

*Michael Van Walleghe***The Hunk**

— *Florida, 1988*

76 years old, he says  
but hung like a camel  
and strong as an ox . . .

A ladies' man, a retired  
small time gangster  
he says, from Detroit.

An ex-pimp is my guess  
complete with gold chains  
and a ridiculous bikini.

A bore, a weightlifter  
a geriatric adolescent  
who can walk on his hands . . .

But my mother likes him  
or forgives him at least  
and so do her friends —

the ladies she swims with  
at the neighborhood beach.  
They call him "The Hunk."

It seems he lives here —  
a tent under the boardwalk  
or in the palmetto somewhere.

Something to do I think  
with his job — a watchman  
or caretaker of some sort.

But that's not it he says.  
NO! What he really does  
is babysit for turtles . . .

At which point his voice  
turns absolutely reverent —  
as if he's speaking poetry . . .

All those little flags  
sticking up out there?  
Those are turtle eggs.

And on the next full moon  
coincident with high tide  
most of them will hatch.

That's where he comes in.  
Nuncio the body builder  
the lonely widow's dream

leading them to water . . .  
Of course. Who else?  
I can see it perfectly:

Ten thousand baby turtles  
and this guy, on his hands  
lurching toward the sea

where presently my mother  
and her friends are sharing  
a thermos of martinis . . .

How beautiful they look  
bobbing around out there  
in their inner tubes —

the joke on someone else  
for a change, the children  
on their own, at last.