



## **Babette's Feast**

*Isak Dinesen (Pseudonym) , Karen Blixen*

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With the mysterious arrival of Babette, a refugee from France's civil war, life for two pious sisters and their tiny hamlet begins to change. Before long, Babette has convinced them to try something other than boiled codfish and ale bread: a gourmet French meal. Her feast scandalizes the elders, except for the visiting general. Just who is this strangely talented Babette, who has terrified this pious town with the prospect of losing their souls for enjoying too much earthly pleasure?

## Babette's Feast Details

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Author : Isak Dinesen (Pseudonym) , Karen Blixen

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## From Reader Review Babette's Feast for online ebook

### Lance Greenfield says

The story and the language (translation) are so quaint.

As it such a short story, it would be difficult to summarise and add detail to the publisher's blurb, without spoilers, so I won't. What I would say, though, is that this is a book that I could read several times, and learn something new each time. You know how it is when you view a detailed oil painting for the tenth time, and notice something that you've never seen before? Well, this is the equivalent in book form.

Watch out for a lesson in grace.

This book is almost guaranteed to be different to anything that you have ever read before. Try it for yourself.

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### Laura says

You may read online here.

*From IMDb:*

*In 19th century Denmark, two adult sisters live in an isolated village with their father, who is the honored pastor of a small Protestant church that is almost a sect unto itself. Although they each are presented with a real opportunity to leave the village, the sisters choose to stay with their father, to serve to him and their church. After some years, a French woman refugee, Babette, arrives at their door, begs them to take her in, and commits herself to work for them as maid/housekeeper/cook. Sometime after their father dies, the sisters decide to hold a dinner to commemorate the 100th anniversary of his birth. Babette experiences unexpected good fortune and implores the sisters to allow her to take charge of the preparation of the meal. Although they are secretly concerned about what Babette, a Catholic and a foreigner, might do, the sisters allow her to go ahead. Babette then prepares the feast of a lifetime for the members of the tiny church and an important gentleman related to one of them.*

### Opening lines:

**In Norway there is a fjord—a long narrow arm of the sea between tall mountains—named Berlevaag Fjord. At the foot of the mountains the small town of Berlevaag looks like a child's toy-town of little wooden pieces painted gray, yellow, pink and many other colors.**

### Quotations

Page 2:

In the Loewenhielm family there existed a legend to the effect that long ago a gentleman of the name had married a Huldra, a female mountain spirit of Norway, who is so fair that the air round her shines and quivers. Since then, from time to time, members of the family had been second-sighted.

Page 17:

Of what happened later in the evening nothing definite can here be stated. None of the guests later on had any clear remembrance of it. They only knew that the rooms had been filled with a heavenly light as if a

number of small halos had blended into one glorious radiance. Taciturn old people received the gift of tongues; ears that for years had been almost deaf were opened to it. Time itself had merged into eternity. Long after midnight the windows of the house shone like gold, and golden song flowed out into the winter air.

A movie *Babette's Feast* (1987) was made based on this novella, with Stéphane Audran, Bodil Kjer, Birgitte Federspiel.

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### **Jadranka says**

"Babetina gozba" je pravo malo remek-delo.

Život autorke ove novele, Karen Blixen, prija je za sebe. Bila je pesnikinja, slikarka, plemkinja, vlasnica plantaže u Africi (da, da, dobro ste proitali - vlasnica plantaže kafe, a predgrađe Najrobija gde se nalazila njena plantaža danas se zove Karen). Njena dela su doživela brojne ekranizacije, ukolik je i jedan asteroid nazvan po njoj :) Ali, ona je sebe najradije nazivala pripovedačem, i kako nam je to preneo u odličnom Pogovoru prevodilac Radoš Kosović, sebe je jesto poredila sa Šeherezadom.

Radnja "Babetine gozbe" odigrava se u 19.veku, na samom severu Norveške, i pored naslovne junakinje Babet, njene dve gazdarice, sestara Martine i Filipe, glavni junaci ove nadasve simpatične novele su i stanovnici malog gradića po imenu Berlevog.

"Babetina gozba" je pisana na prvi pogled lakim i pitkim stilom, koji lako uvlači i itaoca u Babetinu, Martininu i Filipinu svakodnevnicu. U isto vreme je odlično dočarana atmosfera malog gradića i mentalitet njegovih stanovnika.

Ocena: 5+

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### **Silvery says**

"Pero había momentos en que le parecía que el mundo no era cuestión moral, sino mística. Se miraba en el espejo, observaba la hilera de condecoraciones de su pecho y suspiraba para sí: '¡Vanidad de vanidades y todo vanidad!'

Me ha sorprendido gratamente este relato.

