

We're in Miss Skordas' grammar school writing class on the Greek island of Mikonos. It's an old-fashioned classroom with wooden desks on the Friday before the 1981 Christmas break. Holiday frosted windows adorn the room which bustles with festive activity.

Eleven-year-old Agapi and her twelve-year-old brother, Stefanos, listen intently to their teacher. She's in her late fifties and has a caustic demeanor that demands perfection.

MISS SKORDAS
(Sternly)

Class...

Nereus, the class bully, however, stares out the window not paying attention. Miss Skordas glares at Nereus, and simultaneously slaps her meter-long ruler on her desk.

WHAM!

MISS SKORDAS
... Remember, your term papers are due the first Monday after we get back from Christmas holiday, and they must be a story that taught you a life lesson. Those of you who don't do well will be held back a grade... Any questions?

The other class members stare at each other trembling.

A few hours later school lets out. It's a crisp afternoon with the sky just starting to drizzle a fine mist that saturates the walkways.

Stefanos carries Agapi's books as the two saunter home. Their treasured writing work is amongst this eclectic collection.

STEFANOS
How the heck we gonna come up with a couple of stories by next week? We're in big trouble.

AGAPI
Don't lose sleep. We'll find a way.-

STEFANOS
But, we should take a different route home.

AGAPI

Come on Stefanos. Let's not go out of our way. I'm in a hurry to start our homework.

As the walk down a narrow marble pathway bordered by a variety shops, Nereus pops out from an alley.

AGAPI

Oh no!

STEFANOS

Hey, Nereus. What are you doing around here?

NEREUS

Just waiting for you, twerp.

He darts up to a startled Stefanos, and yanks on corner of the stack of books Stefanos is carrying. Books and papers fly in a hundred directions scattering over the wet pavement.

NEREUS

Try getting your report in on time now.

Agapi and Stefanos rush to their wet papers trying to minimize the damage.

STEFANOS

Nereus, you jerk.

NEREUS

Next time I see you I'm gonna make your face into a culinary masterpiece... a "pound cake."

Nereus laughs, and slithers back into the alley out of sight.

The next day, Agapi and Stefanos dart into their kitchen. It's filled with olive and fruit preserve jars. A wood burning stove warms the air and dries several dozen school papers that are pinned to a clothesline in the background. The smell of baking bread, a Mikonos tradition, permeates the air.

Marina, their mother, wearing a white apron with a large Greek flag on it chops vegetables.

AGAPI

Mom, while our papers are drying can Stefanos and I go to the Christmas festival at the town square? It's-

STEFANOS

Are you crazy? Nereus might be around.

Through the kitchen window the sky turns grey, and...

BOOM!

...A lightning bolt strikes the ground a mile away. Rain pelts the house in a torrential downpour as the wind violently erupts.

MARINA

That's some rainstorm. Looks like you'll have to stay here. You can help me prepare the Christmas soup, Vegetable Borscht with Chicken, for our Christmas lunch party.

AGAPI

But, we'll miss the festival.

MARINA

Our guests will be here for lunch. How 'bout getting into the Christmas spirit. Do something for others?

STEFANOS

Yeah, who needs the festival anyway.

MARINA

It's important to have the spirit especially this time of year.

Marina ties matching aprons on her children, and the three scurry around the kitchen's wooden table chopping beets, garlic, onions, potatoes, cabbage and celery. They're having fun as a family. When they add the ingredients, their soup begins its transformation into a heart-warming amalgamation. As it simmers on the stove, tempting aromas saturate the room.

Marina smiles, and gives her children a nod of approval. Agapi and Stefanos grin knowing they've done the right thing.

Soon the guests and family arrive soaked, but when they sniff the wonderful aromas that have filled the house, their eyes open visualizing the culinary creations to come. Their hearts warm.

Agapi and Stefanos share the serving responsibilities. The guests love the soup and ask for refills.

When Agapi returns to the kitchen, she peers out the window. Through the downpour she notices Nereus, drenched and wind beaten.

AGAPI

Look at that. It's Nereus. He's walking alone out in the storm.

Agapi throws on a coat and sprints out the door.

STEFANOS

(Yelling)

What? Are you crazy?

Agapi catches up to Nereus rain dripping off her uncovered head blurting:

AGAPI

Nereus what are doing out in the rain all alone?

NEREUS

What the heck do you care?

AGAPI

It's the Christmas season. Why aren't you with your family?

NEREUS

I got no family. My parents... Aw forget it.

AGAPI

Come in our house and have some hot soup.

A few minutes later Nereus is seated at the kitchen table wolfing down the Christmas soup.

NEREUS

Yum, that's very tasty! Really warms me up. Who made it?

AGAPI

Stefanos and I did.

Nereus gives Agapi and Stefanos a mean look. As they start to shake, he articulates,

NEREUS

I used to get straight A's in creative writing at my previous school... Well, that's before they kicked me out for fighting...

Nereus grins.

NEREUS

...Maybe I could help you with your
writing projects.