

Jennifer Donnelly

*author of
A Northern Light*

REVOLUTION

CHAPTER SAMPLE

From Jennifer Donnelly

*Award-Winning Author of
A Northern Light*



Hope Transcends

The world has been brutal to Andi Alpers, and she's certainly not interested in traveling to Paris with her father—until she finds a journal from the French Revolution. A journal whose author had just as much reason to hate the world as Andi does—more, perhaps. As words transcend paper, and time becomes blurred, Andi must decide: Is hope stronger than a broken heart?



KEEP READING FOR MORE . . .

I

Those who can, do.

Those who can't, deejay.

Like Cooper van Epp. Standing in his room—the entire fifth floor of a Hicks Street brownstone—trying to beat-match John Lee Hooker with some piece of trip-hop horror. On twenty thousand dollars' worth of equipment he doesn't know how to use.

“This is the blues, man!” he crows. “It's Memphis mod.” He pauses to pour himself his second scotch of the morning. “It's like then and now. Brooklyn and Beale Street all at once. It's like hanging at a house party with John Lee. Smoking Kents and drinking bourbon for breakfast. All that's missing, all we need—”

“—are hunger, disease, and a total lack of economic opportunity,” I say.

Cooper pushes his porkpie back on his head and brays laughter. He's wearing a wifebeater and an old suit vest. He's seventeen, white as cream and twice as rich, trying to look like a bluesman from the Mississippi Delta. He doesn't. He looks like Norton from *The Honeymooners*.

“Poverty, Coop,” I add. “That's what you need. That's where the

blues come from. But that's going to be hard for you. I mean, son of a hedge fund god and all."

His idiot grin fades. "Man, Andi, why you always harshing me? Why you always so—"

Simone Canovas, a diplomat's daughter, cuts him off. "Oh, don't bother, Cooper. You know why."

"We all do. It's getting boring," says Arden Tode, a movie star's kid.

"And one last thing," I say, ignoring them, "talent. You need talent. Because John Lee Hooker had boatloads of it. Do you actually write any music, Coop? Do you play any? Or do you just stick other people's stuff together and call the resulting calamity your own?"

Cooper's eyes harden. His mouth twitches. "You're battery acid. You know that?"

"I do."

I am. No doubt about it. I like humiliating Cooper. I like causing him pain. It feels good. It feels better than his dad's whiskey, better than his mom's weed. Because for just a few seconds, someone else hurts, too. For just a few seconds, I'm not alone.

I pick up my guitar and play the first notes of Hooker's "Boom Boom." Badly, but it does the trick. Cooper swears at me and storms off.

Simone glares. "That was brutal, Andi. He's a fragile soul," she says; then she takes off after him. Arden takes off after her.

Simone doesn't give a rat's about Cooper or his soul. She's only worried he'll pull the plug on our Friday-morning breakfast party. She never faces school without a buzz. Nobody does. We need to have something, some kind of substance-fueled force field to fend off the heavy hand of expectation that threatens to crush us like beer cans the minute we set foot in the place.

I quit playing "Boom Boom" and ease into "Tupelo." No one pays any attention. Not Cooper's parents, who are in Cabo for the hol-

idays. Not the maid, who's running around opening windows to let the smoke out. And not my classmates, who are busy trading iPods back and forth, listening to one song after another. No Billboard Hot 100 fare for us. We're better than that. Those tunes are for kids at P.S. Whatever-the-hell. We attend St. Anselm's, Brooklyn's most prestigious private school. We're special. Exceptional. We're supernovas, every single one of us. That's what our teachers say, and what our parents pay thirty thousand dollars a year to hear.

This year, senior year, it's all about the blues. And William Burroughs, Balkan soul, German countertenors, Japanese girl bands, and New Wave. It's calculated, the mix. Like everything else we do. The more obscure our tastes, the greater the proof of our genius.

As I sit here mangling "Tupelo," I catch broken-off bits of conversation going on around me.

"But really, you can't even *approach* Flock of Seagulls without getting caught up in the metafictional paradigm," somebody says.

And "Plastic Bertrand can, I think, best be understood as a postironic nihilist referentialist."

