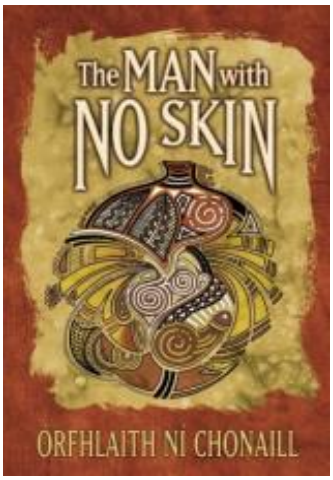
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The Man with No Skin

by Órfhlaith Ni Chonaill



About the Book

When Father Ciarán O'Sullivan is viciously attacked in his home and left for dead, he realizes that his life has been a waste. As a priest in the African village of Kishagi, on the slopes of Mount Kenya, he has tried to be both divine and human, and failed at both.

As he finds his way back from the limbo lands between living and dying, he accepts he has much to learn about himself, and more to learn from and about the people he has presumed to serve.

This is a journey of love, hatred, jealousy, and forgiveness in a place at the center of the whirlpool of differing cultures and beliefs.

The Man With No Skin vividly illustrates the clash between traditional and modern worlds and the cultural divide between blacks and whites in Africa. The human impact of the spread of AIDS and a priest?s struggle with his own humanity are also important themes.

Discussion Guide

1. What is the significance of the title **The Man With No Skin**? Why do you believe it was chosen to represent the book?

2. How would you describe Kishagi? In what ways is it typical of any African village, and in what ways is it different?

3. What are the similarities between Wambui and Shiku? In what ways are they different? How do their lives reflect the lives of women today in Africa?

4. In his communication with his superiors, Father Ciarán tries to explain why he believes some Catholic principles

aren?t effective in Kenya. Do you agree with his position?

5. Part of the message of the book is that priests are human too. How is Father Ciarán?s humanity expressed in the book?

6. Irungu?s employment with Mrs. O?Flaherty, a white ?Mama,? ends badly. What changed in him after the funeral?

7. Why does Father Madden believe Ciarán was attacked? Does Shiku echo the same message later in the book?

8. How does Father Ciarán?s relationship with his family back in Ireland relate to his decision to remain in Africa after the attack?

9. During his recovery Father Ciarán writes his memoir, but feels his story doesn?t make sense, and switches to fiction. Why does he feel his life has been a waste? Discuss the art of writing as a form of healing.

10. Father Ciarán?s relationship with Shiku is clearly outside the boundaries of his religious faith. Do you feel it is a natural outgrowth of a strong bond that has developed between a caregiver and the person cared for?

11. What motivated Father Ciarán to become a priest? How does his sense of spirituality change after his recovery?

12. What role does Julius play in the novel?

13. The end of the book deals with the ability of people to forgive themselves and others within relationships. How does forgiveness become a reality?

14. How does Father Ciarán go about building a new life for himself?

Author Bio

Órfhlaith (pronounced Oh-er-la) Ni Chonaill has lived in Ireland most of her life. She spent four years in Nairobi, Kenya in the mid-90?s. In 1998 she graduated from Trinity College, Dublin, with an M. Phil. (Creative Writing). In 2001 she obtained a certificate in Creative Writing Workshop Leadership with Amherst Writers & Artists, in Massachusetts, U.S.A. She is an affiliate of AWA and a member of the Irish Writers' Union.

Her poems, short stories and interviews have been published in *Force 10* and other Irish magazines. An African story, "Kikuyu Grass", was short listed for a Hennessy Award in 1999.

Órfhlaith lives with her husband in Strandhill, Co. Sligo, Ireland, where she writes and facilitates a creative writing workshop called Writers' Ink.

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