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YOUNG SUE PREGNANT,  
MR HERBERT UTTERLY GAY. . .

Mrs Pierce dropped her last bed sheet from her clothes line into her washing basket, and frowned. She seemed to be suddenly aware of something niggling away at her at the back of her mind. It was some realisation as yet unrealised, a concept indistinct and nebulous.

She shrugged, picked up her basket and stepped back inside her boarding house through the back door. She passed through the kitchen where her help-girl, Sue Baxter, was drying up the lunch time dishes. Young Sue was a hard working girl, some fifteen years old and some fifteen weeks gone. Mrs Pierce had found her wandering the streets, and had taken her in and given her employment. She'd listened sympathetically to Sue's sad tale of how she fell pregnant to her Zulu boyfriend who then left to join the French Foreign Legion. Unfortunately for Sue, and even more unfortunate for the boyfriend, he was shot dead by a thirst-crazed Arab called Irving whose Rolls Royce had run out of petrol in the middle of the Sahara.

At the foot of the stairs in the small lounge of her boarding house Mrs Pierce met Mr Max Herbert, the young homosexual brain surgeon from room 7. He looked resplendent in his thigh-high boots, pink shorts, purple body shirt and beglittered canary-yellow hair. He skipped lightly down the steps, threw an airy "Hello, ducks" to Mrs Pierce, and tripped gayly out through the front door.

Pausing half-way up the stairs, Mrs Pierce thought for a moment.

Young Sue pregnant, Mr Herbert utterly gay. . .

That indistinct, hazy idea that floated in the back reaches of her awareness moved a little closer towards perception.

On the first floor Mrs Pierce passed room 3, occupied by Miss Jewel Jeranda, blackmailer, drug addict and all round good-time girl. Through Miss Jeranda's door Mrs Pierce heard the exclamation, "I'm pregnant!" But she took no notice of it. It was a phrase that was in common use amongst the female tenants of her boarding house, and she would hear it coming from

various rooms at least four times a week.

She continued up to the second floor where room 15 was reverberating to the screaming domestic developing between its occupants, the Hargraves. Mrs Hargraves was a thin, wiry woman with the strange talent of being able to foresee the future, and for not being in when the rent was due. A woman of near middle age, Mrs Hargraves claimed to be an exiled Russian princess, and was secretary of the Labour Party's women's auxiliary. Mr Hargraves, on the other hand, was somewhat less spectacular, being merely a clerk and thus much too dull to be of interest here . . . other than to note that he was an escaped triple murderer.

Moving along the passage, Mrs Pierce passed Mr Harry Worth. He flashed his toothy white smile from behind his fat cigar as he passed. If pressed, Mrs Pierce would probably admit she liked Mr Worth best of all her tenants. With his dark glasses, slicked back hair, \$1000 suits, black shirt and white tie, Mr Worth was quite a nice quiet man who always paid his rent on time. Being a drug pusher and part-time hit-man for the Mafia had nothing at all to do with his personality.

Mrs Pierce stopped and thought again.

Young Sue pregnant, Mr Herbert utterly gay, Miss Jeranda scoring and whoring, Mrs Hargraves a soothsayer, Mr Hargraves a fugitive, "I'm pregnant" a commonly heard phrase, Mr Worth a gangster. . .

Mrs Pierce had the vague feeling that it all added up to something, something rather nasty. But exactly what it was still eluded her.

Further along the corridor was room 28 where lived Mr Alex Bitler. He was a very old man with a little greyed Charlie Chaplin moustache. Although he spoke (or usually shouted) with a heavy German accent, he always insisted he was Swiss. He gave Mrs Pierce the impression that he had a somewhat shady past, though for the life of her she couldn't imagine just what it might have been.

Mrs Pierce ascended to the third floor and crept past the open door of Clara Windrush's room. She sighed a sincere sigh of relief, for if she had been pigeon-holed by Mrs Windrush, Mrs Pierce's ears would've needed a complete overhaul. For Mrs Windrush, nicknamed Radio Australia, was one of those people who apparently began talking at a remarkably early age and,

without stopping for breath, had continued on thus all through life. Fortunately for Mrs Pierce, however, Mrs Windrush was rattling away on the phone, narrating to some hapless listener all she could see through her telescope at the window.

At the beginning of the third floor corridor Mrs Pierce stopped. Her heart began to race. She braced herself to run down the hallway, hugging her washing basket tightly at her side. There was danger here, and the danger was that down that corridor lived twelve married couples, and, unluckily for the safety of any passers-by, adultery was rife.

Bravely, Mrs Pierce began to run, but half-way along was knocked down by a naked man sprinting from room 30 to room 34. Before she could regain her feet she was trampled on by a nude woman rushing from room 37 to room 44.

All in all it took Mrs Pierce twenty-five minutes to crawl the length of that busy passageway, and by the time she dragged herself and her basket of trampled washing to the door of her own room, she was black and blue from the pounding of many running bare feet all over her body.

Jason and his Argonauts would have had an easier time passing through the clashing rocks, Mrs Pierce thought ruefully, staggering through the door.

That indistinct something was still buzz, buzz, buzzing about the back of her mind, drifting just that side of comprehension when Mrs Pierce stepped into her bathroom to straighten her foot-messed hair. As she did so she happened to glance down into the basin. She glanced up again in surprise, down again at the basin, then up at her image in the mirror that showed an expression of fear unrolling across her face.

Young Sue pregnant, Mr Herbert utterly gay, she thought with rising alarm and ire. Miss Jeranda scoring and whoring, Mrs Hargraves a soothsayer, Mr Hargraves a fugitive, "I'm pregnant" a commonly heard phrase, Mr Worth a gangster, the mysterious Alex Bitler, a resident windbag and sticky-nose . . . adultery by the dozen. . .

It finally added up, and realisation leapt into crystal clear comprehension.

"No! It can't be!" she cried angrily. "My God! My God! Some blasted idiot's written me into a soap opera!"