



SCHOOL: Jean Vanier
TEACHER: Deanne Hachey
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Dave Condon
UNIT: Simcoe Muskoka Secondary
UNIT PRESIDENT: Michele MacDonald

GRADES 11-12 / SHORT STORY
by **Samantha Moneypenny**

It's the same boring routine every pathetic day. My creative thinking was going downhill, and I was pointing the theoretical finger at the small, lifeless town of Shadeacre, New York. So welcome, people, to the slightly depressing, feeling-sorry-for-myself inner monologue of an average 18-year-old stuck in a small town life.

"Leo Anthony Jenks! You're going to be late for school!" my mom called to me.

"Coming!" I trudged through the painfully plain kitchen and grabbed my hefty textbooks and duffel bag full of football equipment, snatching up an apple on the way out. I waved bye to my family - which consisted of my mom and dad - hastily closed the door behind me, and sprinted to catch my bus. I got to my stop with no time to spare and jumped on, throwing an apologetic glance at my crabby old driver. She did not seem to be in a forgiving mood. Oh, well. I sat at the back, and twisted my headphones to fit my ears. Keeping up so far? Good. If not, I'll summarize for you. My name is Leo Jenks, I'm an only child, pretty good-looking (not to brag), and I'm on the football team for the only high school within a fifty mile radius. I don't know how much more cliché my life can get; all I'm missing now is being appointed captain of the football team, and the annoying girlfriend. Wait—

"Leo! Where have you been? I've been looking for you all morning! Look at these amazing pumps I got at the mall last night! They totally go with your skin tone!" I bet you can assume who would be waddling down the hall - in her new heels - towards me, her strawberry blonde bob bouncing weightlessly around her shoulders. Celia Groves, meet the readers. Readers, meet Celia Groves, my girlfriend. She just happened to be pretty high up there on the social ladder, and a member of the cheerleading team. Just between us, she drove me crazy, and not in the good way. So, I let her take up her usual position, practically hanging off of my arm, and put my happy face on as we strutted down the harshly illuminated hallways crammed with kids herding in different directions. It looked like something from Animal Planet. I could hear the dialogue in my head: *"And here we have the alpha pair. . . notice how the herds of fledglings gravitate towards the sides of the hallway to let them pass. . . social hierarchy seems to be the main thing that keeps order within the school. . . they seem to be communicating frequently by some electronic devices—"*

"Leo? Are you even listening to me?" Celia was snapping her perfectly manicured nails in front of my face.

“Earth to Leo!”

“Sorry, I was just thinking.”

“About what?”

“Nothing,” I shook my head, not having the energy to explain what my mind had wandered to when it was in a different space and time. Ring! Ah, saved by the bell. Whatever she was about to tell me was cut off by the shrill ring of the warning bell. “I’ll see you at lunch, okay?” I quickly hurried into my first period English class. Alas, it was no use, I was already pretty late. I entered the classroom stealthily, and slunk down alongside a very worn bulletin board on the inside wall of the room, hoping that Mr. Sommers—an old, unobservant pushover—wouldn’t see me sneaking in late. I almost made it, too. But the loud scrape of the metal chair legs on the tile floor threw me to the grumpy old shark, who liked to gnaw on kids with his haggard teeth.

“Mister Jenks, how lovely of you to join us! Perhaps you could tell me why Puck is such an important character in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, because that is what we were discussing before you so *rudely interrupted*.” Mr. Sommers stood there with his hands on his hips, actually expecting an answer. In that moment, I decided to start my own little rebellion party of silence in protest against his question, as I am highly competitive. This of course, led to a full blown staring contest between Sommers and me. After what felt like years, but was only a tension-filled twenty-five seconds, Mr. Sommers turned back to the board in defeat.

“As I was saying . . . Puck is a very important character.” *Victory!* He scribbled something on the board, and rattled on about Shakespeare this and Shakespeare that, to which of course the whole class would tune out. I stared down at my feeble little chair in hatred. How could it have betrayed me to Sommers like that, after all I’d done for it! Not once, had I pasted gum on the underside of it, nor had I scribbled inappropriate images into it with pen. All I’d done was graced it with an entire semester of holding up my butt. Finally, the glorious sound of the bell found its way to my ear canals. One period down, three to go. Oh, joy. Dragging my feet down the hallway to my next class, my earphones blasting in an attempt to block out the unnecessary chaos of the hallway, I saw some of my football teammates and waved to them half-heartedly. They called out “*Hey,*” to me, but all I saw was the movement of their lips and the eager smiles on their faces. I took my usual seat in my second period class, Philosophy, which thankfully flew by for me. After that came lunch, which lead to Celia jabbering on endlessly about Louis Vuitton bags, or something that had absolutely no value to me. I pretended to listen, but I was actually going over plays that I needed to know for practice.

