



PIGMENT

A Film by
Judah Lazarus

SYNOPSIS

Pigment is the story of two hauntingly beautiful sisters born with a life threatening light sensitivity disorder called Xeroderma Pigmentosum, or XP for short. XP is a genetic disorder of DNA repair in which the body's normal ability to remove damage caused by ultraviolet light is compromised. The only viable option for patients suffering from this rare disease is to completely avoid exposure to the sun.

After receiving the devastating diagnosis, the girls' parents commit to raising Heather and Shelby by night. Spending their nights playing together in the woods outside their modest country house, and their days behind the covered windows of their bedroom, the sisters create elaborate costumes and lose themselves in romantic fantasies about life in a larger world they will never know.

After years of oppressive seclusion and intolerable family strife, the bizarre twins forsake the safety of their home and leave, under the cover of dark, for NYC.

Within minutes of arriving at New York's Penn Station, the teenage sisters are set upon by an opportunistic pimp who takes them back to his Upper East Side brothel with the intention of breaking them down and turning them out.

Although normally calculating and patient, Freddy the pimp finds himself overcome by the sisters' odd beauty and tries to force himself on Heather. Seeing her sister being attacked Shelby reacts instinctively and viciously mauls the pimp with unbridled, animalistic rage.

Fearing reprisals, the sisters leave Freddy for dead, and although it is well past dawn, flee the apartment. They wrap themselves from head to toe and head out onto the street in broad daylight! Not knowing where else to go, and desperate for shelter, Heather and Shelby make their way to a dance club that they heard about from one of the girls at the brothel.

At the door, the sisters find that the club hasn't opened yet. Nevertheless, Heather and Shelby, find their way in through the service entrance and make an impression with the club manager, Richard Quedstedt, and he offers them a job working the coat check.

For the most part, Heather and Shelby manage to keep their deadly illness a secret but their strangeness is undeniable and they are soon the center of attention. With their pale skin, wildly imaginative costumes and peculiar affectations the sisters quickly gain notoriety amongst the club staff, patrons and the press covering the club scene.

Almost overnight the sisters are moved from the relatively obscure coatroom to the coveted position as gatekeepers at the club's velvet rope. Soon the sisters are being heralded as authentic creatures of the night and champions of the counterculture.

The Hyde sisters have arrived; everyone knows their name and everyone wants to be their friend. The romance, glamor, and excitement of their childhood musings are materializing before their eyes.

And yet, their lives in the city are more complicated than they were in the seclusion of their childhood. Subtle differences between the sisters, unseen and unfelt back home, seem significant now in the glare and spectacle of the clubs.

Shelby readily takes to their newfound fame. She is unfazed by the freakish nature of their celebrity. In fact she sees their success as her and Heather's birthright. They are princess freaks; champion to the disenfranchised that populate club-land. The decadent indulgences offered up to them are just payback for the years of exclusion, stigma and boredom.

Heather, on the other hand, finds the attention a painful validation of their otherness —proof that she and Shelby will never belong in the straight world. Heather realizes that what she truly wants is a cure. Heather wants to be normal.

And so it is here, behind the velvet rope of the hottest club in New York City, that Heather and Shelby Hyde come face to face with the inevitability of their progressing illness, burgeoning individuality and diverging desires.





The New York Times

July 21, 2002

Hudson Journal; Where Daylight's a Risk, Dark Is a Time to Shine

By LISA W. FODERARO

As wisps of cloud drifted across a half moon, 9-year-old Mary Begg, in helmet and harness, climbed the 10 rungs of a ladder toward the lowest foot grips on a soaring climbing wall.

Hesitating a moment, Mary, a shy girl with owlsh glasses, reached up and touched a toehold with her hand before rappelling off the wall, eliciting a cheer from her fellow campers below.

As youngsters in countless other camps were singing their final song of the night and tucking themselves into bunk beds, the young (and not so young) participants in Camp Sundown here were just starting their day.

The camp is intended to give a high-energy, outdoor camp experience to those with a rare genetic disorder, xeroderma pigmentosum, which makes them unable to tolerate ultraviolet light. And so activities like this one, on a rugged adventure course at Columbia-Greene Community College, take place at night, when the campers can venture safely outside.

Under the eerie glow of eight 1,000-watt bulbs hovering overhead on stanchions, Mary -- who had traveled all the way from Australia -- and the others tackled a network of poles, ropes, pulleys and other contraptions that looked like something out of the television show "Fear Factor."

