

THE PIPES

by Alasdair Gray

Scene a small pub interior in a posh district, like the Wee Ubiquitous Chip BarCast: a barmaid, an ordinary customer, an Asiatic Gael

The barmaid is doing something barmaidly, like drying tumblers. The customer is reading the sports supplement of a well-known newspaper.

CUSTOMER: [*without looking up from his paper*] You know my brother, the artist?

BARMAID: Yes.

CUSTOMER: He's more than an artist now. He's the chief arts administrator for the whole of Lanarkshire. He's shagged just about every woman in Lanarkshire. [*looks up from his paper*] Has he shagged you?

BARMAID: No.

CUSTOMER: Where you from?

BARMAID: Dumbarton.

CUSTOMER: That explains it. [*reads again*] He's also into property.

BARMAID: Oh?

CUSTOMER: You know that tenement at the corner of Boghead Road and Sheriff Irvine Smith Street? That's his.

BARMAID: A prime site.

CUSTOMER: Yes, a prime site. He's filled it up to the ceilings with lavatory pans, lavatory cisterns and every other type of plumbing fixture.

BARMAID: I've seen them through the oriel windows.

CUSTOMER: You won't see them again. He's whitewashed all the windows on the inside.

A slightly brown man in full Highland regalia enters. He wears a large Sikh turban with two black cock feathers fixed to it with a Cairngorm brooch, and carries either a seven foot high Lochaber axe or a claymore. The others pay no attention to him as he leans the Lochaber axe against the wall beside the door or, advancing to the counter, lays the claymore upon it.

GAEL: [*in a clear soft West-Highland voice*] A celebratory malt of the month, if you please, mistress.

BARMAID pours one, places it before him. He lays coins on counter, lifts the glass.

GAEL: Keep the change. Slanjay Vawr. [*he downs it in one*] Does anyone here know the great news?

CUSTOMER: [*not looking up from his paper*] If you want to tell us the Broomielaw dykes have burst and rising water is turning Glasgow into a cluster of islands you can save your breath. We knew months ago that was bound to happen.

GAEL: Yes it is happening, but that is not the great news. The Prince has landed! Nobody else is interested.

GAEL: [*more emphatically*] I am telling you, the Prince has landed!

BARMAID: [*politely*] What prince is that?

GAEL: Prince Charles Windsor Xavier Sobieski Stuart the tenth, our Once and Future King.

BARMAID: I'm afraid politics don't interest me much these days.

CUSTOMER: [*looking up briefly*] Where was that prince dredged up?

GAEL: He has been with us all his life, but has been kept from his rightful inheritance by treacherous Prime Ministers conniving with that old bitch who lyingly calls herself Elizabeth the Second of Britain. The whole concept of a United States of Britain derives from her ancestor, James Stuart the Sixth of Scotland and First of

England. Do you not know that the House of Hanover's claim to the British throne derives from the Stuart connection that Queen Victoria was so proud of? The Hanoverian monarchs, being ashamed of their German blood, re-christened themselves Windsor during World War One. Prince Charles has extirpated that taint by fully identifying himself with his Stuart ancestry. Yes! All Scotland must now arise to make Prince Charlie the only rightful King of Scotland, England, Ireland, Poland and North America.

CUSTOMER: [*reading his newspaper again*] If you asylum seekers had any sense you would keep out of politics.

GAEL: [*in a dangerously calm voice*] Asylum seeker. Are you referring to my complexion?

CUSTOMER: It stands out a mile.

GAEL: I will have you know, I was born a subject of the British Empire. My father fought for it in two World Wars. In 1950, the year I was conceived, King George the Fifth in Buckingham Palace pinned a medal to his chest, an award for conspicuous bravery in the Khyber Pass. Soon after he married my mother, a MacTavish from the Isles. Since then I have farmed the soil of my ancestral croft with my own bare hands and you have the gall to call me an asylum seeker?

CUSTOMER: I'm glad the British Empire gave you a chance in life, but frankly, your sort have been diluting the purity of Scottish culture since the year dot and enough is enough – here in Glasgow anyway.

BARMAID and GAEL speak almost simultaneously.

BARMAID: What Scottish culture?

GAEL: Exactly what is my sort?

CUSTOMER: [*patiently at first, to the BARMAID*] The culture of Scotland gave the world the Protestant Bible, steam engines, gas lighting, tar macadam, MacIntosh raincoats, electric telegraph, television, penicillin, Campbell's Soup and McDonald's Burger King. [*to the GAEL, becoming excited*] Asylum seekers have been diluting that proud culture since the Eye-ties came here with their decadent ice cream and

fish and chip shops, then came the Jews, Indians, Pakis, Chinks, Serbs and Croats. Every fucking stupid wee nation we try to teach sense to by bombing brings in a new wave of asylum seekers crowding out our natural native food with their filthy foreign restaurants until now Scottish salmon, Scottish lamb, Aberdeen Angus beef, haggis, black puddings and Highland venison are for export only. Let us change the subject. [*quietly to the BARMAID*] She phoned me again last night.

The GAEL eager to speak raises his hand but is steadily ignored.

BARMAID: Your wife?

CUSTOMER: Said she still passionately loved me. She doesn't know what passion is. She's frigid. Never an orgasm in her life. She was drunk, of course. An alcoholic.

BARMAID: [*non-committaly*] I thought she'd sorted that problem out.

There is the faint distant sound of a pipe band playing "Wha Daur Meddle wi' Me".

CUSTOMER: Alcoholics never change. She sits around doing nothing but her hair and polishing her piano.

BARMAID: Jetta Spotiswood still sees her.

CUSTOMER: God knows why. [*raising his voice as the pipes sound nearer*] What's going on out there?

GAEL: [*grasping his claymore or Lochaber axe*] I told you! The Prince has landed!

CUSTOMER: [*louder still*] Why should anyone blow about a second rate no-user like the Prince of Wales?

BARMAID: [*angrily*] Excuse me but that language is out of order!

GAEL: [*shouting over the sound of the pipes*] My friend, you have been brainwashed by the capitalist press which derides a man for loving trees, old architecture and a lady as unglamorous as himself! The only man fit to represent us all! I am not the only man who will help the last of the Stuarts redeem his kingdom!

The GAEL rushes out. A moment later there is a tremendous splash after which SOUNDS the moan of quickly deflating bagpipes. The CUSTOMER stares at the BARMAID who stares at the foot of the door, from beneath which a thin trickle of water enters.

BARMAID: The water's coming in. We'll soon have to leave.

CUSTOMER: [*philosophically*] Aye, the Lowlands of Scotland will soon be completely submarine. It's only a trickle just now – ten or fifteen minutes to go before our feet get wet. Time for a quickie. A whisky please. Have one on me. [*he lays down money*]

BARMAID: [*pouring two whiskies*] Thanks. Will you be moving to the Highlands?

CUSTOMER: If there's room. The English have been buying houses there. You've got to admire their foresight! Folk with cash are always a jump or two ahead of us.

BARMAID: Why didn't they build dykes? I mean, Holland has been under sea level for centuries and they aren't flooded.

CUSTOMER: It's a matter of economics, dear. The British Empire was once the world's police force, so it had no time for local agriculture. Now the job's been taken over by the Yanks who need our support to save civilisation from terrorists who do not share our democratic values. Let's have another for the road.

With a great CRASH the lights go out and there is a terribly prolonged SOUND of rushing waters.

THE END