And "But, like, New Wave derived meaning from its own meaninglessness. Dude, the tautology was *so* intended."

And then, "*Wasn't that a mighty time, wasn't that a mighty time . . .*"

I look up. The kid singing lines from "Tupelo," a notorious horn-dog from Slater, another Heights school, is suddenly sitting on the far end of the sofa I'm sitting on. He smirks his way over until our knees are touching.

"You're good," he says.

"Thanks."

"You in a band?"

I keep playing, head down, so he takes a bolder tack.

“What’s this?” he says, leaning over to tug on the red ribbon I wear around my neck. At the end of it is a silver key. “Key to your heart?”

I want to kill him for touching it. I want to say words that will slice him to bits, but I have none. They dry up in my throat. I can’t speak, so I hold up my hand, the one covered in skull rings, and clench it into a fist.

He drops the key. “Hey, sorry.”

“Don’t do that,” I tell him, tucking it back inside my shirt. “Ever.”

“Okay, okay. Take it easy, psycho,” he says, backing off.

I put the guitar into its case and head for an exit. Front door. Back door. Window. Anything. When I’m halfway across the living room, I feel a hand close on my arm.

“Come on. It’s eight-fifteen.”

It’s Vijay Gupta. President of the Honor Society, the debate team, the Chess Club, and the Model United Nations. Volunteer at a soup kitchen, a literacy center, and the ASPCA. Davidson Fellow, Presidential Scholar candidate, winner of a Princeton University poetry prize, but, alas, *not* a cancer survivor.

Orla McBride is a cancer survivor, and she wrote about it for her college apps and got into Harvard early admission. Chemo and hair loss and throwing up pieces of your stomach beat the usual extracurriculars hands down. Vijay only got wait-listed, so he still has to go to class.

“I’m not going,” I tell him.

“Why not?”

I shake my head.

“What is it?”

Vijay is my best friend. My only friend, at this stage. I have no

idea why he's still around. I think he sees me as some kind of rehabilitation project, like the loser dogs he cares for at the shelter.

"Andi, come on," he says. "You've got to. You've got to get your outline in. Beezie'll throw you out if you don't. She threw two seniors out last year for not turning it in."

"I know. But I'm not."

Vijay gives me a worried look. "You take your meds today?" he asks.

"I did."

He sighs. "Catch you later."

"Yeah, V. Later."

I head out of the Castle van Epp, down to the Promenade. It's snowing. I take a seat high above the BQE, stare at Manhattan for a bit, and then I play. For hours. I play until my fingertips are raw. Until I rip a nail and bleed on the strings. Until my hands hurt so bad I forget my heart does.

When I was a kid I believed everything they told me,” Jimmy “Shoes says as we watch a little boy toddle past clutching a Grinch. “Every damn thing. I believed in Santa Claus. The Easter Bunny. The bogeyman. And Eisenhower.” He takes a slug from a beer bottle in a paper bag. “How ’bout you?”

“I still am a kid, Jimmy.”

Jimmy’s an old Italian guy. He sits with me on the Promenade sometimes. He’s not all there. He thinks LaGuardia’s still mayor and that the Dodgers never left Brooklyn. He wears these old shoes. That’s how he got his name. They’re hepcat shoes from the fifties, all shiny and red.

“How ’bout God? You believe in God?” he asks me.

“Whose?”

“Don’t be so smart.”

“Sorry. Too late.”

“You go to St. Anselm’s, right? Don’t they teach you no religion there?”

“It’s just a name. They sent the saint packing, but they kept his name.”

“They did that to Betty Crocker, too, the sonsabitches. So what do they teach you there?”

I lean back on the bench and think for a minute. “They start out with Greek mythology—Zeus, Poseidon, Hades, those guys,” I say. “I still have the first thing I ever wrote. In preschool. I was four. It was on Polyphemus. He was a shepherd. And a Cyclops. And a cannibal. He was going to eat Odysseus but Odysseus escaped. He poked Polyphemus’s eye out with a stick.”

Jimmy gives me a look of utter disbelief. “They teach you that crap in nursery school? Get outta here.”