Most participants were from the United States, but another young girl had come from Morocco, while the oldest camper, Betty Wallace, 62, had arrived from Manchester, England. Because xeroderma "On a typical day, she might be in the sun for 45 seconds to a minute, if you add it all up," said Neil Johnson, Alixe's father, who had just walked across a cable 20 feet off the ground that resembled a tightrope while she looked on. "When the sun goes down, she's out the door."

THE TONE OF PIGMENT

Although Xeroderma Pigmentosum, the rare light sensitivity disorder, which Heather and Shelby suffer from is an actual disease, I chose it not for authenticity but rather because of the symbolic and metaphoric opportunities it afforded me in constructing the narrative. Even though our story will be informative, it is not a medical drama about living with a rare genetic disorder. And although *Pigment* is set in a nightclub it's purpose is not to document club life. Instead, *Pigment* should be seen as a fable or a fairy tale with deep symbolism, strong metaphors, and universal themes.

To that end, I've tried to create a fantastical narrative by setting a series of opposing forces against each other. At the very center is a pair of twins Heather and Shelby, unnaturally close and seemingly inseparable. They live as two halves of the one whole. But this also means that they are mirror opposites of each other and although their divergent natures are not apparent early on, it eventually becomes clear that the sisters want very different things. Heather desperately wants to be normal, while Shelby relishes being a freak.

The next set of opposing forces is that of day and night or more to the point light and darkness. This unbounded tension pervades the story and operates as the central metaphor for all that is divided in our characters lives. This fundamental division between light and darkness epitomizes the dualistic nature of our existence. It embodies everything that is in opposition, everything that is unfixable and hopelessly divided.

The above examples are the two most central oppositional forces in *Pigment* but there are numerous others meant to ratchet up the tension and reinforce the theme. There is the natural sanctuary of the woods where Heather and Shelby played when they were young, set against the rabid social construct that envelops them in the city. There are the hard tragic facts of the sisters' medical prognosis juxtaposed with the vapid, superficiality of the nightclubs. This same tension carries through to all the characters; there are the outcasts and the insiders, the freaks and the normals, the healthy and the sick, the privileged and the disadvantaged, and so on. In fact, everyone in *Pigment* is defined not by who they are but by who they are not. And this is the single unifying thread between all the characters and is an essential theme of *Pigment*.

PROGRESSION OF FRAMING FOR HEATHER AND SHELBY

When we first meet Heather and Shelby they are a perfect pair - complementary in every way. They are more than sisters and best friends - they are literally inseparable. They have lived their lives in near total isolation. Aside from their parents, doctors and a couple of friends they meet at a summer camp for children with light sensitivity disorders, the sisters interact with almost no one. Their closeness is extreme and uncomfortable; the line between them is blurred. They are, in fact, two halves of the same whole.

And yet as the story unfolds, differences between them do become apparent. Shelby is wild, unapologetic and visceral. Heather is verbal and thoughtful and she longs to be normal. These differences appear inconsequential at home, but in the city the sisters gain power and find hope, and they learn that they want very different things.

Shelby thrives on the attention in the clubs. She feels as if she has arrived. In the clubs she can be who she is and be rewarded in every way for it. Heather on the other hand, resents the attention. Every look, every comment, seems to reinforce her deepest fear that she is a freak and an outcast who will never be normal.

As the story unfolds, the rift between the sisters grows and their separation becomes inevitable. The camera work and framing in *Pigment* will illustrate this relationship between the sisters.

At the opening of the movie, Heather and Shelby will be photographed together, always sharing the frame. At the story unfolds the framing evolves to highlight the growing differences between the sisters.



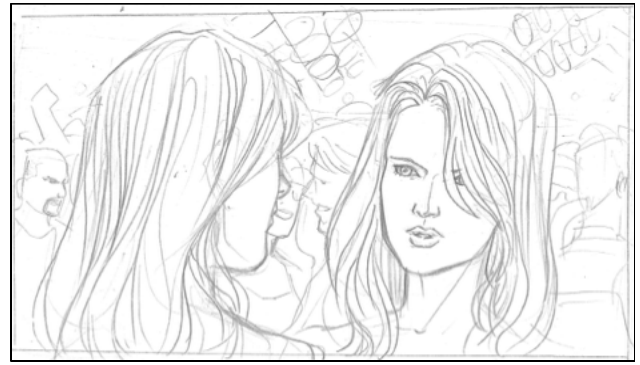
1. Heather and Shelby stand together as one in frame, both facing camera.



