

The Chords are Clean, the Growl is Real

by Hobie Anthony

"Good, it's Link Wray again,"

"What?"

"Our waiter, he looks like Link Wray."

We were downtown, having lunch. I was on a break, Ruth was on her way to work. The place was busy and Link was hopping all over, trying to fill all the tea glasses, keep coffee warm. I could never remember his name, but the growling guitar of the real Link Wray's *Rumble* rang in my head whenever he asked for my order. I ordered the veggie sandwich on sourdough, Ruth had the soup. Ruth was so beautiful that I never noticed her scowl.

"Isn't he from North Carolina?"

"I think he died in Sweden."

"Denmark?"

"One of those."

"The waiter is from North Carolina."

"How do you know?"

"Girls talk, we know."

"I wonder how he got out here to San Francisco?"

Rumble seems like such a simple song to us today, but when it was released it was said to incite gang violence; it was banned in some areas. Perhaps the distortion scared the squares. Link Wray discovered distortion when he poked a hole in his amplifier and slowly strummed those chords: D, D, E / D, D, E / D, D, A. It's so simple, I could play that song if I wanted to.

"What's the matter?"

"I've got that yeast thing again."

"I read something about spraying vinegar down there."

"Salad coochie?"

"It's for your health."

"I saw the doctor."

"Yeah?"

"It's coming."

"What do you mean?"

"You remember when the condom broke?"

Link Wray only had one lung when he died. He lost it to Tuberculosis when he was still in his prime, but he continued to sing anyways, despite the doctors. It wasn't pretty, he sounded strangled and sick. But he was the king of distortion, so I guess he pulled it off.

"Do you always have to wear that dress?"

"Do you always have to wear that tie?" Ruth said, "Doesn't your wife get sick of seeing that tie?"

"Touche."

"Don't you mean Douche?"

The waiter came back around, filled my tea, brought Ruth some more lemon water. His sideburns were impressive, like a civil war general but close-cropped in a modern style. He had a tattoo of a guitar on his forearm. I pointed to it with my fork.

"Link Wray?"

"He's one of my favorites, man."

"Right on, *Rumble*."