“I swear. After that, we learned Roman mythology. Then the Norse myths. Native American deities. Pagan pantheistic traditions. Celtic gods. Buddhism. Judeo-Christian backgrounds. And foundations of Islam.”

“What the hell for?”

“Because they want you to know. It’s important to them that you know.”

“Know what?”

“That it’s a myth.”

“What’s a myth?”

“All of it, Jimmy. Everything.”

Jimmy goes quiet for a bit; then he says, “So you get out of that fancy school and you got nothin’? Nothin’ to hold on to? Nothin’ to believe in?”

“Well, one thing, maybe . . .”

“What?”

“The transformative power of art.”

Jimmy shakes his head. “That’s a crime. They shouldn’t do that to a kid. It’s child abuse. You want I should report ’em?”

“Could you?”

“It’s taken care of. I got friends in the police department,” he says with a meaningful nod.

Yeah, I think. Dick Tracy’ll get right on it.

I pack up my stuff. My feet are frozen. I’ve been out here for hours. It’s two-thirty now. Half an hour until my lesson. There’s one thing and one thing only that can get me into my school: Nathan Goldfarb, head of St. Anselm’s music department.

“Hey, kid,” Jimmy says as I stand up to leave.

“What?”

He fishes a quarter out of his pocket. “Get an egg cream. One for you and one for your fella.”

“Come on, Jimmy. I can’t take that.”

Jimmy doesn’t have much. He lives in a home on Hicks Street. He only gets a few dollars’ spending money each week.

“Take it. I want you to. You’re a kid. You should be sitting at a soda fountain with a sweetheart, not hanging out in the cold like you got nowhere to go, talking to bums like me.”

“All right. Thanks,” I say, trying to smile. It kills me to take his money, but not taking it would kill him.

Jimmy smiles back. “Let him give you a kiss. For me.” He holds up a finger. “Just one. On the cheek.”

“I’ll do that,” I say. I don’t have the heart to tell him I’ve had a dozen fellas. Or that there are no such things as kisses on the cheek anymore. We’re in the twenty-first century now, and it’s hook up or shut up.

I stretch out my hand to take the quarter. Jimmy lets out a low whistle.

“What?”

“Your hand.”

I look at it. My ripped nail is still bleeding. I wipe the red off on my pants.

“You should get it taken care of. It looks awful,” he says.

“I guess it does.”

“You must be in pain, kid. Does it hurt?”

I nod. “Yeah, Jimmy. All the time.”

Ms. Alpers?”

“*Nabbed*. I stop, then slowly turn around in the hallway. I know that voice. Everyone at St. Anselm’s does. It’s Adelaide Beezemeyer, the headmistress.

“Do you have a minute?”

“Not really, Ms. Beezemeyer. I’m on my way to a music lesson.”

“I’ll call Mr. Goldfarb to let him know you’ll be late. My office, please.”

She waves me inside and calls Nathan. I put my guitar case down and sit. The clock on the wall says 3:01. An entire precious minute of my lesson has just slipped away. Sixty seconds of music I’ll never get back. My leg starts jiggling. I press down on my knee to stop it.

“Chamomile tea?” Beezie asks as she puts the phone down. “I’ve just made a pot.”

“No thank you.”

I see a folder on her desk. It has my name on it—Diandra Xenia Alpers. After both grandmothers. I changed it to Andi as soon as I could speak.

I look away from the folder—it can't be good—and watch Bezie as she bustles about. She looks like a hobbit—short and shaggy. She wears Birkenstocks no matter what time of year it is, and purple menopause clothes. She turns unexpectedly and sees me watching, so I look around the room. There are vases on the windowsill, hanging planters dangling from the ceiling, bowls on a sideboard—all glazed in various shades of mud.

“Do you like them?” she asks me, nodding at the mud bowls.

“They're really something.”

“They're mine. I throw pots.”

So does my mom. At the walls.

“They're my creative outlet,” she adds. “My art.”

“Wow.” I point at a planter. “That one reminds me of *Guernica*.”

Beezie smiles. She beams. “Does it really?”

“Of course not.”

The smile slides off her face, hits the floor, and shatters.

