August, Before the Third Grade

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It was the anniversary
of the Sharon Tate murders.
On the radio, something about a knife
and a pregnant belly, swastikas, someone
named Squeaky. They played a clip
of Manson singing the Beatles
and the DA saying This is a case
of pure evil. I worried
about the fact that Manson
could still get out on parole because
my mother explained to me
about California and the death
penalty, and how they turned
it over and then gave
it back. In the third grade I worried
about the kinds of things
a small man named Charlie
could do to you—how he might
give you one of those names,
Gypsy, Cappy, Snake,
might cut your forehead open
might make you do it
yourself while he sang you
the White Album, the same

album my mother and I listened
to every Saturday while we washed
the bathroom floors til they squeaked.
Wailing with Lennon, Yes, I'm lonely,
wanna die, gripping the rag and scrubbing
until all the scum was gone.

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