

# Purity Study Guide

## Purity

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## Plot Summary

“Purity” is a contemporary novel of discovery and cultural commentary by Jonathan Franzen in which Purity “Pip” Tyler goes to work for the information leak organization Sunlight Project while seeking to learn the identity of her father. When the novel begins, Pip has \$130,000 in student debt, is stuck in a dead-end job, and struggles to retain a relationship with her imbalanced mother. Pip spends much of her free time protesting nuclear weapons, while she is in love with her married housemate and fellow protestor, Stephen. A German couple, Annagret and Martin, come to meet Pip through their travels as they seek to network with anti-nuclear groups. Annagret explains she is a friend of Andreas Wolf, the famous and wanted founder and leader of the Sunlight Project, who now operates out of Bolivia. Annagret is impressed with Pip, and wants her to go to work for Sunlight. When Stephen’s wife leaves him, and when Stephen rejects the much younger Pip’s advances, Pip agrees to work for Sunlight.

The novel then jumps back several decades to the 1980s, where Andreas Wolf, living in East Germany, is in his late twenties. Serving a work sentence for publishing a poem that was critical of socialism, Andreas tends to juvenile delinquents under the assumption he is to put them back on the right path. Andreas takes his work lightly, sleeping with dozens of teenage girls who come to him instead. Eventually, he meets Annagret, who, at 15, changes his lifestyle for the better. He senses a goodness in her, falls in love with her, and murders her sexually-abusive stepfather for her. As the Communists collapse in Germany, Andreas finds himself in front of camera where he proclaims that the secrets and lies of the past must be exposed by the sunlight. This makes him an overnight celebrity, and positions him for his future work. Andreas later meets an American named Tom Aberant, whom he befriends and confesses the murder to.

Tom and Andreas become friends due to their difficult lives. Tom is dealing with an emotionally imbalanced wife named Anabel, heir to a massive agribusiness fortune that she does not want. Tom has come to Germany with his dying mother so she can see her homeland one last time, and so he can write an article about the fall of Communism for Harper’s. Tom’s mother passes away. Tom helps Andreas to rebury the man Andreas has killed to avoid detection in exchange for Andreas’s help in gaining access to the German State Security archives. Both men fall out of touch for several years, during which time they commit to their own efforts in pursuit of truth. Andreas’s relationship with Annagret falls apart as he works on Sunlight, while Tom begins an investigative journalism website called Denver Independent. As a measure of thanks and apology, Andreas sends some leaked information Tom’s way, so that Tom might utilize it in his work. Tom and Anabel later divorce, while Tom begins seeing a woman who comes to work for him as a reporter, Leila Helou.

When Leila criticizes Andreas Wolf and other leakers as irresponsible children with no filter, and people with secrets of their own, Andreas panics and believes Tom is going to divulge the past. Andreas uses his organization to pick apart Tom’s past, tracking down Anabel to discover she is the mother of Pip, and Tom is Pip’s father. This, in turn, leads



to Andreas using Annagret to hire Pip. Andreas then uses Pip as a plant at Denver Independent to install spyware so Tom can be spied on. Pip has a moral awakening when she comes to assume Tom is her father, and she confesses everything.

Tom travels to Bolivia to confront Andreas, who has by now become psychotic, paranoid, and suicidal. He urges Tom to kill him for everything he has done, but Tom will not do so. Andreas then e-mails Pip Tom's secret memoir, obtained using the spyware, which reveals the broad extent of the past. Andreas then scrawls a murder confession on his arm and jumps off a mountain summit to his death. Tom then returns to Colorado, where he and Pip establish a relationship. Pip reads the memoir, and comes to the conclusion that some secrets are better left untold, and that sometimes the past is best left in the past. Pip then reestablishes contact with her mother, and reunites her parents who accuse one another of misrepresenting their roles in the past. Pip, now seeing a young man named Jason, hopes the future will be better.