Surely she'll throw me out of here now. I would. But she doesn't. She puts a mug of tea on her desk and sits down in her chair. I look at the clock again. 3:04. My foot jiggles harder.

“Andi, I'll come right to the point. I'm concerned,” she says, opening my folder. “Winter break begins tomorrow, and you haven't submitted any college applications. Not one. You haven't submitted an outline for your senior thesis, either. I see here that you've chosen a subject . . . an eighteenth-century French composer, Amadé Malherbeau . . . one of the Classical period first composers to write predominantly for guitar.”

“For the six-string,” I say. “Other composers wrote for lutes, mandolins, vihuelas, and baroques.”

“Interesting,” Beezie says. “I like the title . . . ‘Who's Your Daddy? Tracing the Musical DNA of Amadé Malherbeau to Jonny Greenwood.’”

“Thanks. Vijay came up with it. He said my old title—‘Amadé

Malherbeau's Musical Legacy'—was nowhere near pretentious enough."

Beezie ignores that. She puts the folder down and looks at me. "Why no progress?"

Because I don't care anymore, Ms. Beezemeyer, I want to say. Not about Amadé Malherbeau, my classes, college, or much of anything. Because the gray world I've managed to live in for the past two years has started to turn black around the edges. But I can't say that. It'll only get me a ticket back to Dr. Becker's office for the next tier of mind-numbing meds. I push a piece of hair out of my face, stalling, trying to think of something I can say.

"My God, Andi. Your hand," she says. "What happened?"

"Bach."

She shakes her head. "It's all about the pain, isn't it? The truancy, the bad grades, and now you've even found a way to use your beautiful music to inflict pain on yourself. It's like you're doing eternal penance. You need to stop this, Andi. You need to find forgiveness for what happened. Forgiveness for yourself."

The anger starts up inside me again, red and deadly. Like it did when the Slater kid touched the key. I look away, trying to wrestle it down, wishing Beezie would just jump out the window and take her ugly pots with her. Wishing I was hearing notes and chords, not her voice. Wishing I was hearing Bach's Suite no. 1. Written for cello and transcribed for guitar. I'm supposed to be playing it with Nathan. Right now.

"How's my crazy diamond, *ja*?" he always says when I come into his classroom. His favorite musicians are Bach, Mozart, and the guys from Pink Floyd.

Nathan is old. He's seventy-five. When he was little, he lost his family at Auschwitz. His mother and sister were gassed the day

they arrived because they weren't strong enough to work. Nathan survived because he was a prodigy, an eight-year-old boy who could play the violin like an angel. He played in the officers' mess every night. The officers liked his music, so they let him eat their leftovers. He would go back to his barracks late at night and throw up his food so his father could eat it. He tried to do it quietly, but one night the guards caught him. They beat him bloody and took his father away.

I knew what Nathan would say about my hand. He'd say that bleeding for Bach was no big deal. He'd say that people like Beethoven and Billie Holiday and Syd Barrett gave everything they had to their music, so what was a fingernail? He wouldn't make a tragedy of it. He knew better. He knew tragedy. He knew loss. And he knew there was no such thing as forgiveness.

"Andi? Andi, are you hearing anything I'm saying?"

Beezie is still at it.

"Yes, I am, Ms. Beezemeyer," I say solemnly, hoping if I look contrite I might get out of here before midnight.

"I've sent letters home. About your failure to hand in an outline for your thesis. You probably know about them. I sent one to your mother and one to your father."

I knew about the one to my mother. The mailman dropped it through the slot. It lay on the floor in our front hall for a week until I kicked it out of the way. I didn't know Beezie sent one to my dad but it doesn't matter. He doesn't open his mail. Mail is for lesser mortals.

"Do you have anything to say about all this, Andi? Anything at all?"

"Well, I guess . . . I mean, I just don't see it happening, Ms. Beezemeyer, you know? The senior thesis. Not really. Can't I just get my diploma in June and go?"

"Completing the senior thesis to at least a satisfactory level is a

condition of earning your diploma. You know that. I can't let you graduate without it. It would be unfair to your classmates."

I nod. Not caring. Not at all. Desperate to get to my lesson.