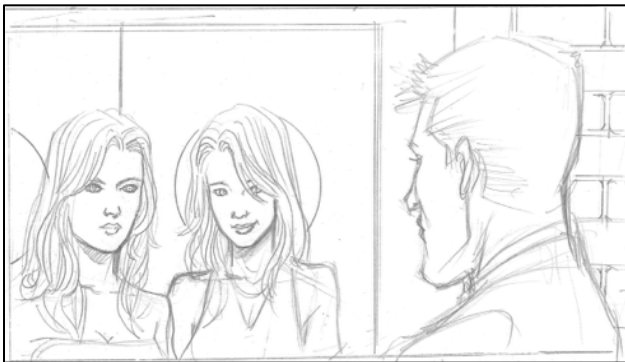
2. Heather and Shelby are both in frame, but face each other as two individuals.



3. Heather and Shelby are both in frame, but with distance between them.



4. Heather and Shelby are both in frame, but we see one of them over the shoulder.



5. Heather and Shelby stand together in frame, but now someone shares the frame with them.



6. Heather and Shelby are both in frame, but now someone stands between them.

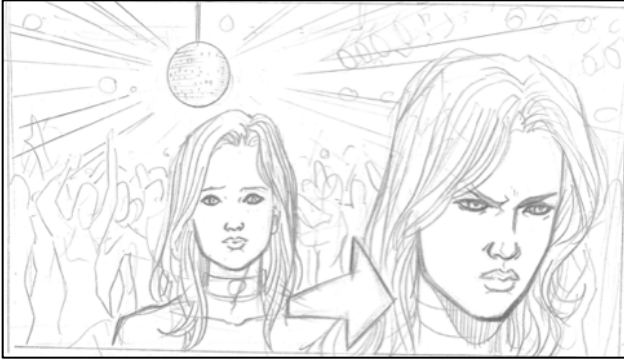


7. Heather and Shelby are both in frame, but now someone is between them, and one of them is seen over the shoulder.



8. One of the sisters is in frame with someone else, but one of the sisters is partially out of frame.

PROGRESSION OF FRAMING FOR HEATHER AND SHELBY CONT.



9. The frame starts with both sisters in frame, but one of them walks out of frame.



10. Only one of the sisters is in the frame.

MOOD BOARDS: HEATHER AND SHELBY ESCAPE TO NYC



EXT. COUNTRY GAS STATION - NIGHT

The sisters sit on a bench outside the gas station with the hoods of their long black capes draped over their eyes to shield their vulnerable skin from the harsh overhead lights.

We watch the reoccurring action from the OPENING SCENE as a Greyhound bus pulls into the country gas station.

INT. BUS, CONTINUOUS

We follow the sisters, cloaked beneath their hooded capes, get on and find seats.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD, CONTINUOUS

The bus makes its way down the country road, we stay with the bus as it turns onto the main artery and then onto the interstate highway.

MOOD BOARDS: SHELBY SAVES HEATHER FROM FREDDY



FREDDY

I can take care of you... You and
your sister. That's what I do.

Freddy skillfully works Heather's legs apart without ever releasing his hold on her. His voice remains steady and calm. Heather is hyperventilating as her eyes fill with panic.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

You take care of them. That's all
you do. I do the rest. And you'll
belong. That I can promise.

Heather's eyes soften, her breathing slows. She lets Freddy's words hypnotize her. He releases her from his grasp testing her will. But as soon as he does Heather kicks violently, causing her dress to ride up above her waist.

Just then Shelby dances in from the bathroom. She is made up more extravagantly than ever before.

When Shelby sees Freddy on top of Heather she goes berserk. She grabs a heavy stone ash tray and swings wildly. Freddy's head snaps to one side violently sending blood zipping through the air like a long red ribbon. The blood splatters across the picture window, accenting the city vista with dark red puddles.

MOOD BOARDS: MICHAEL K. MEETS THE SISTERS AT THE COATROOM



Michael has his ticket in his hand so Heather takes it. There is immediate chemistry here. Then Shelby bounces over.

MICHAEL'S FRIEND

Sisters? That is so hot. They can't be paying you enough.

Michael doesn't seem at all hip and that's exactly what Heather likes about him.

MICHAEL'S FRIEND (CONT'D)

Come with us now, I'm begging. I'll pay. How much for the both of you?

Michael's friend is now waving his billfold. Heather, suddenly feels like she's back at the brothel. Shelby takes the ticket from Heather and goes for the coats.

MICHAEL KEENER

Don't do that.

(to Heather)

He didn't mean anything. He's trying to be charming.

Shelby tosses the coats on the counter.

HEATHER

Take the coats. Keep your money.

