

SUSAN G. DUNCAN

Tender

I held a paperclip just now, when
I read a Western Monarch weighs less than one.

I handled it gently, let it rest in my
left palm as if it were indeed a wearied butterfly

returned a thousand miles from Juarez. I'd answered
the phone today to your familiar voice last heard

three decades ago, and after uneasy preliminaries
you reminisced, and here our memories

diverged—not from acrimony, not from spite—
in confusion. You wanted to get them right,

but feared that age had intervened
and only I might verify. My ancient anger receded

into a stunned rapprochement.
See, I'd (loathed you, and yet) wanted

to be remembered wistfully by you.
And though at last you want this too,

it eludes you: where we honeymooned,
how we met—(you're only 70, isn't this too soon?)

and mercifully, why we parted. All of it—forfeit.
A human heart, in shape and size, is like a fist,

clenching and unclenching—at a butterfly's beat.
I must remember: handle the next tender heart I meet

always supposing it's braved
some pummeling, endured long ache.