# Purity in Oakland

## Summary

While on lunch break at work at Renewable Solutions in Oakland, California, Purity “Pip” Tyler talks to her mother by phone. Pip, a recent college graduate with \$130,000 in student debt, now sells power purchase agreements to homes in potential renewable energy districts. Pip dislikes talking to her mother, because her mother constantly imagines she has some illness, disease, or condition that Pip knows her mother, a grocery store cashier, never has. Pip’s mother also practices a form of yoga-like spiritual art she calls Endeavor, in which no actual art is ever created, and in which she limits contact with the non-natural world around her. Pip knows that in the past, her mother was very different. Pip explains that her coming weekend visit to her mother, where she still lives in Felton, will bring up the subject her mother hates talking about –who her father is, because Pip wants to be out of debt. As Pip hangs up, she resists another attempt made by her boss, Igor, a Russian, to flirt with her. Igor then holds her poor work performance over her head in response.

Pip has four housemates –the schizophrenic Ramon, whom Pip helps study vocabulary; the schizophrenic Dreyfuss, who believes German spies have infiltrated the city through the Oakland Nuclear Disarmament Study Group (ONDSG), of which Pip is a member; and there are Stephen and his wife, Marie. Stephen and Marie adopted Ramon just prior to the death of Ramon’s brother, Eduardo, who was killed by a laundry truck, with the hope that the adoption would give Eduardo some freedom from having to revolve his life around Ramon. Stephen is also a member of ONDSG, and is the man with whom Pip is in love. It is through the ONDSG that Pip meets the German couple Annagret and Martin, who are traveling throughout America to raise awareness for their squatter’s rights group, and to make connections in the anti-nuclear community. Annagret also reveals she is friends with Andreas Wolf of the Sunlight Project, currently operating out of Bolivia due to charges brought by America and Europe for hacking, spying, and releasing classified information.

Impressed with Pip’s knowledge of nuclear conditions, Annagret conducts a job interview with Pip. The interview consists of a questionnaire with no wrong answers, with questions such as choosing a superpower and what Pip would do if all her friends suddenly disappeared. Another question involves whether Pip has ever read an e-mail, looked at a smartphone, or listened to a conversation and so on, without permission. Pip explains she has, in the attempt to learn the identity of her father. Annagret explains that Sunlight can help her find this out. Annagret worries, however, that Pip is too obsessed with boys because she has feelings for Stephen. This angers Pip, because she doesn’t date much at all, especially after a near-sexual encounter with a young man named Jason that she met at Peet’s Coffee, where by reading his text messages she learned he attempted to pawn her off on a friend. Pip refuses to speak to Annagret anymore.



Pip thinks about what little she knows about her father because so much is either a lie or invented, such as the original story Pip was sold by her mother about an abusive marriage, lifted from a memoir by Candida Lawrence. What Pip does know is that her father has not been in her life, so she believes he owes her, and can cover this debt by paying off her student debt. At home after work, she discovers that Marie has left Stephen and moved out. Marie has been having an affair with Vincent, the man who manages the property. Pip must encourage Stephen to speak with Ramon, because Ramon will now have to be committed to a home. It is later learned that Sunlight has just orchestrated a massive document dump for Oakland, which shows how a bank cheats homeowners by getting them to go into refinancing, then going unresponsive, then “losing” paperwork, then initiating foreclosure proceedings – especially in the city’s East Bay area.

Pip comes on to Stephen, who denies feelings for her, saying he is 15 years older than she. He explains he looks at her like a daughter, then covers his face with his hands. This enrages Pip, who calls him weak and curses at him. Stephen pushes her away, telling her she needs therapy, saying that his wife only left a few hours before. Pip then surmises that Stephen must be in love with Annagret, which Stephen does not deny. Pip, sick to her stomach, stays home from work the next day. The following day, Dreyfuss explains he has read Stephen’s e-mails to Annagret, and that none of them are romantic at all. Dreyfuss says there is something not right about the Germans, and notes that Annagret is distressed that Pip does not want to be friends with her. Pip decides to move out, and texts Stephen that she will pick up her stuff when he is not around. In an e-mail from Andreas Wolf himself, Pip learns she has been accepted into a paid internship at Sunlight, but then fires back an e-mail asking what the deal is with Sunlight, and if Andreas Wolf only has sexual designs on her. Wolf returns an e-mail denying this, saying they need good laypeople with high intelligence to work for them.