With that Shelby waves them off. Michael feels bad and looks over at Heather as he walks off with his friend.

MOOD BOARDS: HEATHER AND SHELBY WORK THE DOOR FOR THE FIRST TIME



EXT. THE ROPE, GELLO NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

The scene out front is bumpin'! SUVs and racing bikes circle the block. The crowd is buzzing and Heather and Shelby, in matching outfits, are at the center.

The sisters look out over the crowd. At first Finbar appears to still be pissed about sharing the glory but after a few moments of watching the girls he can't help but feel nostalgic for his first time working the rope and comes up behind the sisters and whispers to them:

FINBAR
...and they all want to be your friends.

MOOD BOARDS: HEATHER, SHELBY AND JOHNNY SPLENDID IN THE TENT



INT. TENT - MORNING

The sisters take off their makeup; Johnny Splendid notices Heather's uncovered scar but knows better then to inquire. The girls change into sweatpants and t-shirts. Now they look like regular teenagers.

JOHNNY SPLENDID

Don't you guys make enough dough to get a real place?

SHELBY

This is a real place, Johnny.

JOHNNY SPLENDID

My name is Kevin.

SHELBY

Why would you want the name they gave you? I mean, we picked you.

JOHNNY SPLENDID

And what made you do that?

SHELBY

Don't you know we all have a glow?

Shelby pulls off Johnny's shirt revealing his tan lines.

SHELBY

(CONT'D)

Most people smother it but yours is very strong.

Shelby takes off top. There's a long beat and then Heather takes her top off too. The sisters' pale skin glows under the magenta light.

MOOD BOARDS: MICHAEL TAKES HEATHER, SHELBY AND JOHN WAYNE ON A BOAT RIDE DOWN THE HUDSON



EXT. SAILBOAT, HUDSON RIVER - LATER

The boat moves further down the river. Heather and Shelby sit on either side of John Wayne. Michael stands alone at the wheel. The drugs are just starting to kick in.

JOHN WAYNE

You were lucky to have each other.
With everything, the loneliness is
the worst. I'm tired of being
trapped behind this horrible mask.

SHELBY

Don't.

HEATHER

You are so beautiful.

A tight shot. Just their faces. Shelby kisses John Wayne on the mouth. Then Heather cups his face and turns him to her.

Michael watches from behind. There's no jealousy in his face, just the knowledge that he will never belong in their world.

Heather and Shelby unzip John Wayne's space suit and begin to use their hands on him. We see Michael's face again. He is almost embarrassed to be there - in their moment.

But John Wayne is X-ing and is very ill and doesn't seem that concerned with climaxing. He becomes distracted, stands abruptly and starts shouting.

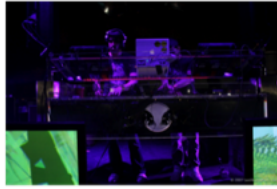
JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)

I see France! I see France!

SHELBY

What are you talking about?

John Wayne points down river - it's the Statue of Liberty.





STORYBOARDS: HEATHER AND SHELBY HIDE FROM THE LIGHT

INT. LOBBY, MOMENTS LATER



The elevator door opens into the lobby. Sunlight streams in through the expansive windows at the far side of the room.



HEATHER
Did you kill him?

SHELBY
How should I know?



The doorman stares at the twins as they hesitate in the elevator.



Heather wraps her scarf around her head and face attempting to cover every inch of exposed skin. Shelby follows suit. They finally step through the elevator doors.



The doorman smiles, disingenuously, at them



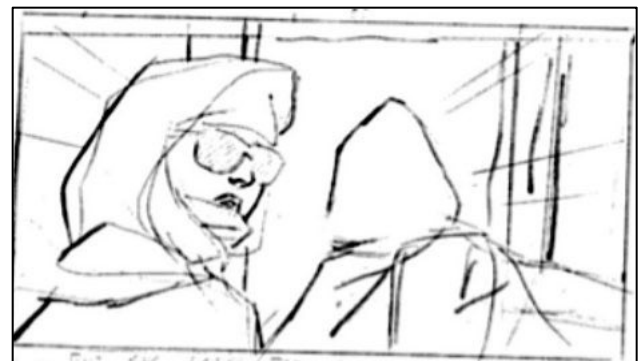
and picks up the house phone.



The twins head for the front door. Shelby can barely drag her bags but refuses to give up the stolen booty.