“. . . And the clasp is like, this rose gold. . .” *Run ten yards, fake left.* “. . . It’s the absolute cutest! All the girls will be so jealous!” *Spin right, run a fly.*

“Leo, are you listening to me?”

“Of course I am, Celes,” I lied smoothly. Look, I know you think that I don’t pay any attention to my girlfriend, and I’m a terrible boyfriend, blah, blah, blah. But you see, my dear readers, the day will come when you meet a material girl like Celia. That will be the day that you

come to recognize true pain. “Gotta go, don’t want to be late for my favourite class,” I said, quickly jumping up and gathering my bag and books, maybe a little too quickly, judging by the hurt expression that flickered across Celia’s pale green eyes. “Don’t worry, I’ll call you tonight,” I reassured her, and felt a flood of relief when some of the slight ruby colour returned to her perfect complexion and she smiled at me. I pecked her on the cheek, and then was hustling to the boys’ locker room. There’s no denying that third period is by far the highlight of my day—gym. I smiled like an idiot as I took my last deep breath of clean, fresh air before bravely entering the dark pit of despair labelled ‘Boys Locker Room.’ Thankfully, my prayers had paid off, and I emerged alive. The rest of the boys trickled into the gym at different times, and our school’s ironically overweight gym teacher, decked out in stretched, grey, stained sweats, and sporting a broken whistle around his neck, ordered us to stand on the baseline. We weren’t naive young’uns anymore and knew what this meant. We were to run. Barely audible groans escaped the lips of just about every boy in this humid box of horror.

“If you’re going to complain about it, you’ll all run for the entire class!” Isn’t he a treat? I had a ghost of a smirk on my face as we crouched down on the faded, miserable paint line, waiting for the airy sound of the broken, plastic whistle to echo off the gym walls. *Tweet!* Over an hour later, I stepped out of the locker room, and I swear you could see steam coming out from the crack under the door. Boys are gross. I could see some wet, stringy strands of my jet black hair stretching down across my eyes, bouncing with every step I took.

“Leo, wait up!” One of my teammates, Max, jogged up to me. “Hey man, you pumped for tonight?” he asked me, clapping me on the back. Our next class was together, outside in a portable. We pushed open the creaky double doors that groaned in protest against the cool autumn air. The wind cut through our flimsy sweaters, and tossed my hair around; Max’s buzz cut didn’t exactly get tossed.

“It’s just a practice, Max,” I laughed. Max is the most stereotypical jock you will ever meet... Or read about, I should say. I don’t know, I’m new at this.

“Yeah, exactly! Keep your head up, eh?” I knew he was just messing with me. We were actually best friends, have been since Kindergarten. Let’s just say you don’t exactly meet too many new people in a town with the population of an inner city grocery store.

“Don’t worry, I. . .” I trailed off, the sun reflecting off something catching my eye. I whipped my head to my right in the direction of the parking lot, and spotted three black Cadillac SUVs rolling smoothly onto the cracked asphalt of our small school lot. Now, I’m not the sharpest tool in the shed and I don’t know much, but I know enough to realize that our tiny school in the middle of nowhere is not the appropriate backdrop for a Cadillac commercial.

“What do you think they’re doing here?” Max was staring as well.

“I have no idea, but let’s find out,” I whispered, and crouched low behind the pathetic half dead bushes that “decorated” the front of our school, with Max right behind me. We watched intently as six men, dressed in sharp black suits, sunglasses over their eyes, and professional scowls pasted on their faces, exited the SUVs and walked briskly into the school. One of them

stayed behind to stand in front of the school and watch the vehicles. Max and I started to inch forward, so we could make out the static that was flowing into the man's earpiece. Dead leaves from the bushes scratched me and grabbed at my clothing and hair with gnarled fingers, and dry soil stained the knees of my jeans, but I was oblivious.

"... *Secure suspect . . . find her . . . them . . . threat. . .*" I caught the occasional incoming earpiece words here and there.

"Max, I think they're looking for someone... Or something," I turned to explain it to Max, who simply shrugged and headed towards the portable classroom. I got up, brushed my knees off and followed him into what would be another all-too-exciting class. . .

"Here now," I glanced at the text from my mom (she's texting, I'm so proud) telling me she was here to pick me up. I waved bye to Max, got in the car, and prepared myself for an insanely boring ten minutes of my life that I wouldn't be able to get back.

The slight bump that jostled the car as we pulled into our driveway shook me from my thoughts. "If you're planning on going to that get-together tonight, get your homework done first." My mom informed me.

"Yes ma."

