

**July of 1969**  
By Jamie Nord

**Part I**

Damon Floros eagerly unlocks the old, wooden door of his small business building, Floros & Co. Insurance. He pushes it open with a loud creak that seems, to him, to echo through all of Greece. Damon sees his reflection in the dusty window and he notices how flushed and excited his face looks. The breeze tosses his black hair around, and his even blacker eyes pierce into the mirror image in front of him. He sighs, shaking away the eerie sensation of the future, an invisible force pressing up against every inch of his body.

Damon mindlessly turns on all the lights and air conditioning—a motion that he has been carrying out for the past fifteen years, and that generations of previous heads of the Floros households had carried out for decades before him. All the while, his brain is flooded with the thoughts of the historic adventure awaiting the world on this day; July 20, 1969. Man will walk on the moon.

And he, Damon, has promised to insure all three of the brave astronauts.

Damon Floros does not get such ideas into his head very often. Damon knew the risks he was taking when he sealed his promise to the Americans. This habitual man, with his severe loathing of disorder, never acted without thinking, but he also never acted against his logical conclusion of thought. But, this is what he did when he carried out his absurd plan. Damon was aware of the minimal probability of the astronauts' success. And yet, he didn't care. This turning point had brought some kind of change about Damon Floros. He was not the same man after turning against all his beliefs in the single swish of a pen, signing his name and fate on a crisp, legal document six days ago.

Maybe this small gesture would help him make a bigger difference in the world. He is tired of just insuring all the old ladies in Greece who spent their time baking bread for their many children. Damon had inspired a certain newness to his world, believing that inspiring something new might solve all his problems. It was a shock to those who knew him well.

His train of thought is interrupted by the sound of prominent footsteps and Damon turns to see his younger brother, Makis, walk into the office. Damon is filled with a fierce anger that feels as fresh to him as when his brother had first humiliated him last Tuesday. Makis had secretly changed Damon's famous 'astropolicy' and turned it into a joke by editing the regulations. The original had said that Floros & Co. Insurance promised to insure the three astronauts for \$10,000 each, and if they died between the time they entered the spacecraft and the time they finished their quarantine, their families would be given the money. However, Makis had written in the final, legal copy that the company would absolutely not pay their families if the astronauts were captured by extra-terrestrials or if they refused to return to Earth because they loved life on the moon so much.

Makis' face is smug, even if he has ruined his successful brother's professional reputation. "Good morning, brother!" His chapped lips turn up in a wry smile. This provokes Damon and he would probably do something rather rash, but fortunately his wife, Tessa, walks in at just this moment with Damon's business partner, Christos.

"Are you ready to waste money on those silly Yankees as they try to 'make history', Damon?" Christos asks of his boss in a sarcastic tone that makes Tessa frown.

"Why are you so convinced that the Americans will fail, Christos? They are still alive at this very moment, preparing to make that first step on the surface, and I believe they will

succeed in doing so,” Tessa says softly as she sits down next to her husband on the soft, blue couch they keep in a back room of the building. She tucks a stray piece of her blonde hair behind her ear. Tessa has managed to inherit her great grandmother’s German features, including her bright, blue eyes. Damon used to say that it was her eyes that had made him fall in love with her, but this is simply a sweetheart’s lie, to satisfy her gentle vanity. In reality, his affection was inspired in Tessa’s patient and uncomplaining nature, and the fact that she was always glad with what she had.

“I’m not convinced that they’ll fail. I just think risking so much money on their journey was a ridiculous idea and a waste,” he answers and looks meaningfully at Damon.

“Well, it’s not like I can change it now. Everything has already been finalized.” Damon glances over at his brother as he says this. His jaw clamps down hard, like he’s using all his willpower to stop himself from ruining his relationship with his only living relative forever. Tessa feels his body go rigid next to her and she places her hand lightly on his chest, sucking out all the rage inside Damon through the delicate touch of her fingertips.

“What gave you the idea to insure them in the first place, Damon?” Makis asks with a real curiosity, one that even Damon can see in his eyes. Makis’ face is rounder than Damon’s and gives him a somewhat mischievous countenance, resembling that of a child. However, his pale blue eyes seem to fade more and more with old age.

“I admired their courage. They spoke so eloquently and I couldn’t help but try to support them in some way.” His wife assesses him as he speaks. She notices that he had spoken in the same passionate tone when he had asked her to marry him, almost a whole decade ago now.

“You think they’ll die!” Tessa’s voice rises an octave as she realizes this and her eyes grow wide.

“Yes,” Damon admits, solemnly. “But I don’t want them to.”

“Are you just insuring them out of pity, Damon?” Tessa asks, her disappointed eyes dropping to the ground, as if her innocence has been tainted by her husband’s words. She bites down on her lower lip, in the same way that she did when their doctor had told them six years ago that they would never be able to have a child.

“A waste and a joke,” Christos mutters under his breath.

Damon’s sharp ears hear though, though, and his face is brought to life with a fierce passion. “No!” he says sharply and causes his wife, seated closest to him, to flinch. “It is neither a waste, nor a joke, nor a policy formed by pity. This company was not established on such foundations! Floros & Co. Insurance has a reputation for its qualified and polite workers who care for their customers. I am not about to let anything change here. And I stick by my decision. Those Americans are risking their own lives to explore our mysterious moon and if you don’t believe that they have heroic hearts, then listen to them yourselves!” Damon turns up the volume on the television, which was broadcasting an old interview with Neil Armstrong, and the four Greeks turned their attention to it briefly. The astronaut is in the middle of stating, “. . . *to be responsible for someone else’s life. I was afraid of failure and its grave consequences. Now, I’m not only responsible for lives but also the fate of an old dream.*”

The reporter stiffens his back as he asks in serious, soap-opera tones, “*How do you feel about that?*”

Armstrong continues, an American confident in the face of the moon. *"I just hope I don't let anyone down. Who knows what will happen, but I am going to take every inch of willpower in my body and try to turn it into success."*

Damon remarks at this moment, "You know, the American reporter, the one who was interested in getting a story about our insurance policy with the astronauts, had a voice just like that. Negative about everything."