Heather opens the door and the intensity of the sunlight is amplified five fold. This stops Shelby in her tracks



but she looks back over her shoulder to see the doorman has come out

STORYBOARDS: HEATHER AND SHELBY HIDE FROM THE LIGHT



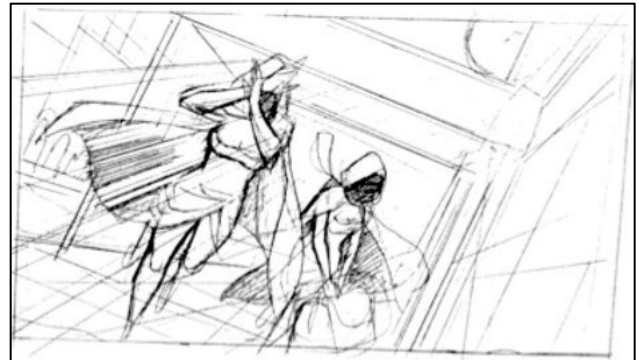
from behind his desk and is moving evenly toward her



She takes a breath and rushes out into the light



Panic and sunlight consume everything. The twins stumble down the street, moving in an uneven line,



trying to hide under awnings or the branches of the occasional trees. They are completely covered in gloves, scarves, sunglasses and their long hooded capes. They look completely insane.



The twins pass two uniformed prep school girls.



Although the schoolgirls are about the same age the contrast between them and the twins is palpable.

STORYBOARDS: HEATHER AND SHELBY HIDE FROM THE LIGHT



Heather can't help but turn to watch as the girls pass.



When she does, she sees Martin Sacks as he comes rushing out of Freddy's building.



Heather pulls Shelby behind a mail box and narrowly avoids being seen by Martin, who looks around aimlessly before heading back inside.



SHELBY

HEATHER
This is what I'm talking about! You expect me to know everything!



The twins keep moving

STORYBOARDS: HEATHER AND SHELBY HIDE FROM THE LIGHT



when they pass a phone booth, Heather stops and then doubles back.



Heather makes a call. Shelby huddles next to her. Some foreign sounding guy picks up on the other end.

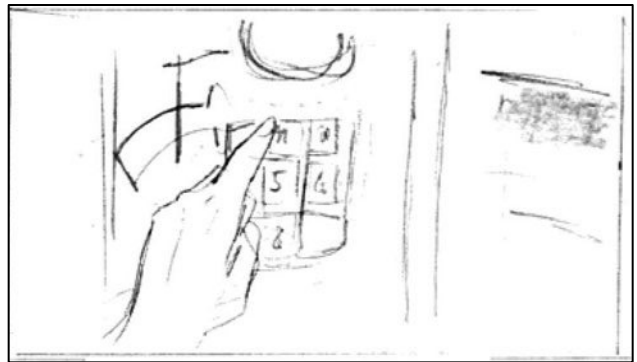
HEATHER
Is this Richard Quested?



VOICE ON PHONE
Wong numba.

HEATHER
Damn it!

Heather hangs up the phone.



Frustrated, she tries the number again. It rings a few times.



HEATHER
Is this Richard Quested?

(unsure)
I'm Heather Hyde... I got your number from Martin Sacks...



VOICE ON THE PHONE
Martin Sacks, that sick bastard. OK, Heather Hyde guest listed; Friday night.

HEATHER
What about tonight?

VOICE ON PHONE
Tuesday night, hardcore. Done.

STORYBOARDS: HEATHER AND SHELBY HIDE FROM THE LIGHT



HEATHER

Can we come now?

VOICE ON PHONE

It's only 2:30. What are you running away?

HEATHER

Yes. We need a job. We'll do anything.



Shelby thinks that Heather is blowing the interview and leans in and yells into the phone.

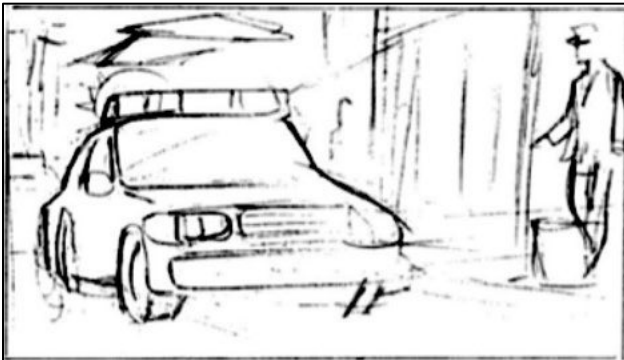
SHELBY

WE'RE FREAKS!!



VOICE ON PHONE

114 Horatio Street. Use the service entrance on Hudson.



A police car, with sirens blaring, comes speeding down the street stopping at Freddy's building. Heather drops the phone and the twins take off around the corner.

