

TITLE:

WHY DADDY PLAYS THE BLUES
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

10:00 drama

SYNOPSIS

Daddy, a middle-aged white guy taking fingerstyle blues guitar lessons, learns that he has major life lessons to learn from his teacher, a 30-something, wheelchair bound African-American man named Howard.

CHARACTERS

Daddy - a 50-something white guy

Howard - a 30-something black guy

PROPS

Kitchen table and chairs.

Two guitars, a guitar stand, and one guitar case.

Wheelchair.

TAB guitar paper, pencils.

NOTE:

Upon request, author will provide TAB Guitar music for "C.C. Rider" as called for in this script.

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AT RISE.

HOWARD SITS IN HIS WHEELCHAIR NEXT TO THE KITCHEN TABLE.

O.S. KNOCK

DADDY: (O.S.)
(calling out)
Howard?

HOWARD:
(calling out)
Hey! Back here!
(muttering to
himself)
I'm always back here, unless I'm up
there.

DADDY ENTERS CARRYING HIS GUITAR CASE.

DADDY:
You back here?

HOWARD:
I'm always back here, unless I'm up
there.

DADDY EXTENDS A FIST AND HOWARD TAPS IT WITH HIS.

DADDY:
How're you doin'?

HOWARD:
Not bad. You?

DADDY SITS IN THE EMPTY CHAIR.

DADDY:
Not too bad. You wanna do my
lesson back here?

HOWARD:
Sure...

HOWARD ROLLS OUT OF LIGHTED AREA.

HOWARD: (CONT'D)
Lemme get my axe.

HOWARD RETURNS WITH A GUITAR AND A SMALL TABLET OF TAB-GUITAR MUSIC PAPER. DADDY TAKES HIS GUITAR OUT OF THE CASE. HE PUTS A COUPLE SHEETS OF TAB-GUITAR MUSIC ONTO THE TABLE.

THEY CHECK THE TUNING BETWEEN THE TWO GUITARS.

HOWARD: (CONT'D)

Daddy, why don't you play me what we did last week.

DADDY SLOWLY PLAYS THE PREVIOUS WEEK'S SONG "C.C. RIDER". HOWARD WATCHES AND LISTENS INTENTLY.

HOWARD: (CONT'D)

There was one place where you picked with your middle finger... I think here...

(plays a 3-note riff)

I think you'll find that if you pick that with your index finger instead of the middle finger, you'll wind up able to move to the next pattern more quickly.

DADDY:

Okay.

HOWARD TAKES DADDY'S MUSIC SHEET AND A PENCIL.

HOWARD:

I'll write that in here - "p-w-i-f" - pick with index finger.

DADDY:

Well, that doesn't sound too blusey, Howard - p-w-i-f - pick with index finger. Couldn't you give it some sort of blusey sounding name or something? I mean, when I play this for my white friends and they ask me about it, it seems pretty lame to say this is a p-w-i-f - pick with your index finger.

HOWARD:

(patiently)

More bluesey, huh? Okay. You know, I got this song by studying Robert Johnson Jr., son of the Robert Johnson.

DADDY:

(excited)

Really?

HOWARD:

Yeah, I think he woulda said something like... "pick with your fuckin' index finger". How's that? More bluesy?

DADDY:

Uh, definitely. More bluesy. My neighbors will be impressed.

HOWARD:

(playing the song)

Yeah, you can play 'em "C.C. Rider" in this slow version.

(sings)

C.C. Rider - see what you have done. C.C. Rider - see what you have done.

(spoken)

What have we done, Daddy? What have we done?

DADDY:

I don't know, Howard. What have we done?

HOWARD:

How long you been studying finger-style blues guitar with me, Daddy?

DADDY:

Oh, about 3 or 4 years now.

HOWARD:

Why you want to do this?

DADDY:

Oh, I had a heart attack about 5
years ago.

HOWARD:

Heart attack, umm.

DADDY:

Yeah, myocardial infarction.

HOWARD:

Myo-cardial in-what-fucked-up?

DADDY:

Infarction. I had arterial
sclerosis.

HOWARD:

Sclero-what-fucked-up?

DADDY:

Sclerosis. That means I had
hardening of the heart.

HOWARD:

Hardening of the heart. Ummm.
That's not good. You was a hard
hearted bastard, huh?

DADDY:

Yeah, I guess I was! Literally and
personality. Hard hearted. After
the heart attack, I had to learn
how to soften my heart.

HOWARD:

Soften your heart?

DADDY:

Yeah. Soften my heart, my
relationships, my life.