Pip decides to resign at Renewable, and goes to see her mother a day early. She takes a bus to Felton, during which time she continues to correspond with Andreas Wolf. Andreas explains her work will be in rooting out the truth and exposing it, though she will be damned for it. Worried about trust, Pip explains her real name is Purity and that she hates it; Andreas explains his mother showed him her genitals when he was seven. He goes on to say that he is sorry Pip is currently feeling powerless, that a change of scenery could help, and that he is not a predator.

Pip later arrives in Felton, where she is greeted by her mother. At their house, Pip explains to her mother she can either help Pip find her father, or Pip is going to work in Bolivia for the Sunlight Project. Pip’s mother calls the entire situation a nightmare, for she also hates Andreas Wolf. She believes that all Andreas wants is a beautiful young girl to have sex with. Pip denies this. Her mother realizes something must have happened, but Pip says nothing did. Her mother says she has the right to love her more than anything in the world, to which Pip says she does not and begins to cry.



## Analysis

When Jonathan Franzen's novel "Purity" begins, Purity "Pip" Tyler is stuck in a dead-end job, has massive student debt, a difficult relationship with a mentally and emotionally unstable mother, and is in love with a much older man who does not return her feelings. Pip can't seem to make much sense of anything at all in her life – but what she can make sense of are the perception that she has crafted of her father as a rich man who owes her for being absent from her life for so long. Pip's determination to find her father underscores one of Franzen's themes in the novel – that perceptions of people, rather than who they actually are, can be dangerous. The same is true of Andreas Wolf, a man wanted in numerous countries – but whom Pip has already built up in her mind as a noble hero misjudged and misunderstood by far too many people. (Consider Pip's mother's warnings about Wolf in regard to his last name, as wolves are predators in the animal world.)

Andreas Wolf is in the business of exposing secrets through the Sunlight Project, which Franzen relates to – and which readers will draw comparisons to – the real world Julian Assange and Wikileaks. The broad extent of secrets which Andreas Wolf exposes is to be contrasted with the secret identity of Pip's father. Indeed, Pip even recognizes that she could use Sunlight's reach to uncover things about her father. (Annagret suggests this.) Why Pip's mother refuses to reveal the identity of Pip's father is a mystery to both Pip and the reader, but is obviously a secret that Pip's mother wishes to keep for a reason. What this secret is will only later be revealed. Indeed, Pip's early trust of Andreas comes to the revelation of secrets between them, relating to Andreas seeing his mother's genitals while Pip speaks about her real name and her relationship with her mother.

Here, Franzen also gives a nod to technology, and to the idea – which will be shaped over the course of the novel – that technology must have its limits. In Pip's mind, Andreas Wolf has been unfairly persecuted for using technology to unveil important secrets – yet she never questions the importance of those secrets themselves. Likewise, the idea that an organization should have that kind of power to cause it to be on the run from numerous countries, as well as having the power to potentially track down Pip's father is unnerving. Again, the reason why Pip's mother is keeping her father a secret is never seriously contemplated by Pip – but only serves as an annoyance. If Pip's father does not want to be found, for example, what right does anyone have to track him down through any medium, including technology?

Other secrets that are exposed stand to be important. For example, Stephen and the others learn that a particular bank has been deliberately causing customer confusion as a way to repossess homes. This is something that may not have otherwise not been known had the Sunlight Project not exposed such secrets. In this respect, the exposing of secrets using technology makes the deliverance of justice possible. The timing of the information released is not an accident. As the reader learns later, Andreas wants Pip to come to work for him – and the timely exposure of the bank is to provide proof of his power and the capabilities of Sunlight.



## Discussion Question 1

Why does Annagret say she wants Pip to come and work for Sunlight? What is Pip's initial response? Why?

## Discussion Question 2

Why is Pip so desperate to find her father? Do you believe her reasoning for wanting to do so is justified? Why or why not? In general, what could possibly explain Pip's mother's desire not to speak about the past?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Pip agree to go and work for Andreas? Why does her mother oppose this? Why does Pip brush aside her mother's concerns?

