

"SELF MADE"
SCRIPT COVERAGE

WRITER: Nicole Jefferson Asher
DATE SUBMITTED: 08/19/2020
DATE COVERED: 09/07/2020
GENRE: Hero's Journey, Period Drama, Rags-to-Riches
TIME/LOCALE: ~1910 St. Louis/Indianapolis
READER: LUCY SARTOR
COVERAGE FOR: R. PALMER BLANCHE

LOGLINE: The incredible true story of Sarah Breedlove, a determined yet downtrodden Black woman in Jim Crow America who transforms alongside her Wonderful Hair Grower business, becoming Madame CJ Walker: America's first female self-made millionaire.

COMMENTS SUMMARY: *Self Made* is an original, inspiring story of beating the odds filled with strife, rivalry, wit, and passion. The writing encapsulates the experiences of Black people in 1910s America and the characters are distinct and deeply fascinating. A binge-able and motivating tale along the lines of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* and *Hidden Figures*.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
CONCEPT	XXX			
STORY	XXX			
STRUCTURE		XXX		
CHARACTER	XXX			
DIALOGUE	XXX			

PROJECT: Recommend
WRITER: Recommend

SYNOPSIS

An opening interstitial shows a Black woman in a boxing ring, a la Jack Johnson. A voice over of **SARAH** describes the importance of Black hair. On camera, **SARAH BREEDLOVE**, a poor Black woman in her 40s, washes laundry, and learns how to read from her daughter **LELIA**, energetic and awkward in her 20s, and gets paid a measly quarter for her work. Walking down the bustling streets of Jim Crow St. Louis, Sarah approaches and enters the hair salon of **ADDIE**

MUNROE, 40s, an elegant light skin entrepreneur and stylist with beautiful hair. Sarah stumbles in asking Addie if she can sell her miracle hair product, seeing as Sarah is living proof that Addie's invention, Magical Hair Grower, works on nappy, balding, and thinning hair. While Addie does Sarah's hair, Addie's husband **EUGENE**, malice in his disposition, smugly crosses the scene. Addie and Sarah joke about men's egos and bond. Then, Addie's beautiful sales consultants enter and Sarah gives them tips on how to market the product. Sarah finally asks Addie if she can sell it but she insinuates that Sarah isn't beautiful enough. Sarah, crushed, steals some tins of Hair Grower before exiting. Another interstitial of the shadowed boxer. Sarah is now in her Sunday best with hair done, selling Addie's product on the streets of the colored part of town. She tells a woman her story (voiceover) and flashbacks of Sarah and her second husband **DAVIS** (drunk, 30s, handsome and hungry) about to make love when her head rag comes off and reveals her bald spots. Davis, repulsed, angrily dismounts her and cuts her with a bottle of whiskey, and leaves. Addie approaches the house to sell some of her hair grower, saving Sarah's life. Flashback ends and more women have gathered on the street to hear her story and she sells twenty tins. She tells Addie how much she sold, and Addie is angry that Sarah stole the tins, telling her she looks like she stepped off the plantation. Sarah tries to advocate for her sales but is devastated. She looks in the mirror and sees the bald "Sarah" rejected by Davis. Back in the kitchen, Sarah is making a concoction of her own Hair Grower on the stove. Her husband **CJ WALKER** (40s, handsome, compassionate) enters lovingly to congratulate Sarah on the sales, and Sarah cries to him about Addie's response. Sarah tries the product on Leila and burns her scalp. Flash forward and Sarah's product takes off. She places the money in a jar for Leila's college. Addie uninvitedly enters and threatens Sarah. The boxers in the interstitial are revealed to be Addie and Sarah. CJ and Sarah resolve to move to Indianapolis to be with CJ's sister and father as the business is better there. They wait for Lelia at the train station but she arrives with her juke joint beau **JOHN** (20s, good-for-nothing musician), excited to announce to CJ and Sarah that they got hitched. Sarah is appalled as she told Lelia to wait and marry someone of good fortune and hard work. Two years later in Indianapolis, Sarah employs the whole family into making her Wonderful Hair Grower, including John, CJ's sister **PEGGIE** (40s), and CJ's father **CLEOPHUS** (80s, former slave, clever and ornery). Sarah and Lelia sell the product on the street and discuss Lelia's future: John wants to open a juke joint but Sarah wants her to go to college and run the business someday. Six months later, the salon's grand opening pulls no business, and Sarah binge eats while CJ suggests they get jobs at the local hotel. Sarah is determined and soon enough, she is standing in the city square giving her testimony to people of all colors and genders. She offers to give a farm girl free treatment and soon enough, she sells the product. The salon is now packed with women, and CJ, Peggie, **ESTHER** (20s, gorgeous and hardworking) and other stylists bustle to tend to clients. Sarah uses the old hot comb Addie gave her and gets inspired. Meanwhile, the hype of the Great White Hope vs. Black Jack Johnson boxing match grows. Sarah recruits **FREEMAN RANSOM** (30s, erudite) from his bellhop job to be her corporate lawyer. Cleophus tries to convince CJ that Sarah is only out for herself and

