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The Pig War

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THE PIG WAR—

Friday Harbor, Washington

“The Britishers used to come down this trail
To their camp, and their ships was out in that bay
A-waitin for the battle. A red-coated guard would hail
You as you come up, and he’d yell, ‘Who goes there?’ ” I say

But John, he just says, “What was on this island?”
“Jeez, John,” says I, “You always miss the thrust
Of things like this. This land is your land and my land;
Duty, and honor, and country, and Fifty-four-forty or bust

Or whatever it was. So what if it was a herd
Of pigs and twenty Americans?” But I’ve lost
Him, and he gets that look of his, that bird-
Eyed, glassy-headed one, and he says, “What was the cost

In terms of human lives?” (That’s what he said, I’m tellin’
You the truth.) And I says, “Oh, there was a whole bunch
Of soldiers in both camps, but I guess not much killin’
Went on. Never was a real war. Ten or twenty, mebbe.” He’s out to lunch

Again, with that look of his, so while he’s shut up I sets
the scene for him. “Just before they calls it off, the tide
Goes out, and the reds send their ships out of the harbor, and lets
Nobody in or out. The Yanks, they’re on the rocky side

Of the island, and in either end the men digs
In, just like the troops at Verdun.”
“Must’ve been a helluva nice herd of pigs,”
Says John.

Matt Mosman