



Once upon a time in ancient Persia, there was an old, old woman named Naneh Sarma(1). Her hair was white like snow, her back arched with great age, and her face wrinkled with wisdom. She lived alone in a small house on top of the highest peak of Alborz Mountain. She had only one son, Nowrooz(2), who was a tall and handsome young man. He was kind and gentle to all creatures, and wherever he walked, he brought life, good weather, good health, and good fortune with him. The ancient Persians loved him and celebrated his arrival every year.

Naneh Sarma spent her days watching the people who lived in the valley below. She loved winter and snow. Each year, at the end of summer when day and night were at equal length, she stood by her doorway and summoned the cold air to come her way. With each passing day, she watched as days became shorter and nights grew longer. When the cold air arrived, the old woman would send it down the valley with a swing of her arm. She would sing, and her gentle songs would cradle trees to a deep sleep. Animals would find shelter and people would gather wood.

---

(1) Naneh Sarma = "Old Mother Winter" in familiar Farsi

(2) Nowrooz = "The New Day". Nowrooz is the first day of spring (the spring equinox) and is the oldest and most celebrated holiday in Iran today. Nowrooz is also the first day of the Persian calendar.

At times Naneh Sarma spun linen threads from the clouds above her house. The colors of the threads varied from one day to another, reflecting the sunlight that beamed through them. Thinking about her son, Nowrooz, who had promised to visit in a few months, she spent many long nights weaving a tablecloth. She decorated the tablecloth with beautiful designs of colorful birds and blooming flowers, because that was what Nowrooz loved.

Occasionally, Naneh Sarma felt tired from weaving; at these times, she would get up and stretch for a few minutes, then slowly walk to her front door. With an interested look on her face, she would summon the frigid air, take a deep breath, and slowly blow into the air. Down below, a snow storm would start. Naneh Sarma enjoyed seeing the valley covered in a white blanket of snow. She loved watching snowflakes on the tip of little children's noses. Adults walked faster while children danced in the snow and made snowmen.

On the fortieth night of winter, she watched the people in the valley gather at an elder's house. They built a fire, told stories, and recited poems; they also ate special foods, such as watermelons or pomegranate. This was a special celebration, for the sun was being born that night. From this point on, each day became longer and each night became shorter.

The longer days made the old woman feel very tired, but one thing kept her happy: her son's visit was approaching. She started to clean her house. She swept and washed the floors with soapy water. Down in the valley, it snowed a very moist, but fluffy snow. She dusted her furniture, and in the valley there were many windy days. Once, while





cleaning, she accidentally broke her pearl necklace. There were pearls rolling down every corner of her home. Below, hail droplets stormed the valley.

At this point, the old woman was thinking only about Nowrooz, although all her house cleaning had made her exhausted. She grew seven trays of cereals so that people could see which grows best that year: wheat, lentil, oatmeal, beans, barley, oat, and rice. When the seeds germinated and grew taller, Naneh Sarma put a red ribbon around them and placed them on a table covered with the special table linen she had just finished. She continued to decorate the table with red apples, dyed eggs, candles, wine, milk, lotus fruit, a mirror, homemade sweets, coins, and a large bowl of water holding a goldfish. As she put each item on the table, she prayed for good health, love and happiness for her son and all the people in the valley.

On the eve of the last Wednesday of the year, the old woman watched as the people in the valley made bon fires and danced happily around them. This was their way of calling upon their ancestors to visit them and bless their homes and their families. The air had begun to feel warmer, and Naneh Sarma was sure to see Nowrooz within a week. She made herself new clothes; but she was now extremely tired. She sat on her chair and little by little, she fell into a deep sleep.

Right around this time, Nowrooz walked into the valley. With each step he took, grass grew green under his feet. Flowers bloomed and trees woke up from their sleep. He finally came to his mother's home and found her asleep. Naneh Sarma looked so old and so tired that he decided not to wake her up. He kissed her on both cheeks, left her presents from far away lands, and continued his journey circling the Earth.

When Naneh Sarma woke up, birds were chirping and flowers had bloomed. Right outside her window, a small stream ran through the boulders. Green grass covered the valley. People were going house to house, greeting each other. Children walked with their parents in their new clothes. Some carried baskets of dyed eggs. The old woman knew this was all to honor her son, and she tried to smile.

She slowly walked to the corner where Nowrooz had left her presents. Tears formed in her eyes as she opened each present. As the warm tears rolled down her wrinkled face, a soft rain started in the valley. She looked around for a while and still felt very tired, so she decided it was time to go to bed. She opened her windows and a gentle breeze rushed in. Its crisp, fresh scent reminded her of her son. The valley echoed with children's laughter and the sound of music playing in homes. Everything that day reminded her of Nowrooz, for there truly was a "New Day" in the valley.