"He didn't understand, I guess," Tessa answers warmly.

Christos and Damon are the only one still watching the television. Christos turns it up a notch. The reporter is still asking questions, accompanied by an expression that matches his dramatic voice, a face that a man saves solely for a camera.

*"What is it like knowing that you have everything to lose and gain from this?"* the reporter asks.

*"We all take risks everyday in life and we never know what is coming next,"* the astronaut answers. *"Yes, I could leave Earth just to greet Death, but a whole other world is out there, a place with no room for doubts or fears, a place where I feel like I belong."*

"How can I not admire people as true as that?" Damon asks with his dark eyes glowing.

## **Part II**

"I'll go make some coffee for us," Christos says as the interview ends. He rises abruptly and strides out of the cramped room. They follow him with their eyes and take in the tense way he runs his hand through his rich, chestnut hair as he walks. His tall and lanky body nearly crashes into the corner of the doorway, as if his brisk gait could not carry him away from them

quickly enough. With the combination of the odd gray color of his eyes, a third party might have been rather inclined to believe the agitated man was blind.

“Perhaps I ought to see if he needs any help.” Makis speaks more to himself than anyone else as he says this and trails after the lonely, underpaid accountant. Christos’ detached behavior has provoked his boyish curiosity, and, being driven by this rather than caution, Makis follows his urge into the kitchen.

He promptly finds Christos searching through cupboards in their break room in a slow, dejected way as if he can’t quite actually see the objects in front of him. Makis quickly walks over to the right cupboard and pulls out the coffee grind. Christos turns and looks at him. “Thank you,” he mumbles, flatly, and pulls out a filter. They work in the little kitchen area in a deathly silence, preparing snacks and drinks. Makis tries to think of something to say and looks around for inspiration.

“I never understood why Damon painted these cabinets blue. It’s just too much blue for one room, don’t you think? I didn’t even know he liked the color so much. What could he have possibly been thinking when he picked out this shade of paint?” he asks, but his question is left unanswered. Makis tries again. “It seems odd to me that a man will soon be somewhere other than a place we have always been,” he says of the astronauts in a thoughtful tone. “I still can’t believe Damon is going through with his plan. The way that man tries to fit a circle inside a square. . .” Makis’ voice trails off and he shakes his head in an annoyed sort of way. “Who knows, maybe the whole thing is just a hoax. Fake.”

“Not everything’s fake, Makis,” Christos answers in the same thoughtful way.

Makis thinks there might be another meaning behind his words. But how can he ask that? He tries hesitantly. "Then what's real?"

Christos doesn't answer as quickly this time. He opens his mouth but it takes a couple tries before words come out. "My sister died two days ago. Car crash. Drunk driver slammed into her at the roundabout." He puts his hands on the counter and sighs. "That's real."

Makis takes a step backward. "Why didn't you tell us?" He feels stunned by the overload of emotion a few simple sentences can cause and the weight of them as they hang in the air. The evident pain in Christos' face forever embeds itself into his memory.

"I'm telling you now," Christos says with a small, grim smile. The smile doesn't stay, though. "I guess. . ." he trails off. "I guess I didn't want to take away from what was going on here. Everyone is all caught up in the insurance policy for the Americans." Makis blushes faintly as he realizes he was casting a shadow on Christos' suffering to put a spotlight on his own.

"I'm sorry about all the drama, Christos. It was stupid of me to twist my brother's attempt at goodwill into a mocking joke," he whispers hoarsely with a loud ringing in his ears.

"I thought it was funny," Christos admits, grinning sheepishly. Makis' eyes light up with surprise.

"Christos, you have been more like a brother to me throughout these past years than anyone else I've ever known. So, let's forget about all our worries for a half hour and go watch my brother lose \$30,000 on TV!" Makis pats him on the back and Christos nods with a quick laugh. They carry out the food and coffee together to the preoccupied couple fussing with the TV antennae.

### Part III

“Quick, it’s starting!” Tessa tells them, eagerly, as Christos hands her a cup of coffee. Decaf, with sugar. Damon makes one final adjustment to the antennae. They hastily settle into the crowded couch and lounge chairs, impatient to be a part of history. Damon looks as if he is wishing he could fast forward through all of life’s uphill battles and skip to the victories, but the television remote control has limited ability to fulfill this silent aspiration.

They easily find the channel with the live transmission and a nervous silence falls upon the bare room. In suspense, they watch the American astronaut slowly emerge from the spacecraft, the *Eagle*. The eerie darkness engulfs everything. The astronaut steps with practiced deliberation onto the snowy surface, sinking into the dust and imprinting the moon with his singular life.

*“That’s one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.”*

His confident voice echoes through the speakers and into that restless, Athenian home.

Suddenly, a dark flash swooshes across the screen without a sound and the eerie picture reveals an empty surface, without a trace of a human soul left on the moon. Gone.

Then, the transmission goes dead. The screen loses the image and the four stare, mesmerized, at nothing. As if to break the spell, Damon exhales slowly, for he and the others had been holding their breath, and rises carefully from the sofa. The grave man walks to his old, oak desk and pulls open the left drawer. Taking out the clean, white paper in his pale hands, Damon begins to tear it up into small pieces, letting his spirit tear apart, too. With one last, profound sigh, he tosses the handful of unfulfilled promises out his window, into the desolate cold; his broken dreams fluttering gracefully away in the winds of Greece.