As the colonel turned into his street he knew that he had to be careful how he went at this late hour, and have some answers ready for the young men who hung around on every street corner like goats, seeing conspiracies and plots in the most everyday comings and goings. It was as if they were training to be detectives, practising on the passers-by. To lend weight to their dangerous game, they had to imagine that each of the passers-by had committed some criminal act. At the very least, they were involved in adultery or drug smuggling, or visiting a cache of weapons, or were linked to people who were plotting to overthrow the regime. Perhaps the colonel was getting carried away, but the fact was that he had no wish to make his problems any worse and, if he was letting his imagination get the better of him, he chose to see it as some passing compulsion that was not natural to him. It grew out of the atmosphere that pervaded the streets and alleyways where he lived. He regarded the fear and insecurity that this atmosphere provoked in him as a kind of necessary training for life which, like it or not, everyone was forced to be inoculated with. Take the sensation of fear, for instance. You can be frightened of something without knowing what it is. Looming over your head, you fancy you see a sword held in an invisible hand, and you have long felt its steel in your bowels. This feeling is irrational, and you cannot shake it off. Because you fear being spied upon, you end up believing that you really are being spied upon. But if this turns out not to be so, you still have to ask yourself why you can’t stop imagining that it’s happening. Where does this corrosive and exhausting feeling that constantly tells you that every eye is watching you come from?

He had been permanently fearful for years. It all started when he buckled on his revolver for the first time and became aware of carrying a weapon. He had had to start thinking about life. The fear had been in him even before he had become aware of it. Perhaps he refused to recognise this fear as something much more ancient and primeval that had been passed down to him through generations, whose cryptic presence affected every-thing he did. Mankind spends all its life in a state of permanent insecurity, knowing no peace, and it never knows why. And in the end you die, but you don’t take that fear with you to the grave as you should. No, you pass it on to the next generation. When I became aware of fear, I had to accept it and gradually come to terms with it and split it up into different elements.

He and his whole generation were scarred by the events that had followed 1953.* After that disaster, they were all paralysed by a pervading sense of pessimism, which had lasted for about twenty years. It only lifted when the generation responsible for the catastrophe had been worn out by defeat and had given way to a new one. In the second half of that period, the fight between the two generations had been quite something to behold.

Not that the new generation that emerged after that fight were any more sensible or realistic. The next generation had been founded on rejection as well, rejection of everything. Out of this decay had been born revolt. The fathers had rejected everything except their nostalgia, while the conduct of their sons made everyone repudiate them; they even repudiated themselves. The fathers were crippled, while their sons were apathetic and rootless. Neither generation wanted to know anything about the other, and the result was that they blinded one another to both the future and the past. One lot were passive rejectionists, while the other lot were catastrophic in their activity. The parents no longer had the energy or ability to explain things or pass on their experience, while the children did not have the faith or the patience to take such lessons on board. It was like the game when children bet on an uncut watermelon being ripe or not. Some bet it would turn out to be ‘as green as soap,’ while others reckoned it would be ‘ripe and red as blood.’ Neither party had a reliable knife to cut it open and see, or sufficient courage or even permission to do so. So history remained unopened and unknown, until it rotted.