

STARTING POINT

Have you ever wanted something that "everyone else" has? Why?

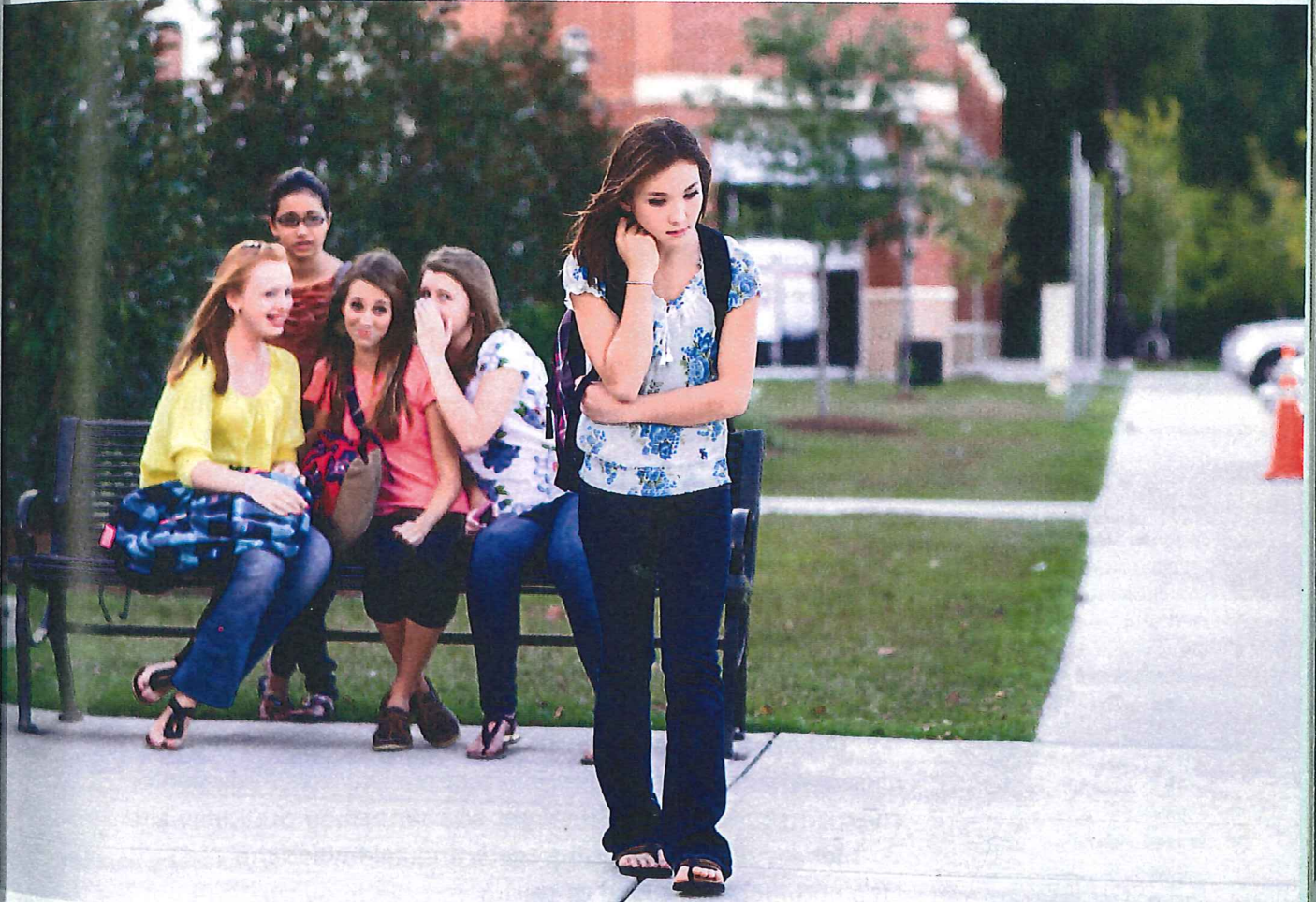
Rachel Vail

Good Enough

I jumped down from the toilet and turned on the hot water full blast. I soaked my washcloth in the steaming water until my palms burned, then pressed it onto my face. I breathed in through the wet heat. After a few splashes of cold water, I dried my face, took one more deep breath, and attempted a

Rachel Vail (1966–) is an American author who has written 21 children's and young adults' books as well as many short stories.

good enough bra nok
full blast full styrke
soaked gjøre gjennomvåt
palms håndflatene
attempted forsøkte



smile. I hoped nobody would be able to tell I'd been crying.

