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Imaginary Painting: *Black Canvas* · Charles Baxter

Inside this paint is a rubber glove.

The black stain is a sidewalk paved to the ceiling,
a black ladder. To the interviewer,
the dark says, "No opinion." What are those insects
that buzz in this box (30 x 38 x 1)?
Inside the paint a child blubbers softly,
pulling us into the pigment, the pitch dark

of just waking in a dark room in a bland bed
where the stranger breathes her apricot breath into the air.
Black, sir, is not a sensible deprivation
but a scent! Somehow one sees a lace curtain, a lace dress,
one smells perfume as mother and father dress for dinner
in another room and yearn toward us where behind

this door we are supposed to be sleeping
but instead wait for a kiss or a peek of them sliding
in evening clothes out into the dark. Will they
be swallowed? This black reaches into the earth
and scoops out liquid nothing, attached to a hand.
It tastes the way the mouth does, as we fall asleep.

Hey, bartender! pour me some of that black.