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### **Nola says**

This is a short novella (probably more novelette) by Isak Dinesen (or Karen Blixen of 'Out of Africa' fame).

Two older sisters (Martine and Philippa) have led a puritan lifestyle in 19th century Norway, preserving the memory of their deceased father who was the much-loved Dean of the local Lutheran church. Each of them had potential love-interests in their younger days, but they spurned their affections, choosing instead to lead a spartan life that would keep their souls pure.

One day, a bedraggled French woman called Babette arrives on their doorstep with a letter from one of the women's former suitors. The letter details Babette's escape from France during an uprising and asks the sisters to extend kindness to her. They are very poor and cannot afford a maid, but Babette offers to work for free if they will take her in. They agree, even though they have some reservations about having a Catholic living under their roof. They train Babette to keep them in the simple lifestyle they prefer, including how to prepare simple foods like soup and haddock.

After many years, Babette wins 10 000 Francs in the French Lottery. The sisters fear she will leave them and return to France, but she has one request. The Dean's 100th anniversary is approaching and she wants to cook them and their guests a French meal. The sisters reluctantly agree, though as the day approaches, they wonder if they have made a bargain with the devil, especially when a live turtle is delivered to the kitchen. I can't say much more because of spoilers, except that the dinner brings about some transformations.

This is a charming little book. I've never seen the movie, so didn't really know what to expect. It's essentially a redemption story. It also provides an interesting insight into the need for true artists to do that for which they were created. It has some similar themes to the movie of 'Chocolat', though the book of 'Chocolat' is darker.

I read the Kindle version, and the end of the book includes dozens of titles of other short Penguin classics. I'll have to check out some of them.

Overall, an interesting story of redemption and sacrifice.

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### **Bfisher says**

This is an astonishingly good story, there is an awful lot packed into a small space. What I enjoyed most about this story is the sustained irony, the way that familiar things are stood on their heads, and how well the writer plays variations on a theme.

A great deal of this story's effect depends on familiarity with some once well-known Christian themes and images, which may make it less accessible for some.

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### **Helle says**

This is a lovely little tale about two elderly sisters living in Norway in the late 19th century, entrenched in their religious, spinsterly lives, and their exiled French cook, who spends her lottery winnings on one fine feast, the likes of which no one in the small town has ever seen before.

It is about the meeting of opposites: lives, values, people, and about the potential bridging of gaps, about sensuousness and duty, about the choices we make in life and those that are made for us.

I read/listened to it in Danish because Karen Blixen was Danish, but because of her long self-imposed exile in Africa, she mainly wrote in English and then later translated her works into Danish. This novella didn't suffer from it, I felt. In fact, I loved the enchanting, quaint, almost fairy-tale like tone. I read some of her

short stories ages ago, and now I wonder why I've never read more by Denmark's second-most famous author. Definitely recommended.

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### **Sla?ana says**

Babettina gozba spisatelji?ino je, nakon Moje Afrike, drugo najvažnije i najpopularnije djelo. Prvi put je objavljeno 1950. u ameri?kom ženskom magazinu "Ladies' Home Journal".

Rije? je o vrlo neobi?noj pripovijesti lociranoj u norveškom gradi?u Berlevågu, smještenom izme?u visokih planina koje fizi?ki zatvaraju vezu sa svijetom, dok je mjesto duhovno izolirao pastor, osniva? stroge crkvene sekte, ?iji su se ?lanovi odrekli svih zemaljskih zadovoljstava. U vrijeme kad po?inje pri?a pastor je odavno mrtav, ali njegov duh i dalje drži na okupu, u miru i slozi, pobožne stanovnike. U pastorovoju ku?i žive njegove k?eri, Martine i Philippa, koje imaju francusku služavku Babette. Isprva se u ku?i osje?alo nepovjerenje prema strankinji, strah da s njom nije ušla i raskalašenost koja se povezivala s Parizom, ali kad je Francuskinja nau?ila spravljati jednostavna jela te k tome ispri?ala gospo?icama da je radila u kuhinji jednog starog biskupa koji je bio svetac, sestre su je po?ele gledati drugim o?ima. Hrana, koja dotad u luteranskoj zajednici nije imala nikakvo zna?enje, u Babettinim je rukama dobila novu, nadnaravnu mo?. Jedinu vezu s Francuskom došljakinja je zadržala kroz Državnu lutriju, koju joj je redovito upla?ivala prijateljica u Parizu. Jednoga dana u Berlevåg je stigla obavijest da je njena sre?ka dobila glavni zgoditak. Saznavši za to, sestre su se prestrašile da ?e ih Babette napustiti i vratiti se u domovinu, no ona ih je iznenadila neobi?nom ponudom: za taj novac željela je organizirati gozbu u prigodi stote obljetnice pastorova ro?enja.