Mom gasped happily when I stepped out of the bathroom. "Oh, it fits perfectly! Boys, look at Dori!" She pulled me out to the deck and I twirled around, not trusting myself to speak, as my brothers complimented me in my new shirt. "Cute, Dori." "Looks good." I looked up at my dad, who was slouched in his chair, watching us. "You look beautiful, sweetheart," he said.

I tried to say thank you, but only the "thank" came out. I pressed my lips together and counted to 210 by 7s, trying to calm myself with math. Of course, math is what got me into this in the first place.

My troubles started a few days ago. My mom had come home between shifts at the diner. I was busy with my math homework. She sat down next to me and put her swollen feet up on the kitchen table. Mom tries to come home between shifts whenever she can, although she doesn't really need to. My oldest brother is in charge while she's at work, and as for me, I am old enough to keep myself out of trouble. I just do homework or read. I have never in my whole life caused trouble.

Well, until now.

And this trouble was just for myself.

"So, have you thought of what you want for your birthday yet?" I remember Mom asking. I rested my forehead in the space between my thumb and my index finger, leaning in closer to the math problem I was trying to figure out.

"Come on," she urged, after a gulp of her iced tea. "I gotta get back to work. What are you really hoping for?"

"An **Orion** shirt," I mumbled, still trying to focus on my math. It was the first week of school, and it was important to me to make a good start, to not fall behind.

"What's an Orion shirt?" Mom asked enthusiastically.

I shook my head. I hadn't meant to say anything. I erased the column of numbers I'd been working on.

"Tell me," Mom said, giving me a nudge with her iced-tea glass. "What's an Orion shirt? I've never heard of that. Don't chew on your lips, Dori, they get so chapped."

I let my lip slip out of my teeth and said quietly, "It's nothing, just a kind of shirt."

gaspet gispet
deck terrassen
twirled snurret
it fits den passer
complimented ga
 kompliment
slouched satt hengslengt
shift vakt
diner restaurant
swollen hovne
in charge ha ansvaret
forehead panne
index finger pekefinger
urged spurte inngående,
 hale ut av noen
erased visket ut
nudge dult
chapped sprukne

"That everybody wears?"

I shrugged, then nodded, and dusted my eraser crumbs away instead of looking at her. "They're just, you know, soft cotton, like knit. With a collar. And on the left collar, there are three little black stars."

"Oh, yeah," Mom said cheerfully. "I've seen a lot of the girls wearing those at the diner. They're 'the thing' this year?"

I shrugged. "Yeah, but they're expensive."

"Oh." Mom stood up and kissed me on the top of my head. "Well, maybe the strike will end soon."

"Maybe," I said. My father's union had been on strike since July, more than two months already. Every day, my mother told me maybe it would end soon. We hadn't even gone shopping for school supplies, our annual tradition the weekend before school starts. I was still using last year's notebooks, trying to write small – to not use too much paper.