## Vocabulary

fervently, categorically, mortified, exuded, innocuous, osculate, placidly, imperturbably, exploitative, charismatic, profoundly, credulous, putrescent, pauperize, utopian, obstinately, subservient, temerity





# The Republic of Bad Taste

## Summary

It is the late 1980s in East Germany's half of Berlin. Andreas Wolf is 27 and currently lives in the basement of the church on Siegfeldstrasse. He finds this ironic because he is an atheist dependent on the church for help, where he has earned his keep officially counseling at-risk youth for seven years. Andreas sleeps with any girl who at least claims to be at the age of consent of 16, while he avoids any girls who have been sexually abused. Andreas both enjoys his sexual conquests, and is repulsed by his appetite, blaming the sickness of the Republic of East Germany for it. In the past, Andreas was sent to a psychologist after his mother discovered him drawing pictures of naked girls, rather than chasing after them – the result being the therapy sessions which compelled Andreas to want to chase after girls. Andreas is from a wealthy background, with his mother, Katya, being an academic and his father the powerful Undersecretary and chief state economist of the Central Committee. Andreas has severed contact with his parents following his crime of publishing a poem that contained an acrostic which took a shot at his mother and socialism.

In 1987, Andreas meets a red-headed teen girl named Petra who is very religious, and who wants to have sex with Andreas though she will not do so in a church. This causes Andreas to bring her to his family's country house. While Petra is showering, the police arrive because no one has permission to be at the house. Andreas explains who he is, which in turn prompts a call by the police to his father. Andreas is told to never return or there will be consequences. After the police leave, he sneaks back inside and forces Petra to have sex with him, even though she has been frightened by the near-situation with the police. Unable to handle a growing depression by sleeping with more teen girls, Andreas tries to become celibate and takes to reading banned British books. The vicar later sends a teenage girl to Andreas who appears to be abused.

Andreas meets with the girl, who says she already knows she is bad. She introduces herself as 15-year-old Annagret. She is strikingly beautiful and very intelligent, which attracts Andreas to her like he has never been attracted to a girl before. Annagret comes to reveal her father is dead, that she has an older sister named Tanja, and that she and her sister used to take judo lessons. Annagret explains she met a man named Horst at the gym, who in his early thirties, fell for Tanja. Annagret's mother, 38, ended up marrying Horst. Tanja angrily moved away, while Annagret grew close to Horst. Horst revealed to Annagret that her mother, a nurse, was not only a drug addict, but stealing drugs from the hospital to sell them. Horst also explained he was an informant for the Ministry for State Security, and that Annagret's mother's behavior had to be stopped or the consequences would be deadly for them all. Horst explained there must be trust between them, and then began sexually touching her.

After recounting this, Annagret asks Andreas for help against her stepfather. Annagret believes she is to blame for everything, even though she knows what is happening to



her is wrong. It causes Andreas to cry because he knows he, too, has taken advantage of young girls. He confesses his own sins to Annagret, and decides he will do what he can to help her. They continue to meet for counseling sessions, during which time Andreas realizes he is falling in love with Annagret, and is willing to hurt Horst to protect her. He devises a plan with her to do so, where she will lure him out to her motorcycle under false pretenses and will bring him to Andrea's father's country house. Andreas is prepared to take action against Annagret's stepfather, because Andreas as a child discovered the man who he believed to be his father was not actually his father.

As a child playing soccer, Andreas was confronted by a dirty man who told him to ask the man who he believed to be his father, where he was in October and November of 1959. The man explained he was a student and colleague of Katya's at Humboldt University from 1957 to 1963, when he was arrested and imprisoned for subversion of the state. Andreas recalls asking the man why he has bothered to say anything at all. The man explained that sometimes people just have to do things, and that if Andreas ever had a son of his own one day, he might understand. Andreas does not confront his mother about this until years later, after the poem he publishes while at university nearly ends up with him in jail. His mother does not deny, but merely criticizes the story while arguing Andreas needs mental help.