Babettina gozba zapravo je prispodoba, živa slika svakodnevlja kojom se osvjetljuje zbiljavišeg reda. Blixen se tu postavila kao kriti?arka religije, njenih rigidnih formi i rituala koji ometaju prihva?anje milosti Božje. Velikim umjetnicima, poru?uje Blixen, nije mjesto u takvom svijetu, jer ?e, požele li usre?iti ljude svojim kreacijama, ostati neshva?eni.

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### **Chrissie says**

This is absolutely **wonderful!!!!**

This novella is only 52 pages long. There is no possible excuse for not being able to find time to read this book. I remember the wonderful movie, but this is even better. The characterizations of the people are funny and moving. Great prose. I adore it. Add it to the top of your reading lists.

I have read about half, 25 pages.

I read Out of Africa ages ago. Was it this good?! Should I reread it?

On completion:

Oh, it was too short! I got interested and then a door was slammed in my face. The movie adds more, and that is good. But the person writing this review, me, doesn't like short stories. If you like short stories or short novellas it is wonderful. Not only does it deal with culinary art, and it is an art, it also deals with how people of different cultures view and judge each other. Not being a cook myself, it was the latter theme that I fastened upon.

The prose is wonderful. It has a style that fits the time and place, a teeny village at the northern edge of Norway in the mid 1800s. I will give you an example so you can judge :

*Her mistresses at first had trembled a little, just as the Dean had once done, at the idea of receiving a Papist under their roof. But they did not like to worry a hard-tried fellow-creature with catechization; neither were they sure of their French. They silently agreed that the example of a good Lutheran life would be the best means of converting the servant. In this way Babette's presence in the house became, so to say, a moral spur to its inhabitants.*

*They had distrusted Monsieur Papin's assertion that Babette could cook. In France, they knew, people ate frogs. They showed Babette how to prepare a split cod and an ale-and-bread soup; during the demonstration the Frenchwoman's face became absolutely expressionless. But within a week Babette cooked a split cod and an ale-and-bread soup as well as anybody born and bred in Berlevvaag.*

*The idea of French and luxury and extravagance next had alarmed and dismayed the Dean's daughters. The first day after Babette had entered their service they took her between them and explained to her that they were poor and that to them luxurious fare was sinful. Their own food must be as plain as possible..... (page 16)*

The humor is subtle. Often it concerns cultural differences.

The ending of the book....well I think the message was a bit different from that in the movie! I very much liked this book, but it was way, way, way too short. That is why I am reducing the stars. It is probably just me who has a hard time with short novels.

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### **Truehobbit says**

Saw this in the library and assuming it was translated from Danish, took it out. Found that she wrote in English, though, which strikes me as a bit odd.

It read nicely, but was more a collection of individual moments than an actual story. Also, as is usual for tales like this, there seemed to be a 'message' - which I didn't get. I ended the book thinking 'right - er...so?', which is never a good sign as a response to art. ;)

There was an afterword about Blixen's life and work which said she had a troubled life and wrote about situations like the ones she experienced in her life. This makes sense - a kind of 'venting' story. And as I'm not interested in that kind of text, it explains my 'meh'-reaction.

It also said "it is a parable about the liberation man can get through art from the necessities forced upon him by life" - makes sense, too, even though I didn't get it from the text straight away.

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### **Diane S ? says**

This was a short novella about a young woman Babette who finds shelter from the civil war in France with two sisters. She stays for many years, cooking the bland food the expect but then asks a favor. She wants to prepare a French feast for the women and their guests on their Father's birthday.

Enjoyed this very much. There is some subtle humor and even a bit of a mystery. Who really is this mysterious Babette? Why at her dinner do the guests find themselves changing? Quite a good story from an author I have long wanted to read.

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### **Paula Vince says**

Martine and Philippa are austere, elderly sisters who still retain traces of their former ravishing beauty. Their father was a strict Puritan minister, and they had devoted their lives to serving with him. Babette is their unassuming French maid who has won a windfall in the lottery. Instead of leaving the sisters, as they fear, she chooses to treat them and their guests to a sumptuous feast. Although all the money will be blown in one night, Babette insists there is nothing she would rather do. Martine and Philippa have serious misgivings, but let her go ahead.

A story doesn't have to be long to pack a powerful punch. For a start, you can almost smell the fragrance of the French banquet cooking. She intends to serve dishes such as Potage a'la Tortue (Turtle Soup), Blinis Demidoff (pancakes with caviar) and Cailles en Sarcophage (quail in puff pastry with truffle sauce), along with the best vintage wines. To me, the story is also full of far-reaching, theological analogies.

