

# SISTER, SISTER

By Pam Hunt

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Poetry editor Hezekiah writes: I just love Pam Hunt's poem, while the premise and message appears clear, I think what intrigues me most about these verses is the vitriol followed by a plea. It is so contrastingly aggressive and passive, caustic and plaintive, disdainful and grief-stricken—hostile and wistful. Not hate-filled, but sorrowful. "How could you know that pretty means rapable? / Alone means robbable? And quiet means stupid?" One's greatest misfortune is to have less to give and more to lose. Here is a poet who may have turned adversity into opportunity. Her dissenting ascensions are predicated on something so simple and immutable as skin pigment—Hunt teaches us: It is not how you appear, it is how you present yourself, and the love with which you're willing to fill your heart. I shall now step, and trip, off my shallow platform ...Nothing is black or white, gray cells matter. "It's so easy when you can't feel pain"—Hall and Oates, haplessly white, but still soulful. (Spacing and font size are poet's own.) HS*

Sister, Sister

"Black Sheep," "White Trash." Stay away!  
You got too many kids and ya' don't dress like me.  
People will judge me if they see me even talkin' to the likes of you.

*But*

*Sister, Sister, I'm all alone.*

Beaten down? Impossible; You're White!  
How could you know that pretty means rapable?  
Alone means robbable? And quiet means stupid?

*But*

*Sister, Sister, Can't you tell that I am all alone?*

You dressed like me today and have no dirty kids clinging to your knees.  
Please be quiet and don't tell me that you struggle  
To get safely through each day and each night

*OK*

*Sister, Sister I will pretend that I'm not alone.*

You're not underprivileged of course, because you look to me to be privileged.  
What? You were taken from your parents? Split from your sister and brother?  
You say you know violence? No, it couldn't be that bad. After all, you're white.

*But*

*Sister, Sister, Can't you tell that I am all alone?*

You're so quiet. You gotta jump in with us to be one of us.  
Read the books we're reading to understand what it's like to eat your dinner from a can  
And walk your kids through the trash in the alley to the bus stop.

*OK.*

*Sister, Sister I will pretend that I'm not alone.*

Abusive husband, no family, no support, no money?  
You feel the need to shield yourself with armor in an unsafe world?  
But you never had to fight racism so how can those be?

*But*

*Sister, Sister, Can't you tell that I am all alone?*

If you just try, you'll pass to be one of us and that's what matters.  
Only talk about funny things your kids do and how you hardly have any 'me time."  
Give us some money to help the poor because that's what we do.

No.  
*Silver Spooned Sister, I cannot pass and I cannot give.*

You may be our neighbor with many of the same day to day plights.  
But just the same, we don't understand you. You look too much like  
The Silver Spooned Bitches and it's just too hard to visualize anything else when we see you.

So  
*Sister, Sister, I really am alone.*

**THE POET SPEAKS:** *Poetry is poignant to me because it can punch you in the gut right away. I was taking a class about a year ago to learn how to write creative nonfiction. When I got back my first paper, my teacher wrote me a note saying "nice poem, but this is a creative nonfiction class." I genuinely didn't realize that I had written a poem. I guess the punch in the gut effect comes natural for me.*

*First and foremost, I hope my poem clearly makes the point that I often feel like I don't belong anywhere. This is a very personal account of the harmful stresses that traumas, addictions, abuses, mental illnesses, poverty and neglect inflict on the life of a person. Some of what I have felt for a long time have seemed more pronounced recently, which is why I wrote this poem. We all have pain, and different ways to express that pain, but straddling as an outlier among stereotypes can make finding an understanding ear difficult. My intention is not to make a white "MeToo" statement. The racial atrocities and systemic inequalities in America are horrifying. Again, the poem is about feeling like I don't belong anywhere. I hope my poem reflects my passion against social injustice in the broadest sense. We all need to be kind and care for each other.*

**AUTHOR'S BIO:** I used to write a lot of grant applications and newsletters when I worked for nonprofits over my career.

I am done with all that now, so writing for pleasure seems like a natural thing for me to be doing.

I obviously hope to write things that move people and make them think.