Amid blackberries, black juice, black pulp, and purpled canes
spined with thorns, our fingers stabbed and pricked, rent for
sweetness: glad injuries. At the Regent, your hand moored in
the small of my back. Shoulders back, spine straight, a good
frame, our bodies guided by pressure and glide, a wrist moving
out or in: pattern, space, forgiveness. The eyes that turn to
watch.

Do not marry a white man,
he said. But chance did not heed,
nor circumstance, nor that inward
mind that sets the body’s compass,
or maybe there always waits
in affection some insurgency,
always a rub. I am convinced

If I warm my skin
with a gun barrel?
that these differences in vision are
of no importance. One sees as one
wishes to see, Degas said.

If I replace my skin
with coal dust?
that constitutes art. Let’s make
an art of it, Beloved. You be my cane,

If I wash my skin
in the Mississippi?
I’ll be your sunglasses. You be
Louie Bellson or Solomon. I’ll be
Pearl Bailey or Sheba. Let’s drink

If I delete my skin
with a keystroke?
pineapple juice. Let’s sit in a window
in a small Midwestern town and watch
them secretly stare. On a fence post,
a magpie peck-pecks a beetle’s carapace,
dark meat dangled from a closed beak,
iridescent wings splintered, frayed into fans.