The Wolff knows more than she let on about French style and essence and she approves of Robert. Still, he inevitably comes in for his share of the Wolff's special treatment.

"Herr MacInness, I will blindfold you!" she snaps during our second rehearsal. "You are too fond of looking at your hands. Keep your eyes on the violinist! Your fingers must know where they belong without your eyes for help."

I, on the other hand, endure a large dose of remedial instruction in French essence.

"The bow must always caress the strings, even at volume," she says. "The French attack must be as authoritative as the German, but the passion is different. The French are always singing. They are always in love. It is the chief reason they lost the Franco-Prussian War."

Robert loses his place as he tries to keep from laughing.

"You didn't tell me she had a sense of humor," he says afterward as we head down the stairs.

"I didn't know," I say.

I can't worry about our slow progress at this point. Orchestra, plus the Wolff's other assignments, take first priority. After our orchestra concert in April, that will be the time to devote myself to Saint-Saëns.

Still, by the middle of term we have the skeleton of the sonata down. The Wolff makes us take it apart measure by measure and reassemble it, refining, searching for meaning, seeking deeper nuance. I begin to understand the singing attack. I wonder idly if I'd grasp it more easily if I'd ever been in love. Since I haven't, and since that's unlikely to change before June, I'll have to get it through extra practice instead.

One night, I'm working over the slow second movement at home in my bedroom. It has deep emotional resonance, but mostly I'm wrestling with the trouble spots, repeating them over and over, then starting from the beginning and trying to play it all the way through. I happen to glance up at the photograph of my father I kept for myself after he died. In those first awful months, I held this photograph by the hour, memorizing his features, which mine resemble, his expression of gentle, amused earnestness, the way he combed his hair, the weave of his necktie. Since I began at the Conservatory, I haven't looked at it as much, but now I pick it up and study it again.

We contemplate each other for a long time, my father and I. It's not that I don't think of him anymore; he's present for me, always, in his violin, if I'm aware enough to feel him. I sense him here with me now, through his photograph. I think of the happiness he would have felt in my progress, the encouragement he would have given me when I needed courage, how, when I've felt overwhelmed, he would have said, Of course, you can do it. Just keep working. It will come.

I think of how much he loved me. How much I loved him. How much I still love him, though his

easy smile and even temper are frozen in this picture, where I can't reach them. My eyes sting, not with the raw grief that consumed me in the beginning, but because of the bond we share now between us, a bond that no one, and no amount of time, can break.

I look at the little photograph a while longer, then dust it off with my sleeve and put it back on the bureau. When I pick up his violin again and take the second movement from the beginning, I find it no longer matters that I have never been in love.

I have loved. I do love. I will always love.