not the least, but the most studiously sedate of the three—he worked as clerk in the university library. They had time for everything they wanted, but no time for people or for any communal campus activities. They . . . Ragnar!" he interrupted himself suddenly, sharply. "Don't sit on the ground!"

Danneskjöld had slipped down and was now sitting on the grass, with his head leaning against Kay Ludlow's knees. He rose obediently, chuckling. Dr. Akston smiled with a touch of apology.

"It's an old habit of mine," he explained to Dagny. "A 'conditioned' reflex, I guess. I used to tell him that in those college years, when I'd catch him sitting on the ground in my back yard, on cold, foggy evenings—he was reckless that way, he made me worry, he should have known it was dangerous and—"

He stopped abruptly; he read in Dagny's startled eyes the same thought as his own: the thought of the kind of dangers the adult Ragnar had chosen to face. Dr. Akston shrugged, spreading his hands in a gesture of helpless self-mockery. Kay Ludlow smiled at him in understanding.

"My house stood just outside the campus," he continued, sighing, "on a tall bluff over Lake Erie. We spent many evenings together, the four of us. We would sit just like this, in my back yard, on the nights of early fall or in the spring, only instead of this granite mountainside, we had the spread of the lake before us, stretching off into a peacefully unlimited distance. I had to work harder on those nights than in any classroom, answering all the questions they'd ask me, discussing the kind of issues they'd raise. About midnight, I would fix some hot chocolate and force them to drink it—the one thing I suspected was that they never took time to eat properly—and then we'd go on talking, while the lake vanished into solid darkness and the sky seemed lighter than the earth. There were a few times when we stayed there till I noticed suddenly that the sky was turning darker and the lake was growing pale and we were within a few sentences of daylight. I should have known better, I knew that they weren't getting enough sleep as it was, but I forgot it occasionally, I lost my sense of time—you see, when they were there, I always felt as if it were early morning and a long, inexhaustible day were stretching ahead before us. They never spoke of what they wished they *might* do in the future, they never wondered whether some mysterious omnipotence had favored them with some unknowable talent to achieve the things they wanted—they spoke of what they *would do*. Does affection tend to make one a coward? I know that the only times I felt fear were occasional moments when I listened to them and thought of what the world was becoming and what they would have to encounter in the future. Fear? Yes—but it was more than fear. It was the kind of emotion that makes men capable of killing—when I thought that the purpose of the world's trend was to destroy these children, that these three sons of mine were marked for immolation. Oh yes, I would have killed—but whom was there to kill? It was everyone and no one, there was no single enemy, no center and no villain, it was not the simpering social worker incapable of earning a penny or the thieving bureaucrat scared of his own

shadow, it was the whole of the earth rolling into an obscenity of horror, pushed by the hand of every would-be decent man who believed that need is holier than ability, and pity is holier than justice. But these were only occasional moments. It was not my constant feeling. I listened to my children and I knew that nothing would defeat them. I looked at them, as they sat in my back yard, and beyond my house there were the tall, dark buildings of what was still a monument to unenslaved thought—the Patrick Henry University—and farther in the distance there were the lights of Cleveland, the orange glow of steel mills behind batteries of smokestacks, the twinkling red dots of radio towers, the long white rays of airports on the black edge of the sky—and I thought that in the name of any greatness that had ever existed and moved this world, the greatness of which they were the last descendants, they would win. . . . I remember one night when I noticed that John had been silent for a long time—and I saw that he had fallen asleep, stretched there on the ground. The two others confessed that he had not slept for three days. I sent the two of them home at once, but I didn't have the heart to disturb him. It was a warm spring night, I brought a blanket to cover him, and I let him sleep where he was. I sat there beside him till morning—and as I watched his face in the starlight, then the first ray of the sun on his untroubled forehead and closed eyelids, what I experienced was not a prayer, I do not pray, but that state of spirit at which a prayer is a misguided attempt: a full, confident, affirming self-dedication to my love of the right, to the certainty that the right would win and that this boy would have the kind of future he deserved." He moved his arm, pointing to the valley. "I did not expect it to be as great as this—or as hard."

It had grown dark and the mountains had blended with the sky. Hanging detached in space, there were the lights of the valley below them, the red breath of Stockton's foundry above, and the lighted string of windows of Mulligan's house, like a railroad car imbedded in the sky.

"I did have a rival," said Dr. Akston slowly. "It was Robert Stadler. . . . Don't frown, John—it's past. . . . John did love him, once. Well, so did I—no, not quite, but what one felt for a mind like Stadler's was painfully close to love, it was that rarest of pleasures: admiration. No, I did not love him, but he and I had always felt as if we were fellow survivors from some vanishing age or land, in the gibbering swamp of mediocrity around us. The mortal sin of Robert Stadler was that he never identified his proper homeland. . . . He hated stupidity. It was the only emotion I had ever seen him display toward people—a biting, bitter, weary hatred for any ineptitude that dared to oppose him. He wanted his own way, he wanted to be left alone to pursue it, he wanted to brush people out of his path—and he never identified the means to it or the nature of his path and of his enemies. He took a short cut. Are you smiling, Miss Taggart? You hate him, don't you? Yes, you know the kind of short cut he took. . . . He told you that we were rivals for these three students. That was true—or rather, that was not the way I thought of it, but I knew that he did. Well, if we were rivals, I had one advantage: I knew