



Avril Lavigne

“Sk8ter Boi”

Let Go

06/2002

Arista

Avril Lavigne Battles The Girls of 4 A-L

Libby Cudmore

I don't know whose idea it was to put the CD/radio player in the Oneida Hall 4 A-L girl's bathroom. It just appeared one day, plugged into the left-wall socket, next to the shower that actually had the bathtub where we all dyed our hair. It was small and round, like a basketball, in the purple and green combo that Bed Bath and Beyond believed signified a *fun, quirky college experience*. When the showers started around 6 am, the radio went on.

Every.

Damn.

Day.

Because it was 2002, it was still required, by law, that Avril Lavigne be played at least once an hour. “Sk8ter Boi” was the most popular choice, but “Complicated” was played, by my recollection, at least four times a day.

Oneida 4 A-L was designated as a sober living study floor and residents had to sign a pledge promising to refrain from consuming drugs and alcohol, even off-campus. No parties, no wall of beer cans, the ideal place for anxious nerds, obsessive students, and recovering addicts. As such, we were a rag-tag bunch. Beth, from Queens, was fascinated by the expanse of WalMart and organized shopping trips every Friday. Elizabeth had studied massage and wore patchwork corduroy and would rub your neck if you would tell her a story about your culture or upbringing. Joy had an illegal rice cooker and boxes of Asian sweets in her room. Ari loved Morrissey and trash cinema. I dressed like Courtney Love and read tarot under red string lights above my bed. None of us wore plaid pants or ties with tank tops. We all listened to Weezer and watched *Gilmore Girls* while eating kettle corn. We were, in short, a bunch of nerds.

Sometimes the radio would go silent, like a murder victim, cord lying helpless along the floor, but soon the crime scene would be cleaned up and horrible order restored. I tried using the CD player for evil, blasting Nightwish's *Wishmaster* in hopes that some Finnish symphonic metal would turn the tide and force the benefactor to take back her wicked gift before it tore us apart. But as soon as I packed up the shower caddy, it was back to All Avril, All The Time.

Paranoia set in. Classes began at 8 a.m., so showers began at 6. In the last remnants of dreams we would hear *He was a skater boy, she said see ya later boy...* We began to suspect each other, turn on each other. Maybe Ari was trolling us. Maybe Joy, always so quiet, had a secret affection for pop music she kept hidden for fear of being mocked. Perhaps the girls in the other corner, always unseen except for one, a disembodied pair of SpongeBob Squarepants slippers in a bathroom stall, talking on her phone over flushing toilets and running water. What were they hiding in there?

We began to suspect the boys—Josh, our RA, punishing us for not attending his Safe Sex Pictionary presentation in the lounge. Ian and Jim and Pete and Duffy, in the corner suite, playing a middle school prank on us. We were all victims. We were all suspects.

See the way you're actin' like you're somebody else gets me frustrated...

The battle continued. Nightwish and The Cure. Strangled silence. Avril Lavigne. Repeat.

Repeat.

Repeat.

Until one day, the CD player was gone.

Our rag-tag group had vanquished the evil that had taken over our lives. The corner girls transferred dorms in the winter. All was quiet. All was good. Sometimes we would be out on campus and a car would drift past and we'd hear what we thought was the faintest strains of teenaged Canadian pop-punk. But it would be gone just as quickly, leaving us to wonder if we'd just *imagined* Avril Lavigne, channeled all of our fears about college and our future into this diminutive, tie-with-tank-top-sporting monster.

Years later at a bachelorette party, the story of the radio came up and the truth was revealed. *I stole it, Beth confessed. And I hid it behind a trash can. But it got accidentally taken out with the trash. Oh well.*

Beth is a lawyer. Beth is a new mom with a beautiful baby she sends me photos of weekly. Beth has never told a lie, not even to spare your feelings because let's be real, the early 2000s were a bad time for fashion and are you *really* going to wear a sheer babydoll negligee as a top? (I am, yes, and, as predicted, look back with a mixture of bravado and fashion disgust).

We all do strange things in the fog of war, things we never knew we were capable of. Heroes rise. Generals cower.

And legends, however miniscule in the grand schemes of our lives, are born.