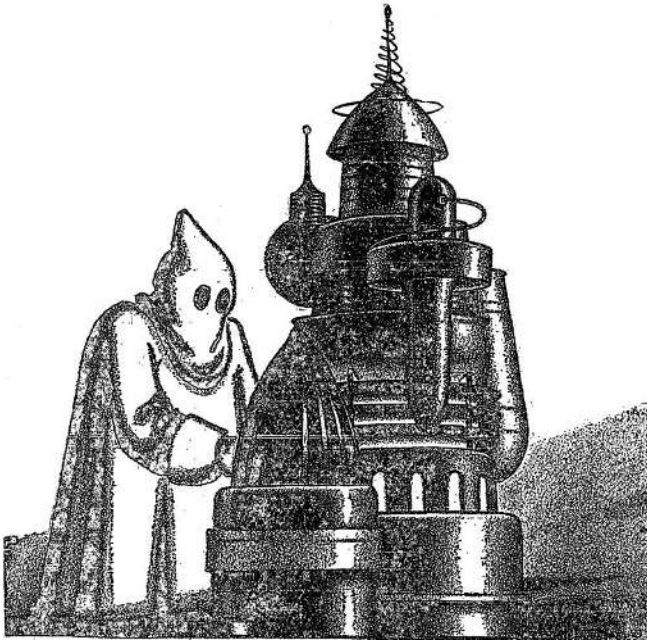
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# I

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**G**eorge Carson—Lieutenant George Carson, U.S.N., now—came in through the door on which is lettered the meaningless title, “Editorial Consultant,” they gave me when they put me on the shelf. “What the devil are you doing here?” I growled as he closed it and strode toward me. “I thought you were somewhere in the Atlantic, chasing U-boats.”

“I was, Pop.” He slung a long, blue-clothed leg over a corner of my desk, grinned down at me. “I’ll be shoving off again by midnight.” He looked ten years younger than when I’d last seen him. Wind and the sun had bronzed him, hooded his gaze with an eagle’s drooped lids and the one or two threads of gray in his black hair served only to give him a certain solidity. “A bit of luck gave me the chance to wangle the first shore leave I’ve had in five months.”

It might be luck, but with the word pain had come into his gray eyes and a slow smoulder of anger.

“Picked up a drifting ship’s boat,” he explained, “with some poor sons aboard more dead than alive.”

“Jerry’s got another one, has he?” I grabbed for my ‘phone. “What—City Desk, Jen—What was it? Where—? Oh, okay.” His face had gone blank. “Okay, George, I forgot. Quote. No information shall be published unless and until released by the Commandant, Third Naval District. Unquote. So the radio can spill it first,” I added bitterly, “and make our headlines look like the March of Time a year behind the

band. Now in 'eighteen—You wouldn't remember, you were in the Navy then too, but back in 'eighteen we—"

"Had to fight your way into the building through the crowds waiting for extras. Or was that the fracas in 'ninety-eight?"

"If you're hinting, you young whipper-snapper, that I'm old enough to—What in blazes are you wasting time here for, anyway? Why aren't you on your way up to Westchester to see your son?"

"No train till one-seven, which gives me about forty-five minutes—Listen, Pop. Something's come up that you—I wonder if you could help me out." Fishing in a pocket of his uniform he looked and sounded exactly like the shy but earnest cub who when I was in the slot, in the twenties, used to come to me with a thousand eager questions. "I picked up a copy of the GLOBE this morning, the first I've seen since Christmas, and—You know I always read the Agony Column first, don't you?"

"I ought to, seeing it was I tipped you that the personal ads are a good spot to find hints for off-trail items."

"This hit me in the eye." George put a torn-out clipping in front of me and added, an odd note of significance in his tone. "In today's sheet."

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It was four lines of six point type, the first line light-face caps and small caps:

COUPLE WILL CARE FOR THE DURATION  
without charge child of widower who wishes to

volunteer for military service. Country, Home. 'Phone Carseville - 465.

I looked up. "This would have struck you just right five months ago, but—"

"It did. I answered that same ad five months ago, and parked Pete with the old couple who'd inserted it." I'd been on vacation, I recalled. He'd been gone when I returned. "That's how I was able to get back into uniform without worrying about the brat."

"So someone else got the idea, so what? It's good, isn't it?"

"I said the same *ad*, Pop." He spoke quietly, but obviously he was disturbed. "Exactly the same, even to the 'phone number. I checked in my address book. It's the same people."

"Okay. Your Peter worked out well and they've decided to take in another kid."

"There isn't room for another. The Barrets live in a small bungalow and the one guestroom is tiny—"

"Two boys might share it, if they got one of these two-story beds you see advertised."

"Ye-e-es." He tautened again. "They don't specify a boy, Pop. Look here. See. They say child. Pete's twelve and—All right. Maybe I'm nuts but I've got a nagging sort of hunch. What I came down here for was to find out if that ad's appeared any other time since the lad's been up there."

"What would that prove?"

"Well ..." I picked up the 'phone, told Jen to get me the Morgue, told Ed Brolles what I wanted. "Now suppose we get