- a) Appearances can be deceptive. How ironic that the sisters initially assumed they needed to give Babette cooking instructions, and how obediently she always stuck to the limit they set. God may do the same with us, if we insist He stays in a box. It also shows us not to underestimate those who appear quietest and most humble.
- b) The presence of Lorens Loewenthalm at the dinner is significant. He's a King Solomon type of character, having achieved everything he'd ever striven for. Decorated, admired and envied, only he knows the depth of his own emptiness. He alone of the guests has the background to grasp the incredible gift of grace which is taking place. Babette is far more than the person the others think she is. And those who think they're extending grace may, in fact, be recipients of a far larger grace. Most of the others only went along to humour the sisters and their strange housemaid, described as 'the dark Martha in the house of their two fair Marys.'
- c) The biggest point of all is that grace is infinite. Even Martine and Philippa, who consider such luxurious fare a sinful sign of excess, are lavished with the gift. They don't realise the magnitude of what haggard, wild-eyed Babette is giving them - yet she still chooses to give it. Grace is not contingent on what we have figured out or done, in other words, how deserving we are. It makes no conditions and singles out nobody in particular. (Get the sisters' vast understatement, 'It was quite a nice dinner, Babette.')

Maybe stories such as this is what it will take to impress some truths on some readers. It reminds me of the parables of Jesus, which he claimed to have told for the same reason. Yes, I can imagine him beginning, 'There were once two elderly sisters who were still very beautiful. And they had a maid...' For a story such as this, short is perfect.

**Maria Clara says**

3.5/Realmente tengo muy pocas palabras hacia este cuento/relato. Es bonito, suave, sin ningún aspaviento, y con un final un tanto peculiar. Sí, algo así.

**Juliana says**

4.5

Adorei!! A ambientação e escrita desse livro são fantásticas. O caráter existencial e mágico, beirando o religioso e ao mesmo tempo o folclórico. Adorei! Só achei um pouco demais na parte de religião em algumas partes, mas foi algo que consegui relevar de alguma maneira (:

**KamRun says**

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**Marco Tamborrino says**

*"Può il risultato di tanti lunghi anni di vittorie risolversi in una sconfitta?"*

Ne avrei fatto volentieri a meno.

## Ana Claudia says

Esse livro me surpreendeu.

Eu li sinopses que retratavam Babette como uma santa (praticamente), mas, ao ler o livro, entendi um pouco mais as motivações e a personalidade dela. As irmãs não me cativaram, mas é exatamente por isso que elas são tão reais: a dedicação fervorosa à religião as deixou anestesiadas, e você sente que ela não fizeram nada na vida. Babette surge como um elemento do equilíbrio. Ela submete-se aos costumes da família por anos, até que finalmente tem a oportunidade de fazer algo que a lembrasse da antiga vida, além de retribuir a hospitalidade de tantos anos. O que ela não sabe é que com isso ela muda a vida de todos naquele vilarejo. Ela parece que consegue comunicar os próprios sentimentos por meio da comida de forma mágica. A história é bonita e li o livro em uma sentada apenas, já que ele é bem curto.

## Gabriela Ventura says

Um conto que me comoveu desde a primeira leitura, há muito anos. Uma protagonista que é uma artista e uma exilada política está prestes a mudar a vida de uma pequena comunidade luterana num fiorde qualquer da Noruega. O triunfo da arte e da performance sobre a austeridade. Sobretudo, é um conto sobre escolhas que fazemos - e, por consequência, as renúncias que vem à reboque - e sobre fazer o que amamos (ou o que consideramos importantes) por nós mesmos.

É um conto belíssimo

## Duane says

Best known for her award winning memoir *Out of Africa*, Karen Blixen also wrote several other works. In addition to being a farmer/rancher/adventurer, she was, in fact, a very good writer, and that is evident in this short work, *Babette's Feast*. It's the story of a French woman, exiled during the political upheaval in her country, who seeks asylum in a small Norwegian village with two pious sisters. But Babette has a secret, and when good fortune smiles upon her, she uses her secret to repay the sisters who took her in.

## **Pinkerton says**

Un pranzo venuto proprio con tutti i crismi. Non pensavo che un racconto tanto breve mi sarebbe piaciuto così. Nonostante la diffidenza iniziale degli ospiti Babette ha regalato loro un pasto fenomenale che ha reso l'atmosfera magica come non lo era ormai da tempo. Un lavoretto coi fiocchi da parte di Babette e lo stesso dicasi per l'autrice. Mi è persino venuta voglia di vedere il film ^^

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