(a beat)

Rhythm! I had no relationship to
rhythm. My life had no rhythm. So,
I had to develop an entirely
different relationship to rhythm.
Waking, sleeping, meals, the
seasons. Everything. I saw this

old guitar my parents had bought me, and I'd always wanted to learn how to play it, so I figured I'd take guitar lessons so I could learn lots of different kinds of rhythms.

HOWARD:

Ah-hah... has this helped you soften your heart?

DADDY:

This and everything else I've changed. I was in advertising and very successful.

HOWARD:

What'd you advertise?

DADDY:

Ever heard of a shoe called Sky Box Shoes?

HOWARD:

Oh, yeah... I know Sky Box Shoes.

DADDY:

(with some pride)

Well, I was the one who made Sky Box Shoes the #1 in the country! Maybe you remember this commercial I did... at the end of the commercial it had this really gorgeous young woman holding a shoe and saying, "I got mine. Go get yours!"

(grinning)

That's my line! We tested the shit out of that commercial. And every time we tested it, it did better!

HOWARD:

Tested... what do you mean tested?

DADDY:

(bragging)

Well, you take a commercial and you shoot several different endings.

Then you show the commercial with different endings to an audience and they tell you which they prefer... which was most exciting to them.

HOWARD:
You mean you would pump it up?

DADDY:
Yeah, pump it up! Exactly! We wanted people to be really excited to get their hands on a pair of Sky Box shoes.

HOWARD:
Hmmm.

DADDY:
That commercial for Sky Box broke all the records for the shoe industry!

HOWARD:
Broke the records, huh?

DADDY:
Yeah, that commercial made those Sky Box Shoes the most in-demand shoe in the country. They were hot! They couldn't make enough of them! There was a real shortage for a while. Stores sold out!

(a beat)

That commercial changed my life! I was so successful and in demand! I made a ton of money... God it was good!

(wistfully)

A ton of money. Aw, but, that was before I had that heart attack.

HOWARD:
Back when you were rich and hard hearted?

DADDY:

(laughing)

I guess. You ever have a pair of
Sky Box Shoes?

HOWARD:

Oh, yeah. I even remember the
commercial you're talkin' about.

DADDY:

Really?

HOWARD:

Yeah. Sure do. You're right about
that line making people want to go
right out and get a pair. I did. I
saw that commercial just one time,
and the way that girl smiled and
said, "Go get yours!" and I said to
myself, whatever it takes, I'm
gonna go get a pair of Sky Box
Shoes. So I did. But, I lost 'em.

DADDY:

Lost 'em...?

HOWARD:

Yeah. I was walking home from this
gig I was playin' at. Musta been
about 2 a.m. and this big fellow
with a long-barreled, chrome-plated
pistol stepped out of this alley.
He pointed his gun at me and said,
"Gimme them Sky Box Shoes". So, I
sat down and took 'em off and gave
'em to him. Then, when he had 'em
he looked at me and said, "I got
mine. Go get yours." And then we
laughed. He's standing there
holding my Sky Box Shoes and I'm
sitting on the sidewalk and we're
laughing.

(a beat)

Then he stopped laughin' and shot
me. Twice. For my fuckin' Sky Box
Shoes. One of the bullets nicked my
spine.

(a beat)

Your line worked, Daddy. He got mine!

DADDY:
Oh shit. Oh shit. Oh shit. Oh shit.

HOWARD:
(singing softly)
C.C. Rider, see what you have done.

DADDY:
Oh shit, Howard! What can I say?

HOWARD:
You already said it. You already tested it. Everybody loves it. "I got mine. Go get yours."

DADDY:
Oh shit...

HOWARD:
... and made a ton of money.

DADDY:
Oh, shit, I'm so sorry! I'm so-o-o sorry!

HOWARD AND DADDY EXTEND A HAND TO ONE ANOTHER AND GRASP EACH OTHER'S HAND TIGHT.

HOWARD:
Sorry don't help nothin'. Just think about what you're doin'! You test ads, make sure they excite people and then turn 'em loose? What are you doin'? Don't do that shit no more, okay?

DADDY:
I don't. I won't.

HOWARD:
And when you're tellin' that story, don't be so fuckin' proud of what you think you did, okay? You didn't know what you did.

DADDY:

I know.

HOWARD:

And, p-w-i-f, okay?

DADDY:

Okay...

HOWARD:

Your fuckin' index finger, okay?

DADDY:

Okay.

HOWARD:

Okay. Lesson's over for this week.
Go practice.

DADDY STANDS AND PUTS HIS GUITAR IN THE CASE, WIPES HIS
EYES, SHAKES HIS HEAD.

DADDY:

(pausing)

Howard? You still gonna be my
teacher?

HOWARD:

Yeah. I'm your teacher. See you
next week.

TAPS HOWARD'S FIST AND EXITS.

SLOW BLACKOUT.