

## Black Sheep

You don't want to come to our party,  
you say. No one here knows you  
even though we all grew up together  
in the same home. No one understands  
how being with us feels

like ice melting under your collar—  
like trying to hold back off-color  
laughter in a funeral room—  
like shifting on a pristine chair  
in grease-stained coveralls.

You think we are whole without you,  
a complete panel of magistrates  
already in possession of a verdict.  
But I am not

judging you—I am judging

the lay of the land. I am  
plumbing the valleys and chasms  
between us, plotting how to hurl  
myself across and lay hold  
before you run.

— *Merrijane Rice*

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This poem was a finalist in the 2024 BYU Studies Poetry Contest.