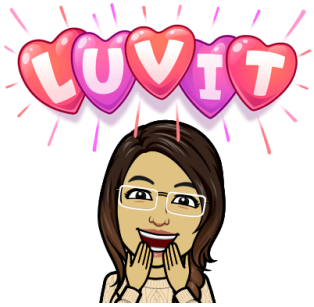
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Fables, Myths, and Fairy Tales

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The Importance of Kindness

What would happen if there were no kindness in the world? That's what this folktale is about. Across the African savanna, the story *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* takes place. The tale, which is an African folktale, was written and illustrated by John Steptoe. It is a magical folktale where characters mysteriously shapeshift. This legend was inspired by a folktale collected by G. M. Theal and published in 1895 in his book, *Kaffir Folktales.* John Steptoe's illustrations are fabulous and beautiful because they are realistic. Steptoe wrote many other stories. Evidently, this folktale has a moral that teaches people to treat others kindly.

Interestingly, this myth takes place in the ancient village of Zimbabwe. In that village, there lives a man whose name is Mufaro, with his two daughters, Manyara and Nyasha. Mufaro means "happy man". Manyara was mean-spirited and her name meant "ashamed". Nyasha was kind since her name meant "mercy". In the village, Nyasha kindly befriended an emerald green garden snake named Nyoka because of her opinion that he was friendly.

One day a harbinger, who was from the city, proudly announces the king wants the loveliest and most worthy woman in the kingdom to become his wife. When Manyara hears the news, she immediately wishes to be queen and make Nyasha the house servant. So at midnight, Manyara leaves. Under the night sky, she runs to the nearby forest because she wanted to get to the city first. As she travels, she meets several people to whom she is ungenerous. Early the next morning, Mufaro and Nyashsa notice that Manyara is missing, but

when they catch sight of footprints leading to the forest, they decide to continue their journey to the city. While they travel, Nyasha gives a snack and is kind to everyone she meets.

When they reach the city gates, they hear Manyara's hysterical cries, "Nyasha, please don't go in! A monstrous snake with five heads furiously attempted to swallow me! Oh, please, don't go, my dear sister!" Nervously, Nyahsa, who is disturbed at her sister's remarks, enters the castle. Through the gates she enters, because of her bravery. Then, she sees Nyoka! "Why are you here, my little friend?" exclaimes Nyashsa in wonder. Then, Nyoka reveals who he is. Slowly he changes from a little snake into a noble prince! "I am the king, your friend Nyoka, and every one to whom you were generous," replied Nyoka. In the end, Nyasha marries Nyoka and becomes queen, while Manyara, becomes the house servant.

Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters is a tale everyone should read while learning about folktales. The most entertaining part of this folktale is when Nyoka, who can mysteriously transform, turns out to be the king of Zimbabwe. It's interesting because he shapeshifts. Sadly, the most unfortunate part is that Manyara lets envy over Nyasha control her thoughts and actions. In the Bible lies the story's moral: "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud" (Proverbs 16:18-19). This is why kindness is important.