

Kate Not to me.

Jack Well, they begin very formally, very solemnly with the ritual sacrifice of a fowl or a goat or a calf down at the bank of the river. Then the ceremonial cutting and anointing of the first yams and the first cassava; and we pass these round in huge wooden bowls. Then the incantation – chant, really – that expresses our gratitude and that also acts as a rhythm or percussion for the ritual dance. And then, when the thanksgiving is over, the dance continues. And the interesting thing is that it grows naturally into a secular celebration; so that almost imperceptibly the religious ceremony ends and the community celebration takes over. And that part of the ceremony is a real spectacle. We light fires round the periphery of the circle; and we paint our faces with coloured powders; and we sing local songs; and we drink palm wine. And then we dance – and dance – and dance – children, men, women, most of them lepers, many of them with misshapen limbs, with missing limbs – dancing, believe it or not, for days on end! It is the most wonderful sight you have ever seen! (*Laughs.*) That palm wine! They dole it out in horns! You lose all sense of time!

Oh, yes, the Ryangans are a remarkable people: there is no distinction between the religious and the secular in their culture. And of course their capacity for fun, for laughing, for practical jokes – they've such open hearts! In some respects they're not unlike us. You'd love them, Maggie. You should come back with me!

How did I get into all that? You must stop me telling these long stories. Exercise time! I'll be back in ten minutes; and only last week it took me half an hour to do number four. You've done a great job with me, Kate. So please do keep nagging at me. (*He moves off – then stops.*) It's not Gilbert and Sullivan, is it?

Kate Sorry?

Jack That quotation.

Kate What's that, Jack?

Jack 'O ruddier than the cherry / O sweeter than the berry' – no, it's not Gilbert and Sullivan. But it'll come back to me, I promise you. It's all coming back. (*Again he moves off.*)

Kate Jack.

Jack Yes?

Kate You are going to start saying Mass again?

Jack We've agreed on next Monday, haven't we? Haven't we, Maggie?

Maggie Yes.

Jack At first light. The moment Rose's white cock crows. A harvest ceremony. You'll have to find a big gong somewhere, Kate.

*He leaves. Pause. Kate and Maggie stare at each other in concern, in alarm. They speak in hushed voices.*

Kate I told you – you wouldn't believe me – I told you.

Maggie Shhh.

Kate What do you think?

Maggie He's not back a month yet.

Kate Yesterday I heard about their medicine man who brought a woman back from death –

Maggie He needs more time.

Kate And this morning it was 'the spirits of the tribe'! And when I mentioned Mass to him you saw how he dodged about.