We entered an empty house, my call for my dad echoing off the walls.

"Your father is working late tonight."

"Oh, ok." I threw my school bag onto the kitchen table and began to take out my English homework, silently cursing Mr. Sommers. *Now, what was the theme from A Midsummer Night's Dream again? Yeah . . . English isn't my strong suit.* I flipped on the TV to drown out the annoying and incessant clack, clack of the knife hitting the cutting board as my mom prepared dinner. Okay, okay, back to English. . . "*And in other news, there have been reports of mysterious sightings in smaller areas of the state of New York of new DNA splicing experiments. . .*" My head whipped up, English already forgotten. I'd heard about these experiments, there had been rallies against them shown in the media. Oh, did I forget to tell all you wonderful readers who are still with me about how messed up our government is? So, let me make sense of what you just heard on my TV: basically, there were secret experiments held in these facilities that were apparently approved by the government that allowed scientists to try and split our human DNA with different animals. Birds, cats, lizards, you name it. But somehow, the information leaked—big surprise there—and a bunch of the experiments escaped—even bigger surprise there. Here's how I imagined the pitch for this idea went down:

"Mr. President, sir?"

"Who are you?"

"We're mad scientists, and we want to propose an idea that could turn out horribly and injure mass amounts of people, and most likely won't succeed, but it would be really cool if it did."

"Proceed. . ."

“We want to secretly take people from their homes, and splice their DNA with different animals.”

“Hmmm. . . Will people die?”

“Possibly.”

“Could it work out in the end?”

“Possibly.”

“If it works, could humans have like, fuzzy cat ears or something?”

“Possibly.”

“You have the go-ahead.”

That's probably the most likely scenario, but hey, it's still just my theory.

“That is just disgusting. Messing with God's work like that. It is an abomination.” My mother had appeared in the dining room beside me, and was squinting at the grainy pictures of half humans, the hate radiating off of her and becoming apparent in the crow's feet around her eyes.

“. . . These creatures may be considered hostile, so if you see anything unusual, especially at night, lock your doors. . .” The TV informed us. It made me sick to think about the procedures that these 'creatures' had to go through, probably in labs. No wonder they're hostile. Whatever. Back to my personal hell—homework.

“Where are you? This party is bumpin!” from Celia.

“On my way,” I replied hastily, and said bye to my mom, grabbing my keys and heading out the door. I pulled up to the only house on the street with lights still on, parked my car on the lawn and headed inside. Okay, don't tell anyone, but I secretly hate parties. Why go to them, you ask? The answer is, I don't know. Maybe it's because they're the only excitement in my entire week.

“Leo!!!” Celia staggered out of the kitchen, coincidentally where the punch was, and hugged me. It wasn't much of a hug, more like her hanging off of me because she could barely walk.

“Let's go dance!” She started to tug weakly at my arm.

“Celia, you know I don't dance. . .” I didn't want to let her down, but I really, really hate dancing.

“You never pay attention to me!” And with that, she stormed off. Great. I'll have to deal with that crying mess tomorrow morning.

“Leo!” Max waved me over to where he and some guys from the team were standing. Perfect, I could take refuge in there for the rest of the night. I couldn’t wait to go home, already. . . But wait, who is that girl slipping out the back door? She looked so familiar. I guess according to the rules of romantic comedies, I had to follow her.

“Hey!” I called after her dark, slim figure. There was something off about the shape of her back . . . those looked like wings attached to her. Who knows, maybe she’s Goth or something and wants to get attention. To my surprise, she turned around and started walking quickly toward me, her arms reaching for me. Strange that she would approach a gross, smelly teenage boy so quickly. But heck I won’t complain! I was smiling like an idiot by the time her hands gripped my shoulders, and she leaned in. . . Wait, I think those are real wings! What is happening?! She’s still leaning in, and too fast! I heard a loud, wet-sounding crack, and everything went black.

Beep . . . beep . . . beep. Wow, what is that incessant sound? Alarm clock? I might as well roll over and shut it off. My arm got yanked back by something. Grumbling, I opened my eyes to find myself in a hospital bed, hooked up to an IV.

“What . . .?” I mumbled in my sleepy voice. There was a chair in the corner with a figure in it. Celia? No. It was definitely a girl, but she had a small lean frame, dark flowing hair, and copper skin. My shifting around must have woken her, because she slowly opened her eyes and lifted her head to look at me. Her eyes were a piercing, complex amber colour, and they bore into mine. The girl from last night! “Who are you?” I groaned and felt the giant bruise on my forehead that had started throbbing. “. . . Did you head butt me?”

“S-L46Y8N, and yes, I did,” she said, as if it were obvious.

“That’s your name?”

“Government property,” She flashed a secretive smile at me, “But I prefer Silvana.”

