



SÈRIE 1

Listening comprehension

(3 points)

KAREN BLIXEN, A LIFE MADE FOR FILM

In the following conversation you are going to hear some new words. Read and listen to them. Make sure you know what they mean.

supplies: provisions / provisiones

spells of drought: sequera / sequía

hazardous: arriscat / arriesgado

auction: subhasta / subasta

engaged: compromesa / comprometida

breakdown: atac, crisi / ataque, crisis

Ready?

Now read the questions on the following page. Read them carefully before listening to the conversation.

Journalist: Among the many stories that Kenya hides, one of the most interesting is that lived by Karen Blixen, the Danish writer who published some of the most beautiful stories of the twentieth century under the name of Isak Dinesen. However, it was in 1985 when the film directed by Sydney Pollack, *Out of Africa*, starring Meryl Streep and Robert Redford, brought her universal fame. But today we are not here to talk about the film but rather about the woman Karen Blixen. And to do so, we have here with us, Professor Jensen from the University of Copenhagen, who has just published Blixen's biography. Good morning, Dr Jensen.

Dr Jensen: Good morning. A pleasure to be here.

Journalist: Professor Jensen, Blixen did not like being interviewed. Where did you find the information you needed to write her biography?

Dr Jensen: You're right. In 1957 when she was interviewed in *The New York Times Book Review*, she said that interviews are like medical examinations and, who can feel inspired when he is being examined!

Journalist: Funny way of describing an interview!

Dr Jensen: Yeah, but ... in fact, she did give many interviews.

Journalist: So, did you get information about her life there?



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Dr Jensen: Not really. The interviews shed light on Karen Blixen's personality, literary interests and her view of Africa. She did not talk a lot about her private life. In the interviews, she commented on a number of social issues and values, as well as more general aspects of her storytelling.

Journalist: OK. Tell us something about her life. We all know about her life in Kenya and her love affair with an aristocratic hunter because of the film "Out of Africa". But how much of what we see in the film is real?

Dr Jensen: The film is based on Blixen's life in Kenya but, in my opinion, the film has become a classic because the safaris, the biplane and the epic scenery captured the imagination of cinema audiences all over the world.

Journalist: I see. So, let's look at Blixen's life. She was Danish and the daughter of a wealthy politician. Why did she go to Kenya?

Dr Jensen: Marriage. In 1913, when she was 28 years old, she left Denmark and her childhood home, and embarked on the journey to Africa, where she married a Swedish Baron named Bror Blixen-Finecke and began a new life on a coffee farm in Kenya. Their families gave them money to start the coffee farm but in August that year the First World War broke out and spread to Africa. This had consequences for the Blixens: there was a shortage of both workers and supplies for the farms. Even more, in 1917 the British banned the importation of coffee. On top of this, Kenya was hit by a plague in cattle and by catastrophic spells of drought. The difficult conditions were even worse because Blixen's husband started hazardous projects, which led to debts. They lost a lot of money. To make matters worse, Karen became very ill. She was diagnosed as having syphilis and had to go back to Denmark to be treated. So that meant more spending.

Journalist: So, I imagine those were hard times for them.

Dr Jensen: Sure, they were. But Karen was happy at that time because she met the English aristocrat Denys Finch Hatton, who was a safari leader in Kenya. The meeting led to the start of a long love affair, the nature of which is very apparent in Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa*.

Journalist: And what happened to the coffee farm? And her husband?

Dr Jensen: Well, the board of directors of the farm fired her husband and Karen took over the running of the coffee farm. On top of that, in 1925 they got divorced.

Journalist: So, did she manage to make a living out of the farm together with Finch Hatton?

Dr Jensen: On the contrary. Karen did not succeed in straightening out the farm's hopeless financial situation, and in 1931 the board of directors ran out of patience and the farm was sold at auction. Karen had to get ready to leave Africa. At this point she was ready for a change because a few months earlier, Denys Finch Hatton died when his private plane crashed.

Journalist: Ohhh. So, she went back to Denmark.



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- Dr Jensen: Exactly: In 1931, 46-year-old Karen Blixen, now financially ruined, moved in with her mother in Denmark.
- Journalist: And that was when that she started writing?
- Dr Jensen: Well, not exactly. Many great artists and writers show a desire during childhood and early youth to express themselves in the form of poems, little stories and sketches. This was also true of Karen. At 8, she wrote poems, fairy tales, stories and plays. In 1907 and 1909, before her marriage, some of her short stories were published under the pseudonym "Osceola" in two of the leading literary periodicals of the time, but they received no particular attention. But in 1913, when she became engaged to the Swedish baron, she gave up all thoughts of an artistic career. In a letter written to her brother, she explains that she did it to follow the convention of the time: women were destined for marriage and family life.
- Journalist: So, she gave up writing when she was in Kenya and started writing again when back in Denmark?
- Dr Jensen: Yes and no. She started writing in Africa around 1925, when her problems had begun piling up. But yes, it was when her life changed radically that she was obliged to find a new purpose in life and a new occupation, so she set out to finish the stories. In 1934, *Seven Gothic Tales* was published under the pseudonym "Isak Dinesen" and in 1937 *Out of Africa* made Karen Blixen's name a modern classic.
- Journalist: She did not have an easy life but, at least, she was aware of her literary success.
- Dr Jensen: Yes, that's right. She was a strong woman with extremely fragile health. By the time she died in 1962, she had had several health breakdowns including severe operations which left her an invalid and unable to eat. However, when her health allowed, she gathered enough strength to visit different countries to receive prizes or to give talks on her books.
- Journalist: What an extraordinary woman! Thanks, Dr Jensen for giving us an insight into her fascinating life.
- Dr Jensen: My pleasure.



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1. She did not talk much about herself and her ordinary life.
2. Their own families.
3. It rained a lot and the farm was flooded often.
4. She wrote about the love affair in *Out of Africa*.
5. The farm went bankrupt and was sold at auction.
6. When she was 8 years old.
7. She wanted to follow the general expectations for women at that time.
8. She went on writing and gave talks when her illness allowed.



Reading Comprehension

1. they were able to forget about their problems.
2. if we learn to go without technological tools.
3. students learn best after moments of outdoor relaxation.
4. has induced several organizations to remind people to unplug.
5. Taking technological breaks can develop into a severe addiction.
6. to pause our use of connected devices periodically.
7. Because we know companies are constantly launching state-of-the-art devices.
8. Being connected all the time makes us less creative.