

BOZO BOB'S RETREAT

PAGE 13



ASSOCIATED PRESS

BY MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER

It was an eclectic night at Astoria's first-rate nightspot, *Top Of The Astor*. The Columbia river sparkled with a dozen ships whose city lights glowed like jeweled tiaras. Belts of stars slashed the sky outside the many tall windows eight stories above the street. The bar was crowded as usual with diverse fusions. The nightly throng of high-toned coastal gentry tiptoed at their usual places near the bar. Members of the North Coast Symphonic Band wet their whistles in post-rehearsal tradition at a large table next to a wall. An ocean research ship's crew and scientists were at the bar and nearby tables. A large swarm of Swat Team cops from Portland were in for a riotous birthday party following riot training at Camp Rilea. And two persons who appeared to be Astoria Clowns, the city's cultural gift to the world, sat at a corner table next to a pair of windows. I was certain one of them was Bob Packwood.

I was at the bar indulging my twin pleasures of wine and chatter. I asked a Swat Cop which side he would be on in the civil war between rich and poor just as the two Bozos entered. One wore a red wig and bulbous cherry nose. "Hi, I'm the Mayor of Astoria" he said to everybody with an exaggerated grin. The other Bozo's face was gray and grim. He grasped his companion's arm and pulled him along as he literally slunk to the table.

My friend Rita was bartending and cocktailing the floor. "Do you know what Mark Twain said about Congress?" I asked her, and answered before she could reply. "He said Congress was America's only criminal class." I pointed to the two clowns. "And I think that sad looking Bozo is one of the biggest crooks of them all."

The pariah can sneak into Oregon but he can't hide, I said to her.

"He better not stand on my toes," she said. "I'll bite his tongue off."

I approached the table and sat down. "I know who you are," I said to the grimfaced clown. "Greasepaint doesn't hide your thief's sneer or your molester's leer."

He turned his thickly smeared face away, toward a window next to the table. A dim chalkline scratched across the sky, preceded by a tiny light. Night jet to Seattle.

"And I'm the Mayor of Astoria," the other Bozo repeated. "I'm not Bob Packwood," Bozo One said. "What would I be doing here if I was Bob Packwood?"

"Visiting the site of your first great triumph," I replied. "Seaside. The spark that ignited your political torch — The Oregon Republican Party Dorchester Conference."

"That's ridiculous," he said.

"Then why would Bob Packwood be here, disguised as an Astoria Clown?" I asked.

"He wouldn't be here in any kind of disguise," Bozo One insisted.

"It's okay for the Mayor to be an Astoria Clown," Bozo Two chortled.

"You're ashamed to be seen by the people of Oregon," I said positively. "You have to sneak home because you're afraid of the very people who made you Senator for so long."

"I am not Bob Packwood," he whispered urgently.

"Then who are you?"

"Who I am is none of your business," he hissed. "Astoria Clowns remain anonymous."

"Except the Mayor," Bozo Two laughed merrily.

"I know the Mayor of Astoria and you're not him," I said.

"But this joker's Bob Packwood, the worst senator in Oregon's history. A disgrace to all honest citizens of this and every state. A criminal and a molester of women."

Bozo Bob glared at me.

"He was the smartest man in the Senate," Mayor Bozo protested. "He did a lot of good for Oregon."

"He disgraced Oregon," I insisted. "This state used to be known for the honesty and integrity of its politicians. Even Saint Mark has tarnished us. But this clown is a rapacious and shameless crook. His entire career in the Senate has been as a front man for anyone with money enough to pay for his expensive and influential services. He has given a new name to philan-

dering. Rude and crude sexual assaults on women are now called Packassing."

"He supported women," Mayor Bozo argued.

"He mauled them."

"He's not the only Senator who ever used his power to seduce women," Mayor Bozo said.

"Nor is he the only Senator bought and paid for by Big Business or who ever sold his vote like a lottery ticket," I said.

"But he was especially greedy among that pack of high-priced jackals, and he was gaudy about it. His richly lucrative breakfasts with lobbyists who paid large sums to break bacon with him are infamous."

"That's the way business is conducted in Washington," Mayor Bozo said. "The Senator has always been very smart about the way politics work and clear-eyed about his opportunities."

"He was always the first hog to the trough and the last swilling," I said.

"The political world is a Darwinian swamp in which one must eat or be eaten," Mayor Bozo said archly. "The Senator developed an understanding that it is better to be eater than eaten."

"But he ate himself," I said with a cruel laugh.

I glanced out the window. The jet trail had fattened into a moonlit intestine. "I like entrepreneurial men but you don't find them in Astoria," I overheard a woman at a nearby table. "Men proportionately have smaller butts than women," a man at the bar said to Rita. "But men are much bigger asses," she replied. A woman passing by our table said to a companion, "If I had a penis I wouldn't have to clean house."

"What happened to the Senator makes the Inquisition look like a party raid," Mayor Bozo said. "He's accused of kissing women. Not beating, not raping. Kissing! Ted Kennedy killed a girl and he's still in the Senate."

"And O.J. Simpson got away with murder," I said. "But he'll never sell orange juice again. Teddy will never be President because he killed Mary Jo. Bob Packwood abused his power to debauch women but he didn't have the juice to prevent exile and ostracism once they finally stood up against him even though it took a few years." I wagged a finger at Bozo Bob. "A friend of mine says you should do court-ordered volunteer work at every women's crisis center and safe house in Oregon for at least six years, one full Senate term, and be resentenced for another six years if you step on any woman's toes at anytime," I said.

"Only a few women complained about the Senator's sex-

ual advances," Mayor Bozo said. "Most women were flattered when the Senator came on to them."

