

ROCKET by Matt Hubert

Is it because I'm black?

He yells and tells
me not to do
fun things like
run in the house,
stay out late at night,
or eat leftovers off his plate.

He keeps me on a tight leash—
two meals, a one-sided exercise
routine where he watches me run.
Zero fancy restaurants.

It's always his turn to talk,
but I've learned my lesson: listen
and his hands will run wild
on my body—each offering
five fingers, facilitating
a full body massage
as I sit and beg for more.

Sit and beg. Lie down and roll over.
My body contorts
to his commanding voice,
which resonates with power,
dominance, control.
Obedience earns my body praise,
and I don't mind.

But what about my mind?

Can I never,
after several years
of careful observation,
offer my perspective,
offer my own proclamation?
Just once try to include me
in family conversation.
Instead of playing rough at night,
ask, perhaps, about my day.

I wrote my philosophy of life
in the snow—
he shoveled it away like
a piece of crap.
It was easily better
than his last draft.

I painted a self-portrait
in the kitchen—
he tossed it back in the bag
where I found the supplies.
He prepared to yell;
I was prepared to prevent it—
with rational discourse?
Spirited debate? Logic?
No. Sad puppy-dog eyes.

What else do I have to offer him?