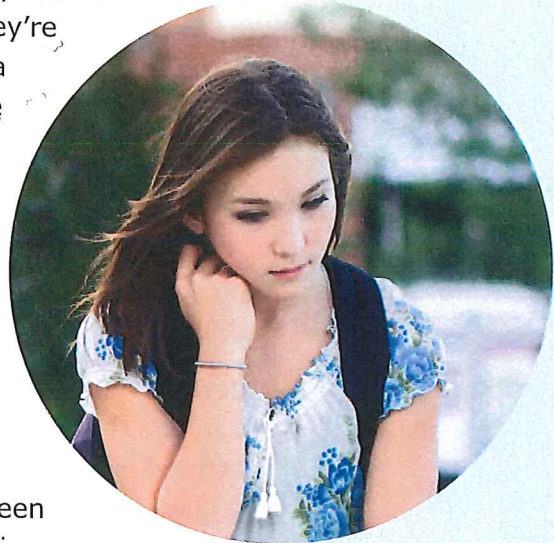
"I don't really want an Orion shirt," I told her as she rinsed her glass. "I was just kidding. What I'd really like is, um, maybe a package of colored pencils. You know, the eight pack, like in AJ's store." I knew my brother AJ could get them for a 40 percent discount at the stationery store where he works after school.

"We'll see," Mom said, leaving. "I'd better hustle."

The only reason the Orion shirt had entered my mind was that Lisa Verilli has the locker next to mine again this year. Every morning I hear her and Carleen and their friends complimenting each other on their Orion shirts – and on their hair, their homework, their ice-skating, their singing, everything.

They are polite girls, and pretty – never really outwardly mean, at least not to me. Lisa even whispers "hi" to me sometimes. She gave me half a hug the first day of school this year. But mostly she doesn't notice me; none of them do.

They are the A-group, the most popular girls in school. I am in no group at all. I do my work, and I go home.



shrugged trakk på
skuldrene
nodded nikket
eraser crumbs
viskelærsmluler
collar krage
expensive dyre
union fagforening
school supplies
skolematriell
annual årlig
discount avslag, rabatt
stationary store
papirhandel
hustle skynde seg
locker skap
mean ubehagelig, slem

Although they are as polite with one another as grown-up ladies, the A-group scares me a little.

The day Mom was asking me what I wanted for my birthday, Lisa and Carleen and the others in the A-group had been comparing which colors of Orion shirts they had gotten to start the school year. Yellow and white seemed to be the top two. Though I wasn't paying close attention. But after I closed my locker, I turned my head and found myself eye to eye with Lisa.

She flicked her eyes down my body, taking in the hand-me-down T-shirt with the faded football on it, from my brother Cal, and the brown, corduroy shorts gathered up by a belt AJ had outgrown.

Lisa smiled sympathetically, which is what made me feel bad. I shrugged, to show I don't care about surface things like what I wear, and walked away.

But later, when I was at the kitchen table with my mother and her iced tea, I was thinking about myself in an Orion shirt. I was imagining how it would feel to get one of those purring compliments: "Oh, Dori! That's the exact Orion shirt I wanted! But it looks much better on you."

I was fantasizing what it might feel like, to look good enough.

On the night of my birthday, we cooked out in the backyard – hot dogs, my favorite, and a white cake with chocolate frosting. My little brother, Nate, whispered to me, "There is a big, beautiful present with a card with a rainbow on it, but don't tell anybody, because it's a secret." I promised I wouldn't tell anybody, but he was so excited he couldn't even eat his cake; so Mom let him give me the presents. There were two, held together with a yellow ribbon.

On top was a card made by Nate. It had a drawing of a girl with long, long hair, much longer than mine, standing beneath a rainbow. On the inside it said, DORI – HPPY BDAY. U R THE B. That's Nate's way of writing "You are the best." He's only 4-and-a-half.

I let him tear open the small present. It was a box of colored pencils, the eight pack. I hugged them and said

corduroy cordfløyel
frosting glasur
excited spent
ribbon sløyfebånd

thanks, and wondered for a second what the big box could be. Until I realized. I tore open the wrapping paper and saw that in that box was a shirt. A soft, knit shirt with a collar. And on the left collar, three little black... hearts.

My stomach dropped. It was a fake, a cheap imitation, with hearts instead of stars.

It was still too expensive, probably, for my mother to be buying for me this year. And it was worse than no Orion shirt at all. It was the fakeness that was so awful. I'd rather wear my brother's old T-shirts. At least they are what they are, and don't try to be anything else.