"And what about your college applications? To Juilliard? Jacobs? The Eastman School?" Beezie asks. "Have you written the essays yet? Scheduled any auditions?"

I shake my head, cutting her off. Both legs are jiggling now. I'm sweating. Trembling. I need my classroom. My teacher. I need my music. Badly. Very badly. Now.

Beezie sighs deeply. "You need to find closure, Andi," she says. "I know it's still difficult. I know how you're feeling. About Truman. About what happened. But this isn't about Truman. This is about you. About your remarkable talent. Your future."

"No. No, it isn't, Ms. Beezemeyer."

I want to stop the words, but I can't. Beezie means well. She's good in her way. She cares. I know she does. But I can't stop. She shouldn't have talked about Truman. Shouldn't have said his name. The rage is there again, rising higher, and I can't stop it.

"It's not about me. It's about you," I tell her. "It's about the numbers. If two seniors got into Princeton last year, you want four in this year. That's how it is here and we all know it. Nobody's paying tuition that equals the median annual salary in the state of New Hampshire so their kid can go to a crap school. Parents want Harvard, MIT, Brown. Juilliard looks good for you. For *you*, Ms. Beezemeyer, not me. That's what this is about."

Beezie looks like she's been slapped. "My God, Andi," she says. "You couldn't have been more hurtful if you tried."

"I *did* try."

She's silent for a few seconds. Her eyes grow watery. She clears her throat and says, "Senior thesis outlines are due when school resumes—January the fifth. I truly hope yours is among them. If it's not, I'm afraid you will be expelled."

I barely hear her now. I'm coming apart. There's music in my head and in my hands, and I feel like I'll explode if I can't let it out.

I snatch the guitar case. 3:21 the clock says. Only thirty-nine minutes left. Luckily the hallways are nearly empty. I break into a mad run. I'm paying no attention, running flat out, when suddenly my foot catches on something and I'm airborne. I hit the floor hard, feel my knees slam down, my chest, my chin. The guitar case hits the floor, too, and skids away.

My right knee is singing. I can taste blood in my mouth, but I don't care. All I care about is the guitar. It's a Hauser from the 1940s. It's Nathan's. He let me borrow it. I crawl to the case. It takes me a few tries to open the clasps because my hands are shaking so badly. When I finally get the lid up, I see that everything's fine. Nothing's broken. I close the case again, weak with relief.

"Oopsy-daisy."

I look up. It's Cooper. He's walking backward down the hall, smirking. Arden Tode is with him. I get it. He tripped me. Payback for this morning.

"Be careful, Andi. You could break your neck that way," he says.

I shake my head. "No, I can't," I say. "Not that way. I've tried. Thank *you* for trying, though, Coop. I appreciate the effort." Blood drips from my mouth as I speak.

Cooper stops dead. His smirk slips. He looks confused, then afraid.

"*Freak*," Arden hisses. She tugs on his arm.

I get up and limp off. Down the hall. Around a corner. And then I'm there. Finally there. I yank open the door.

Nathan looks up from a sheet of music. He smiles. "How's my crazy diamond, *ja*?"

"Crazy," I say, my voice cracking.

His bushy white brows shoot up. His eyes, huge behind his thick

glasses, travel from my bloody mouth to my bloody hand. He crosses the room and lifts a guitar from its stand.

“We play now, *ja*?” he says.

I wipe my mouth on my sleeve. “*Ja*, Nathan,” I say. “We play now. Please. We play.”

4

I always take the long way home.

Up Willow from Pierrepont. Through the streets of old Brooklyn. What's left of it. Then I turn right on my street, Cranberry. But tonight I'm hunched up against the cold, head down, fingering chords in the air, so lost in Suite no. 1 that I walk up Henry instead.

Nathan and I played for hours. Before we started, he took a handkerchief from his pocket and handed it to me.

"What happened?" he asked.

"I fell."

He gave me a look over the top of his glasses—his truth-serum look.

"Ms. Beezemeyer talked about Truman. And closure. It all went wrong from there," I said.

