

Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters

A long time ago in a small village half a day's journey from where a great king lived, lived a man named Mufaro and his two beautiful daughters, Manyara and Nyasha.

Manyara was very mean tempered. Whenever her father's back was turned she'd tease her sister, "Someday, Nyasha, I will be a queen and you a servant in my household." Nyasha would respond, "I will be pleased to serve you. But why do you say such things? You are clever strong and beautiful. Why are you so unhappy?" Manyara replied, "Because everyone talks about how kind you are. They praise everything you do. I'm certain father loves you best, but when I am queen, everyone will know that your silly kindness is only weakness."

Nyasha was sad Manyara felt this way, but ignored her sister's words and went about her chores. Nyasha kept a small plot of land on which she kept a garden of flowers and vegetables. She always sang as she worked and her singing made her crops more beautiful than anyone else's.

One day a small garden snake appeared in the garden and said, "Good morning, little Nyoka." Nyoka responded, "You are welcome here. You will keep away any creatures that might spoil my garden. She bent forward and gave the little snake a loving pat on the head and returned to her work. From that day Nyoka was always at Nyasha's side when she tended the garden. She sang all the more sweetly when he was there.

Early one morning a messenger from the city arrived. The Great King wanted a wife. The messenger announced, "The most worthy and beautiful daughters in the land were invited to appear before the King. He will choose one of them to be his Queen!"

Mufaro called his daughters to him. "It would be a great honor if one of you were chosen. Prepare yourselves to journey to the city. I shall prepare a wedding party. We leave tomorrow before the sun rises." Manyara replied, "But my father, it would be painful for either of us to leave you, even to be wife to the king. Nyasha would grieve to death if she ever were to part from you. I am strong. Send me to the city and let poor Nyasha be happy with you here." Mustafa beamed with pride. "The king has asked for the most worthy and beautiful. No, Manyara, I cannot send you alone. Only a king can choose between two such worthy daughters. Both of you must go!"

That night, when everyone was asleep, Manyara stole quietly out of the village. She had never been in the forest alone at night before and was frightened. But her greed to appear before the King first drove her on. In her hurry, she almost stumbled over a small boy who appeared suddenly and stood in her path. "Please," he said. "I am hungry. Will you give me something to eat?" "I only have enough for myself" replied Manyara. "But please!" cried the boy. "I am so very hungry." "Out of my way, boy! Tomorrow I will become your queen. How dare you stand in my path?"

A long way down the road, Manyara was confronted by an old woman seated upon a large stone. "I will give you some advice, Manyara. After you pass the place two paths cross, you will see a grove of trees. They will laugh at you. You must not laugh back at them.

And later you will meet a man whose head is under his arm. You must be polite to him." Manyara huffed, "How do you know my name? How dare you advise your future queen? Stand aside you ugly old woman!" and rushed on her way without looking back.

Manyara came across the grove of trees the woman told her about, and it seemed that the trees did laugh at her. Manyara said to herself, "I must be calm. I will not be afraid." She looked up at the trees and laughed out loud. "I laugh at you!" she shouted, and hurried on.

She was nearing the river across which was the great city when she saw a man, his head tucked under his arm. Manyara ran past him without speaking. "A queen acknowledges only those who please her," she thought to herself. I will be Queen! I will be Queen!" she chanted and hurried toward the city.

Nyasha awoke at the first light of dawn. As she put on her finest garments she thought how her life might be changed forever after this day. "I'd much prefer to live here" she admitted to herself. "I'd hate to leave this village and never see my father or sing to little Nyoka again." As they prepared to go they could not find Manyara. They search and searched to no avail. But they had to go. Although worried about her sister, Nyasha was excited by everything there was to see.

Deep in the forest Nyasha saw the small boy standing by the side of the road. "You must be hungry," she said, and she handed him a yam she had brought for lunch. The boy smiled and disappeared as quietly as he had come. Later, the old woman appeared and silently pointed the way to the city. Nyasha thanked her and gave her a small pouch filled with sunflower seeds. She passed by a man holding his head in his arm and greeted him with a warm smile. The sun was high in the sky when they approached the grove of towering trees. The uppermost branches seemed to bow down to Nyasha as she passed beneath them.

Someone announced that they could see the city. Nyasha ran ahead to a vista overlooking the city and exclaimed, "Oh, my father, a great spirit must stand guard here! I've never even dreamed of anything so beautiful!

They descended the hill, crossed the river, and made their way to the city gate. And just as they entered the King's fortress they heard screaming. Manyara ran wildly out of a chamber at the center of the courtyard. She fell at her sister's and father's feet, "Do not go to the King, my sister. Oh father, please, do not let her go! There's a great monster there, a snake with five heads! He said that he knew all my faults and that I displeased him. He would have swallowed me alive if I had not run. O sister, please do not go inside that place!"

Nyasha grieved to see her sister so upset, but leaving her father to comfort Manyara, she made her way to the chamber and opened the door. On the seat of the great chief's stool lay the little garden snake. Nyasha laughed with relief and joy, "My little friend! It's such a pleasure to see you, but why are you here? "I am the King," Nyoka replied. And there before Nyasha's eyes, the garden snake changed into a man. "I am the King! I am also the hungry boy you shared your lunch with and the old woman you made a gift of sunflower seeds. I was the man with his head in his arm that you greeted with a smile.

You know me best as Nyoka. Because I have been all of these, I know you to be the most worthy and most beautiful daughter in the land. It would make me very happy if you would be my wife.

And so it was that, a long time ago, Nyasha agreed to be married. There was a great wedding ceremony. And Mufaro proclaimed to all who would hear him that he was the happiest father in all the land, for he was blessed with two beautiful and worthy daughters – Nyasha, the Queen; and Manyara, a servant in the Queen's household.