

KATE: But these aren't Christian ceremonies, Jack, are they?

**start** JACK: Oh, no. The Ryangans have always been faithful to their own beliefs – like these two Festivals I'm telling you about; and they are very special, really magnificent ceremonies. I haven't described those two Festivals to you before, have I?

~~KATE: Not once.~~  
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 casava; and we pass these round in huge wooden bowls. Then the incantation – a 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?

Jack #2

Jack #1

JACK: Forgive me, Chris. You were only a baby when I went away. I remember Mother lifting you up as the train was pulling out of the station and catching your hand and waving it at me. You were so young you had scarcely any hair but she had managed to attach a tiny pink – a tiny pink – what's the word? – a bow! – a bow! – just about here; and as she waved your hand, the bow fell off. It's like a – a picture? – a camera-picture? – a photograph! – it's like a photograph in my mind.

~~Chris: The hair is a beautiful color even now, Jack.~~

JACK: And I remember you crying, Margaret.

~~Chris: Was I?~~

JACK: Yes; your face was all blotchy with tears.

~~Maggie: You may be sure, beautiful as ever.~~

JACK: (To AGNES) And you and Kate were on Mother's right and Rose was between you; you each had a hand. And Mother's face, I remember, showed nothing. I often wondered about that afterwards.

~~Chris: She knew she would never see you again in her lifetime.~~

JACK: I know that. But in the other life. Do you think perhaps Mother didn't believe in the ancestral spirits?

KATE: Ancestral – ! What are you blathering about, Jack? Mother was a saintly woman who knew she was going straight to heaven. And don't you forget to take your medicine again this evening. You're supposed to take it three times a day.

JACK: One of our priests took so much quinine that he became an addict and almost died. A German priest; Father Sharpeggi. He was rushed to hospital in Kampala but they could do nothing for him. So Okawa and I brought him to our local medicine man and Karl Sharpeggi lived until he was eighty-eight! There was a strange white bird on my windowsill when I woke up this morning.