on the eve of another plunge

i am the eternally stubborn, the dog who keeps burning his nose on the stove.

you’re there and i’m here because with my black and white impaired vision, i can’t tell if you’re burning or not.

i have followed them with their angry fires surrounding them, and i could smell the ashes of others who have been there before me.

the b-horror flick where the audience is yelling “don’t go down there, you dumb schmucks!” is playing in my head, even before i burn my nose, yelp and run away to hide somewhere.

the dog knows that he’ll burn his tongue on the still-hot frying pan that cooked the chow mein, quiche and pancakes.

the poor stupid thing doesn’t smell the drugs that you buried in his dog food, though.

no need to blame yourself, the dog brings it upon himself. he sees you scooting the dish closer and closer to the wood stove each time he’s fed.

maybe he can get it all without touching the stove but he’s afraid to try right now. he’ll starve before he feels that degrading slap in the face again.

i have been so far, yet i feel as if i’ve just hatched and the sun is too bright and scary.
i’m staring.
the stove is starting to
glide away.

i stared.

you stared too.

with that
the stove became a wide open space in
the kitchen and i almost had the courage
to take a step closer.

it’s true
i can’t see very well, and if
i just
closed my eyes altogether
i would just feel nameless pain
instead of
you.

these calluses are good for what
ails me, but in a way i yearn for
the days when i grabbed the
steaming pipe
with my lily white hands.

the dog will not
step any closer to the stove.

he’s figured you out.

but don’t open the stove door
either, or he’ll jump in
without a thought.

i don’t have any inkling of your
whereabouts now.

i just wish i could reveal my mind to you
without speech.

in my classes
i often wait to see if someone else will
ask the question i have.
i'd almost like you to tell me
the answer before i can tell you
the question.
that might very well happen
since i really don’t know the question.
the dog knows the answer.
he doesn’t know english, but
in his mind as in mine, the answer boils
down to an image of pain.
with that,
i've been starving for a while.
your outstretched hand
invites me.
all my pain and burning
dissolves
into a puddle of peace.
the stove and burning pipe
in the corner of my eye, i banish the image
from my mind altogether, and
walk with determined steps through the
doorway of this room, a room with no
pavlovian pain and punishment,
no endless nights of whimpering
below the table, this room of you.
i pet the dog at my feet as you
throw another log into the wood stove
and
open the draft.

Matthew Gordon