“Y-you’re one of those leaked government experiments?” I wasn’t sure if I believed her.

“In the flesh.” She made sure no one was looking, and then snapped out a set of 12 foot long raven-black wings for half a second before tucking them neatly under her overcoat, out of sight.

“Why were you-?”

“At a stupid human party? I was searching for others like me.”

“But why?” Not going to lie, I’m a little confused. How can the other ones be evil, when she doesn’t seem to be?

“Some of the leaked experiments are bad and violent and all that noise, but there are some of us who are good, and I want to find them and show that to the public. The media is portraying us as total monsters.” She shrugged, trying to look nonchalant, but I could tell she was very passionate about this.

“I’m still waiting for an apology, by the way,” I smirked at her, which she chose to ignore.

“I’m sorry. I just felt threatened when you cornered me. Keep an open mind. I think the future will bring big change, and that isn’t necessarily good. But keep an open mind . . . Leo,” she smirked at me.

“How do you know my name?” I have to admit, I was very intrigued by this avian lady. She was about to open her mouth to answer, but my phone buzzed on the plastic tray beside my bed, and I glanced down to see who it was - Max. But when I lifted my gaze to the chair, she was gone, disappeared, bye-bye. I wish you readers could have seen my face. It must have been one giant question mark. “Silvana—wait!”

“There you are! The nurse told me you fainted at the party while you were with Celia! How are you feeling? Let’s get you home, sweetie,” my mom cooed at me, and she and my dad rushed in and fluttered around my bed, looking for something to help me with.

“Guys, I’m fine,” I said, hopping off the bed, and changing into my faded jeans. I tried not to look too disappointed about going home.

As soon as I got in the door, I zipped into the living room and clicked the TV on, trying to catch any ‘unusual’ stuff in the media. Sure enough, more stuff on the savage human testing.

“That is just disgusting. Those things do not deserve to live, being an abomination and all,” my mother remarked, her hands placed sassily on her hips. I tried to hide my look of disgust at her judgmental tone. If only she knew. . .

“Mom, they’re probably not disgusting.”

“Leo, just look at them! They aren’t human!”

“That doesn’t make them bad,” I said through clenched teeth. I usually don’t argue with my mom, but this time it was especially hard to bite my tongue.

“Leonardo, don’t argue with your mother,” my dad ended things in his stern don’t-argue-with-me-or-you’re-so-grounded voice. Now, I have two choices: I can keep arguing for a situation where my efforts will make little to no difference but will end up in consequences galore, or I can shut my mouth and head to my room. Guess which one I chose?

“Whatever, I’m going to bed.”

“But it’s only noon, you can’t sleep all day!” Did my mother happen to forget I was just in the hospital?

“I’m exhausted. Goodnight.” And with that, I stomped off to my room. Sometimes it sucks being an only child, because your parents don’t have another sibling to satisfy their urges for nagging. I flopped down on my bed, and stared up at my blank ceiling. Funny how it looked just

like the story of my life. . .

Wallowing in self-pity, I let my mind trace back to that brief conversation I had with a strange and intriguing girl in a hospital room. I was drawn to her because she was the opposite of everything in my life: exciting, thrilling, adventurous! I don't think I'll ever see her again, but I'll probably spend the rest of my days hoping to. So many thoughts were banging around inside my head: Where is she now? Does she have a home? Is she a loner? How did she escape? I had so many questions, but none that would get answered. My heart sank deeper and deeper into misery, and I decided that sleep would be the best thing for me, so I yanked off my jeans and slid under my warm covers.

Morning already? And a Monday, too. I am still not a happy camper. I did everything half-heartedly, and didn't even bother brushing my hair. Wait, I'd better make sure I remembered pants—okay, we're good. Whew. The next few moments seemed to happen in slow motion. I trudged into the kitchen, watching my mom open the folded cardboard flaps of the cereal box. As she started to pour the contents of the box into a ceramic bowl, a blood curdling scream erupted from her. Why is this, you ask? Maybe because instead of Wheaties coming out of the box, there was a steady flow of raven-black feathers pouring into the bowl. I stood there frozen in shock for a moment, and then one singular thought took up my entire brain capacity—*Silvana!*

I rushed into my room, expecting to see her standing there, and the curtains billowing in the breeze behind her. But no, I'm not that lucky. Thanks Karma. I started to shuffle out of my room in defeat, when I heard a flapping noise. I whipped around to face the interior of my room, to reveal. . . nothing, except that my open window had shifted some of the papers on my desk. Better fix those. What's this? I didn't leave a sticky note here.

"Holy crap," I gasped involuntarily. It was from Silvana!

Dear Leo . . . it read.