

# F E N L A N D V I G N E T T E S



B R I A N S W A N N

## I: Mail at Xmas

The war a dozen years over, my father who fought the Nazis bravely (though the Germans were “our brothers”) has been warning me again that the commies are coming for everything including his second-hand Morris Minor that barely fits into his garage and once in seldom leaves.

They’re welcome, I think as I pedal the red GPO bike with my heavy leather GPO satchel through this greasy orange street light morning fog spreads over semi-detached houses, whose house numbers are indecipherable until you go right up and stick your nose on them at the new housing estate called King’s Hedges Road, where there are no kings, except the three I bring, and any hedges are buried with ancient Angles in rotten fen sedge and gray mud under rime-encrusted postage-stamp lawns, here where I wander round and round on my heavy bike, lost, banging into things, bearing tidings of comfort and joy.

## II: Digging Come Spring

Heavy gray marl sticks to my spade, water seeping into the deep gash I gouge  
through  
rotten sedge and reeds, sucking at my feet, the old fen rising in a line we pile  
near where

they'd built another council estate and found an Angle burial ground. In this  
stink of  
ancient air I stand up straight to breathe. "Kill it, kiddo! Kill it!" laughs Shay,  
one of the

Irish navvy twins, shoulders too wide to fit into the trench, posing with one foot  
on the pipes  
we're laying while rolling giant clay phalli, balls to match, which he  
demonstrates for

housewives who watch from behind curtains, colored scarves round their heads,  
pretending  
to look past us across their small dug-up lawns into the distance and its bit of  
sun.