

**John Steptoe's**  
**MUFARO'S BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTERS: AN AFRICAN TALE**

Adapted for the stage by Karen Abbott

**Synopsis**  
**One Act (1 Hour)**

In a small village in Africa, there lives a man named Mufaro. Mufaro has two beautiful daughters, Manyara and Nyasha. Although Mufaro is proud of both of his daughters, they are very different. Manyara is mean and arrogant, while Nyasha is kind and humble.

One day, Mufaro leaves the village to join a hunt. After he departs, Manyara informs her sister that she will one day be a great queen and Nyasha will be her servant. When Nyasha asks why her sister is so upset, Manyara reveals her jealousy. She claims everyone praises Nyasha, including their father. The bitter Manyara goes back to their hut to rest, while Nyasha tends to her garden.

Singing all the while, Nyasha works tirelessly in her garden. She notices a little snake, Nyoka, resting near her plants. She gladly welcomes him because Nyoka will keep pests out of her garden. Nyasha sings to her little Nyoka and even confides to him that, although she has a sister, Nyasha is lonely.

Mufaro returns from the hunt, happy to see his daughters. When he asks Manyara what she has been doing while he was gone, she lies about working in Nyasha's garden. Nyasha doesn't correct her because she knows her father would be saddened if he knew the truth about Manyara.

One day, a messenger from the king arrives. The excited villagers dance to greet him; they haven't seen a messenger in so very long. The messenger announces that the king is looking for a bride and invites "the most worthy and beautiful daughters in the land" to meet him in his city. After confirming with the messenger that the king is indeed handsome, Manyara quickly expresses her interest in the king. Other villagers contend that their daughters should also get a chance to become the king's bride. As the villagers quarrel, Nyasha returns to her garden. After hearing her lovely singing, the messenger tells her she must also meet the king. Nyasha hesitates, wanting her father's approval before she agrees. As the messenger is led away by the bickering villagers, Mufaro declares his happiness. His own daughters have been chosen as potential brides for the king! Manyara argues that Nyasha should stay in the village because she would be too sad to abandon their father. But, although he would miss either daughter, should one be chosen, Mufaro insists that they both must travel to see the king in the morning.

Not wanting anything or anyone to ruin her chance at becoming queen, Manyara sneaks out of the village in the middle of the night. Although she's scared during the long journey through the forest, she perseveres. As she walks down the dark path, she trips over a hungry boy. He asks her for a small bite of food, but she refuses to give him anything and kicks him as she continues on her way. Before long, she happens upon an old woman. The old woman gives her some odd advice (to not laugh at the laughing trees and to be kind to the man with his head under his arm), but Manyara refuses to listen to her. She laughs at the trees and is disgusted by the headless man. She finally reaches the city, anxious to meet the king and sure she will be chosen as his bride.

When Nyasha wakes in the morning, she tells little Nyoka that she doesn't want to leave the village. Mufaro finds Nyasha in her garden and they both quickly realize that Manyara is missing. The other villagers join the search for Manyara and discover her footprints heading towards the city.

As they travel through the forest, Nyasha defends her sister when Mufaro questions Manyara's motives for leaving as she did. Soon, they stumble upon the same hungry boy Manyara encountered in her journey. But, unlike Manyara, Nyasha gives him food and treats him kindly. He accepts her gift and then disappears.

The villagers continue on their journey and come upon the old woman. Nyasha asks her to point the way to the king and, after the old woman does, Nyasha gives her a gift of sunflower seeds. When they come to the laughing trees, Nyasha joins in their song and the trees bow to her. They finally reach the city where the king lives and Nyasha is overwhelmed by the sight of it. As they walk into the city, Manyara comes running towards them. She begs them not to go to the king's palace. She claims that a snake with five heads confronted her and would have killed her if she hadn't escaped. Nyasha doesn't want to leave her sister, but Mufaro, angry with Manyara's deception, convinces Nyasha to meet the king.

Nyasha enters the palace and is so pleased to see Nyoka inside. But, why is the little snake there? Nyoka vanishes and in his place the king appears. The king was Nyoka! He was also the hungry boy, the old woman, and the laughing trees. He tells Nyasha that she is "the most worthy and most beautiful daughter in all the land." Nyasha accepts his proposal and marries the king in a great celebration of dancing and singing. Mufaro is proud of his two beautiful daughters, Nyasha, the queen, and Manyara, servant to the queen.

Notes:

- There is no intermission.
- This is a dynamic musical filled with repetitive drumming music, singing, and dancing.
- There are a few parts of the story that may be scary to some (especially the scenes in the forest with the laughing trees, the old woman, and the man with his head under his arm).
- Some characters in the forest wear large, African-style masks.