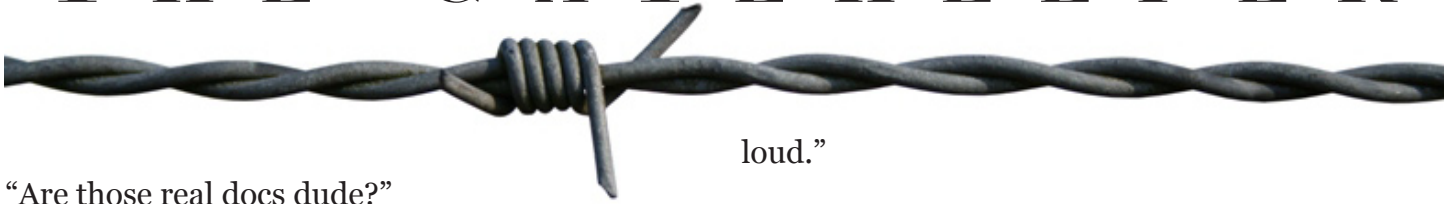


T H E G A T E K E E P E R



“Are those real docs dude?”

“Yeah man, real Doc Martins. I put on the red laces yesterday.”

“Cool.”

My admiring friend then ripped off his plaid shirt and dove into the mosh pit. I followed suit, yelling in approval and head banging in time to some kick-ass Nirvana. The concrete floor of the garage issued clouds of choking dust into the air as hundreds of Doc Martins stomped in unison to the whip-lashing grunge blasting out of the speakers. The music pounded through the valley like a thumping beast.

This was my seventeenth birthday party and it was a hot African night. The week before, somebody had gotten hold of one of my invitations and photocopied them with the words “open party” scrawled on the bottom. To the horror of my parents, who gave up peeking out the window after a while, people came in droves. They wanted in on the sweaty action, pimple faced kids in torn jeans and Metallica T-shirts, riddled with teenaged angst just like we were. The gates held them back, and we were the gatekeepers.

A group of us, wet and smoking cigarettes, told unwanted intruders to get lost.

“Hey man. I’m in your geography class. Remember me? Collin? Can I come in dude? I have that Bon Jovi tape I borrowed from you,” Collin said, poking the tape through the bars like a backstage pass.

“Yeah, he’s cool, let him in.”

Down the street strode an old man with white hair and a black turtleneck, one of our neighbours.

“Can you boys turn down the music? It’s too

loud.”

One of my friends called me over. I came up and leered through the barbed wire fence.

“I’m going to call the police if you don’t turn it down young man.”

I gave him the cold teenage I-hate-authority stare of death.

“Screw you old man. Piss off.”

I was the gatekeeper, this was my party. If it’s too loud, you’re too old. The breeze picked up and chilled my damp skin. Grabbing another beer I jumped back into the nice warm mosh pit for another head-banging session.

A week later I was in church.

My parents were really proud of me because I was one of the head alter boys. I sat stiffly on the right hand side of the priest with my glowing candle and my clean white cassock. The congregation offered up their sins into the hollow silence of the church. I helped the priest prepare for communion. He handed me a wine filled chalice. People quietly started queuing up for the bread and wine. I almost dropped the chalice when I spotted the turtleneck man in the line.

Sweat broke out on my forehead as I doled out the wine. I was the gatekeeper, I held the blood of Christ, the blood of Christ, the blood of Christ...

“The blood of Christ” I said, holding out the chalice to the white haired man.

He took a sip from it.

“Amen” he said.

He lowered his eyes. I was wearing my Doc Martins. With red laces.