Knockout

by Laura Bandy

One day I walked home from Lincoln school holding Christopher's hand.
He was the son of Kenny Norton, the heavyweight who broke Ali's jaw.

I didn't know that part, I liked that Christopher left mini snickers in my heart-
shaped cardboard kindergarten mailbox and shared his magic markers.

After a few post-school strolls in fall, stomping leaves in Duncan Park,
playing hopscotch down the long stretch of Grove street, my mother got a call.

Did she know her daughter was running around with a little black boy, *did she know*.
This was 1980. Norton beat Ali in '73. My mother was born in 1942. Her

mother, whose brother flew with Lindbergh, caused a scene in Birmingham
in 1949 when a stranger pulled her daughter my mother from the colored

drinking fountain in a department store, cautioned her to clean her mouth.
We will never return to the South, said my grandmother, and they never did.

History steals from us all, but never evenly. Lindbergh never got his baby back.
Norton left wife and son, never returned to his hometown, my hometown,

all the way in the frozen North, where I sat next to my mother on our piano bench
after the phone call, listened to her play *Blowin' in the Wind* and *Wayfaring Stranger*.

I told her I hoped to marry Christopher one day and she kept playing,
she never looked away from the patterned notes, black and white

in minor key, she said she prayed that my life would be easy.