Nathan nodded, then he said, "This word *closure* . . . it is a stupid word, *ja*? Bach did not believe in closure. Handel did not. Beethoven did not. Only Americans believe in closure because Americans are like little children—easily swindled. Bach believed in making music, *ja*?"

He kept looking at me, waiting for a reply.

“Ja,” I said softly.

We played then. He cut me no slack for my injuries and swore like a pirate when I bungled a trill or rushed a phrase. It was eight o'clock by the time I left.

The winter streets are cold and dark as I walk down them now. Lights blink all around me for the gods of the holidays. Green and red for Santa. Blue for Judah Maccabee. White for Martha Stewart. The cold air on my face feels good. I am drained. I am calm. And I am not paying attention.

Because suddenly, there it is, right in front of me—the Templeton.

It's an apartment building, built from what used to be the old Hotel St. Charles. It's eighty stories high, two blocks square, and it throws its ugly shadow over everything, even at night. The stores on the ground floor are always lit up, even when they're closed. They sell basil sorbet and quince paste and lots of other things nobody wants. The upper floors are condos. They start at half a million.

It's been nearly two years since I've come this close to it. I stand still, staring at it but not seeing it. I see the Charles instead. Jimmy Shoes told me it was swanky once. Back in the thirties. He said it had a saltwater pool on its roof, and spotlights, too. The Dodgers ate there, gangsters strolled in with chorus girls on their arms, and swing bands played until dawn.

It wasn't swanky two years ago. It was crumbling. Part of it had burned. What was left housed welfare cases and winos. Drug dealers hung out in the front. Muggers prowled the hallways. Its doors were always open, like a leering mouth, and I could smell its rank breath whenever I walked by—a mixture of mildew, cat piss, and sadness. I heard it, too. I heard angry music blaring from boom boxes, heard Mrs. Ortega screaming at her kids, heard the Yankees game on Mrs. Flynn's ancient radio, and Max. I hear him still. He's in my head and I can't get him out.

“Maximilien R. Peters! Incorruptible, ineluctable, and indestructible!” he’d yell. “It’s time to start the revolution, baby!”

I stop dead and stare at the sidewalk. I don’t want to but I can’t help it. It was there, right there, about five yards in front of me, by that long, jagged crack, where Max stepped into the street. And took Truman with him.

Rain washed away the blood long ago but I still see it. Unfurling beneath my brother’s small, broken body like the red petals of a rose. And suddenly the pain that’s always inside me, tightly coiled, swells into something so big and so fierce it feels like it will burst my heart, split my skull, tear me apart.

“Make it stop,” I whisper, squeezing my eyes shut.

When I open them again, I see my brother. He’s not dead. He’s standing in the street, watching me. It can’t be. But it is. My God, it is! I run into the street.

“Truman! I’m sorry, Tru! I’m so sorry!” I sob, reaching for him.

I want him to tell me that it’s okay, it was all just a dumb mistake and he’s fine. But instead of his voice, I hear tires screeching. I turn and see a car bearing down on me.

Everything inside me is screaming at me to run, but I don’t move. Because I want this. I want an end to the pain. The car swerves violently and screeches to a stop. I smell burned rubber. People are shouting.

The driver’s on me in an instant. She’s crying and trembling. She grabs the front of my jacket and shakes me. “You crazy bitch!” she screams. “I could have killed you!”

“Sorry,” I say.

“Sorry?” she shouts. “You don’t look sorry. You—”

“Sorry you missed,” I say.

She lets go of me then. Takes a step back.

There are cars stopped behind us. Somebody starts honking. I look for Truman, but he’s gone. Of course he is. He wasn’t real. It’s

the pills playing tricks. Dr. Becker said I might start seeing things if I took too many.

I try to get moving, to get out of the street, but my legs are shaking so badly I can't walk right. There's a man on the sidewalk, gawking at me. I give him the finger and stumble home.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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JENNIFER DONNELLY is the author of two adult novels, *The Tea Rose* and *The Winter Rose*, as well as the young adult novel *A Northern Light*, winner of Britain's prestigious Carnegie Medal, the *L.A. Times* Book Prize for Young Adult Literature, and a Michael L. Printz Honor Award. She lives and writes full-time in upstate New York.