I looked scornfully at Bozo Bob. "You're no different than most gene defective wimps who have to amass material wealth or power to seduce women because you just don't have the real natural vigor to impress them," I said. "The Republican Party seems to attract a majority of impotent predators like you. Macho milksops."

"Power is the sign of a supreme male," Bozo Bob said. "Women know that a man who is rich and powerful is genetically superior."

"Women know that men who attempt to dominate them might have big fists to beat them with but probably have small peckers," I said. "Real men know that women are their equal or even their superior and don't give a damn."

I stared at Bozo Bob and thought of something John Randolph said about Henry Clay that better fit Packwood: "This being so brilliant yet so corrupt, which like a rotten mackerel by moonlight, shines and stinks." (Randolph might also have described Packwood's quick descent among his colleagues when he called a fellow Senator "the most contemptible and degraded of beings, whom no man ought to touch, unless with a pair of tongs.")

"This country is swerving from democracy to casino oligarchy and you are a thoroughly corrupt example of our warp," I said to Bozo Bob. "And for your crimes we whom you have robbed are now supposed to pay you an annual stipend of \$89,000, which is more than most of us make in a decade. You should be put on trial instead."

"He deserves the money for all the years he spent representing Oregon in the Senate," Mayor Bozo said.

"That's like saying we should have paid Benedict Arnold, Jefferson Davis and Spiro Agnew for their services after they were expelled from public office," I said.

"Nixon got his pension after Watergate."

"Nixon was only a crook. This creep's a crook and a degenerate and doesn't deserve a nickel. If he is an honorable man like he claims to be he won't take the money."

"He earned the money," Mayor Bozo said.

"He proves crime pays," I retorted scornfully. "If he had an ounce of common decency he would turn the money down."

"What do you expect him to live on?"

"He embezzled enough for a dozen lifetimes."

"He can't even pay his rent," Mayor Bozo insisted. "He spent all his money trying to stay in the Senate."

"Commit suicide and save us the money," I urged Bozo Bob. "You're a broken man. You're a disgrace to everyone who voted for you. Suicide is your last chance to redeem your honor."

I looked out the window, down eight stories to the street. "Why not now?" I stood up and placed my chair next to the window. "Just step up on the sill and it'll be over in a second. You'll finally be doing something good for Oregon."

Bozo Bob recoiled, appalled.

Rita walked to the table and tried to quiet us. "Lower your voices to your IQ levels," she scolded.

"We're practicing democracy," Mayor Bozo said.

"We're arguing over this odious man's soul," I said.

"If this clown's who I think he is, I don't think he's got one," she said in disgust.

A loud chorus of Swat Cops sang Happy Birthday to one of their comrades and beat their table with truncheons.

"We're not as loud as they are," Mayor Bozo said.

"They're cops. You're not," Rita said and walked back to the bar.

"One of us used to be a Senator," I said to her back.

"I'm the Mayor of Astoria," Mayor Bozo said grandly.

A rabble of politicians noisily entered the bar and after pressing flesh with everyone they looked around the lounge to recognize, sat down at tables near the door where everyone entering would have to acknowledge them. I saw city councilpersons, county commissioners, state legislators — only the governor seemed missing. (And the real Mayor of Astoria.)

Half a dozen walked up to our table and shook hands all around. "I'm the mayor of Astoria," Mayor Bozo proclaimed but attention was momentarily riveted toward Bozo Bob who shirked from their glances.

"I think I know that clown," I heard one say sitting at a table clustered with his partisan peers.

"Who, the one says he's mayor?" another said, looking over at us.

"The other clown."

Just about everybody who wanted to be Oregon's new Senator was in the bar. DeFazio, Smith, Roberts and Paulus, each at the center of small swarms of rooters, but I didn't see Wyden who was maybe looking for Bosnia. "Les AuCoin ought to be Senator because you cheated him out of it in '92," I said to Bozo Bob who seemed to be averting his face from the contenders. "Wayne Morse would have beat you and got his job back in '74 if he hadn't died on his shield. Did you off him?"

Wyden walked in like he had just discovered Bosnia. DeFazio jumped up from a table and punched him in the nose. Smith grabbed Wyden from the back and urged DeFazio to hit him again. Wyden laughed through blood dripping from his nostrils. "I'm gonna win!" he shouted.

Paulus stormed over to our table. "I know who you are!" she shouted at Bozo Bob.

"Go for the window," I said. "It's your only chance."

Instead Bozo Bob pulled Mayor Bozo from his seat and made a dash for the door. The place erupted. Everybody was fighting each other like the glorious old days of Astoria's universally notorious shanghai saloons. Tables, chairs, bottles and bodies went every which way. The North Coast Symphonic Band struck up a rousing melody while the Swat Cops walloped everybody nonpartisanly. Rita came over to the table. "How did you start that?" she demanded.

I took a sip of red death. "They're voting for our new Senator," I said cheerfully. A broken chair flew through a window next to me and crashed down on the sidewalk eight floors below. Rita sat down, wiped the rim of Bozo Bob's drink with her fingers and downed it in a gulp. Through the flurry of bodies and furniture I could see him running for the door with Paulus behind slapping him on the head with a mail-in ballot. Mayor Bozo was kicking a county commissioner, a fellow I believed owned a fuel dock.

"Have you thought about being Senator?" Rita asked, rubbing her finger over Mayor Bozo's abandoned drink.

"Why not you?"

She clinked the glass against mine.

"God Bless America," she said and swallowed it whole.

Sunbelt Stories

V.O. BLUM

Illustrated by Henk Pander



TIMES EAGLE BOOKS
ASTORIA, OREGON