Andreas heads to his father's country house, where he prepares things like a shovel and a flashlight and digs a hole. When Annagret and Horst arrive later, Andreas makes his move, using the shovel to smash Horst on the skull. Annagret throws up, cries, then kisses Andreas. The body is then buried. Both feel as if they will be caught. If they are safe in a year, they agree to meet again. The police never come or even question Andreas or Annagret. The only thing Andreas can think of is that the police found out about Annagret's mother's involvement with drugs. As the 80s end, the Soviet Union crumbles apart, and countries all over begin to throw off Communism for freedom. Andreas does not hear from Annagret for two years, which worries him. He finds her in a demonstration for freedom, she admits she believes they are about to be caught because her mother is due to be released from jail for drugs, and will begin asking questions relating to Horst the police will have to follow up on. Andreas says he will find a way to make it go away.

One day, Andreas returns to the church to find his mother waiting for him. This stuns and angers him. His mother says the past is now in the past, and wishes Andreas would come to see his father, who is beside himself with pain with the collapse of Communism. She says that the man had two choices: have punishment dealt to Andreas, or ruin his own career by being the father of a subversive poet. Andreas promises to come home for good if his mother will get every State Security file that is on record for him. He tells her that he will be famous in a good way or a bad way, and the files will prevent the bad way. Weeks pass with no result. Andreas directly confronts the man he believes to be his father, who now looks old and worn. Andreas explains why he needs his files, relating the tale of killing Horst.

Andreas's father says he will look into the files, and almost admits he is not Andreas's father in a technical sense. Andreas's father then arranges it so Andreas's and Horst's



files can at least be looked at. At the State Security archives, Andreas discovers carbon copies of both files, which he realizes he is meant to smuggle out. As he seeks to leave, he encounters a news crew to which he reports he is an unofficial monitor for the Citizen's Committee of Normannenstrasse, saying that only the strongest sunlight can disinfect the lies and secrets of the State. It saves him from being seized by the guards. From there, he makes his way to the Kurfurstendamm, where meets the American, Tom Aberant.

## Analysis

As it is revealed through the past, Pip's mother is correct about Andreas Wolf. He is not the innocent, shining example of model humanity that so many hold him up to be. Andreas's past is very questionable at least, ranging from seducing teenage girls to murdering a man (though this can be argued to have been justifiably done in defense of Annagret). Regardless, Andreas's worst secret is the murder – something neither he, nor Annagret, every really get over. There is rich irony – and even hypocrisy – in a man like Andeas determined to expose every secret he can, while zealously guarding his own. This particular point will again be dealt with in future chapters.

A secret like Andreas's is certainly necessary to keep for Andreas, though readers may question the moral justness of such a secret. As noted briefly above, Andreas's quest to guard his own secrets – going to all ends to do so – contrasts greatly with his televised proclamation which catapults him to fame in which he says sunlight must expose the secrets and lies of the former Communist state. His stealing of the carbon copy files is a symbolic act of theft which serves as a harbinger for such work to come with Sunlight.

It is through secrets that the reader also notes striking similarities between Andreas and Pip. Andreas and Pip do not get along well with their mothers; their fathers are absent altogether; and both have invested themselves to discovering truth in their own ways (Andreas first with the fall of Communism, and later Sunlight; Pip with her antinuclear work, and later in the attempt to find her father). One secret which Andreas wishes he had not learned has to do with the sudden appearance of his real father. It throws Andreas off, but in the end, he considers himself better for having learned the truth. Still, it is not a redeeming thing for Andreas. Pip, on the other hand, expects finding her father will bear some sort of financial payoff. It remains to be seen whether Pip's perception of her father matches reality.

Yet, what is telling about the exposing of secrets and the uncovering of the past has to do with the conversation Andreas has with his real father. Andreas asks his father why now, of all times, he has decided to make his existence known. His father responds that sometimes, timing is irrelevant, and timing is everything. In the present situation, his father simply couldn't wait any longer or deny doing it at all. This teaches Andreas that the truth isn't always timely, and can sometimes be downright jarring, uncomfortable, compromising, or chaotic. He will carry this lesson with him into his founding of Sunlight in coming years.