that he needs to have a career separate from her. Sarah throws a party at her house to watch the fight and Peggie runs in to tell her Addie Munroe is opening a shop in town, Sarah runs out and actually runs into Addie on the street, bruised and claiming Gene died. As the colored population strolls to church, women flock Sarah and praise her products. Inside the church, Addie scandalously markets her product and even her new storefront, the only Black beauty shop outside of a home in Indiana. Sarah once again encounters her former, rag-headed self in the mirror of the church bathroom and shatters it. She then gathers a crowd outside to announce that she is giving free product away. Now overrun with orders, the family struggles to get it all done. Interspersed with interstitials of Addie and Sarah fighting in the boxing ring, quick cuts show the family working overtime to make and sell tins of hair grower. Then, an explosion in the basement brings us back to reality: John left the stove unattended to smoke a cigarette, and the whole house is engulfed in flames. Everything, including money, is gone. Addie comes to console, more like steal, Sarah's customers, and in retaliation Sarah pops off, demanding that Addie calls her Madame CJ Walker.

COMMENTS

The against-the-odds true story of **SELF MADE** has a promising premise that will appeal to a variety of modern day audiences: from learners of Black history to those who love a feminist success story, to any fan of historical fiction and the costumes and aesthetics of the early 20th century. The underdog hero, at the intersection of Black activism and feminism, is inspiring for a multitude of oppressed peoples. The all Black cast and feminist success story will pull the demographic along the lines of *Black Panther*, *Hidden Figures*, and *Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*.

This is an exceptional pilot script that follows the origins of Sarah Breedlove into her first taste of success as Madame CJ Walker. Her desires, fears, and motivators are shown in full colors and the magical realism of her reflections into her past self typify this. The supporting characters are complex individuals whose desires, fears, and motivators are also explicitly shown. Addie Munroe is an essential antagonist who digs deep into Sarah's insecurities to fuel the fire of rivalry. The boxing interstitials support this incredibly, although some of these feel slightly repetitive in their beats which might make the audience lose interest.

Overall, **SELF MADE** is an original and authentic story with deeply fascinating characters and enthralling character dynamics. **SELF MADE** could easily be a top bingeable series on a major streaming platform and would demand a medium-to-high budget as the period costuming and set would require accuracy and the magical realism elements would demand excellent effects.

CHARACTERS:

Sarah Breedlove (Madam CJ Walker)- Hard working Black woman whose deep desire for beauty and success motivates her to beat the odds.

Addie Munroe- Sarah's rival hair product mogul whose sticky-sweet disposition and gorgeous appearance fuel Sarah's flames.

Lelia-- Sarah's daughter that encourages and uplifts her, yet she will never be enough in Sarah's eyes and rebels because of it.

CJ Walker-- Sarah's second husband who loves and appreciates her, yet is insecure in living in her shadow.

Peggie- CJ's sister who helps Sarah style hair at the salon.

Cleophus Walker-- A former slave and CJ's father who helps Sarah's business. He nags CJ about his wife's breadwinning.

John Robinson-- Lelia's good-for-nothing musician husband with ulterior motives.

Freeman Ransom-- Sarah's younger lawyer friend who hops on board to help grow the corporation.