I held up the fake shirt for everybody to see, while my mother explained that it was an Orion shirt, the hottest trend of the year for the girls in my class. I chewed on my lip, and she didn't stop me. I gave her and my dad kisses, thanked them for the presents, and quickly helped clean up all the wrapping and paper plates so I wouldn't have to look at anybody. But when I got back outside, there was Mom, holding up the shirt, saying, "Go try it on, Dori. Let's see how it looks!"

So I went obediently to the bathroom, tried it on, cried at my reflection, modeled it for the family, then headed straight for my room. I peeled it off and put on a comfortable old pair of pajamas. I folded the shirt, placed it neatly in my drawer, and closed the drawer tight. When Mom said I should come watch TV with everybody, I yelled down that I was tired and had to finish reading a book for school the next day.

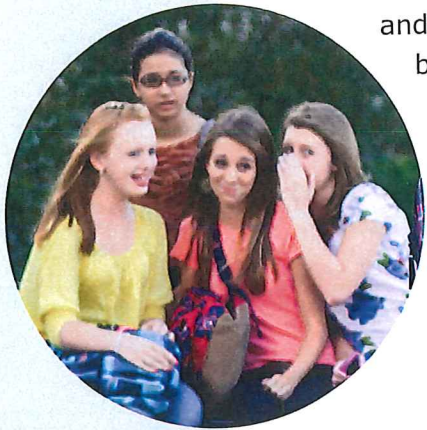
Mom came up. "Hey, birthday girl," she said. I kept reading. "Your new shirt is going to look great with your brown corduroys."

I opened my mouth to protest, but no words came. Just shame. Shame at not being able to afford the real thing, a rehearsal shame for the real shame I knew I'd feel when Lisa and Carleen and the others in the A-group saw me the next morning at the lockers.

I could see myself standing there wearing a fake, a wish-I-had-what-you-have-but-I-can't-afford-it imitation shirt. Not good enough. I turned away while my mother tucked the blanket tight around me. "You are so loved," she whispered.

At the lockers early in the morning, Lisa looked at me,

fake uekte
imitation etterligning
awful forferdelig
explained forklarte
obediently lydig
reflection speilbilde
shame skam
afford ha råd til
rehearsal øvelse



In the USA tax is usually not included in the price, but is added when you pay.

yanked nappet
taunted hånte
humiliation ydmykelse
punishment straff
deserved fortjente
blubbered sutret
adding up legge sammen
tax skatt, moms
subtract trekke fra
real ekte

not unkindly. But then Carleen yanked on Lisa's yellow Orion sleeve and whispered in her ear. I hung on to my locker and waited. I tasted the salty tear that slipped out by accident. I raised my eyes to meet Lisa's.

"New shirt?" she asked.

I nodded, and another tear fell, this one plunking straight down onto my arm.

Carleen taunted, "Is it an Orion?"

I shook my head and kept on crying, ready for the humiliation and punishment I knew I deserved.

"No," I blubbered, ashamed, "it's a fake."

When I blinked, the tears stopped. I suddenly couldn't believe that I, of all people, would be standing in the middle of the hallway, crying about a shirt. These tears are what I should be ashamed of, I realized, not the shirt, not hearts instead of stars.

The eyebrows of the A-group were all raised. I touched the bottom hem of my new shirt. It felt very soft. I imagined my mother standing at the display at the Price Club. I pictured her rubbing the material, adding up how much it would cost with tax, how much it would subtract from how little we had. Then I imagined her picking up the shirt anyway and carrying it proudly to the checkout for her daughter. *You are so loved*, I heard in my head.

A fake? Depends what's real, I guess. I smiled at the A-group and told them, "But it's the best present I ever got." I walked away feeling good enough.

UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Answer the following questions.
 - a Why is she in the bathroom washing her face?
 - b What fits Dori perfectly?
 - c Where does her mother work?
 - d Describe what Dori wants for her birthday.
 - e Why haven't they gone shopping for school supplies this year?
 - f Why does Dori want this shirt?
 - g What does she get for her birthday?
 - h What does she do after she opens her big birthday gift?