## Discussion Question 1

Why does Andreas murder Horst rather than go to the police? Does Andreas bear any moral culpability for the killing of Horst? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Andreas go through such great lengths to protect Annagret? Does Andreas's plan work out for both him and Annagret? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

What does Andreas's father teach Andreas about secrets and truth? Why does this matter so much to Andreas?

## Vocabulary

counterrevolutionary, protocol, denunciation, scrupulously, dossier, megalomaniacal, antithesis, actuarial, analogous, petulant, sententious, abjure, intermittent, mirthful, ardent, supine, transgression



# Too Much Information – Moonglow Dairy

## Summary

In *Too Much Information*, Leila Helou is driving to Amarillo, Texas, from Denver, Colorado, on assignment as an investigative reporter for the online, foundation-supported news service, *Denver Independent*. Pip Tyler works as Leila's research assistant there. While Leila drives to Texas, she listens to an interview she had with Cody Flayner's ex-wife, Layla, who dishes up dirt on Cody's affairs and his strained relationship with his father, for whom Cody works at the Pantex nuclear weapons plant. Leila meets up with one girl, Phyllisha Babcock, to ask her about the July Fourth incident. Leila recalls how Pip had learned of Facebook photos of Phyllisha posing in a bikini in the back of Cody's pickup truck with a B61 thermonuclear warhead on the Fourth of July during a party. Leila had been assigned to look into this by her boss and lover, Tom Aberant, founder and executive editor of *Denver Independent*. Leila knows Pip is gorgeous, and worries that Pip reminds Tom of his ex-wife, whom Tom has never quite gotten over.

Leila continues speaking with Phyllisha, who says Cody brought home the nuclear warhead to impress her and use as a way to sexually excite her by demonstrating the kind of power he could wield. Phyllisha says her orgasm was pretty great, but then she was let down when Cody told her the warhead was only a fake replica for training purposes. Leila begins to recall her own past. Leila remembers how her father encouraged her to go into investigative reporting, simply because she wanted to do it and because the field was so male-dominated. She remembers how her writing professor, the famous Charles Blenheim, had captivated her, driving her into having an affair with him even though he was much older. Following his divorce, she married him and went on to write for the *Denver Post*. Leila remembers pressing Charles to have a baby with her, but Charles refused because he was attempting to write the novel for which he would forever be remembered.

Leila remembers going on to work for the *Washington Post* while she and Charles grew distant, during which time she met Tom Aberant in February, 2004. Tom explained he had a \$20-million inheritance he planned to do good with by forming a nonprofit investigative news service in Denver, which would come to be known as the *Denver Independent*, and that he was looking for writers. Leila was ambivalent about accepting, so asked to meet with Tom again over drinks. This ultimately led to an affair between the two, for Tom felt the same way about his wife, Anabel, as Leila felt about Charles. Leila fell in love with Tom, during which time a drunken Charles was paralyzed from a motorcycle accident. Leila blamed herself for not being around more often, so she decided to atone by returning to Denver to work for Tom, and care for Charles. Leila remembers that this was how she and Pip began to bond. Pip worried about her mother being alone and uncared for back in California. Not long after, Pip moved in with Tom and Leila. Tom confessed to Leila that he believed Pip to be his daughter, and Anabel the mother. He cannot understand how or why Pip came to Denver.



In the present, Leila seeks out Earl Walker, Flayner's former Inventory Control boss at the nuclear plant. Walker agrees to meet her behind the Centergas depot on Cliffside. Meanwhile, Leila calls Pip to fill her in on the warhead sex story, and on landing a meeting with Walker. Walker admits to accepting a \$250,000 severance payment to keep quiet, and that he was fired for drinking on the job once – something which Flayner used against him to cover his borrowing of the mock B61, accidentally shipped to the plant, to deal with a carload of investigators from Kirtland. Back in her hotel room, Leila finds that Tom has taken Pip out to dinner, which causes some jealousy. She reveals her interview with Walker, after which Tom urges another interview based on why a mock warhead was accidentally shipped to the plant from Kirtland Air Force Base in the first place. Leila remains jealous of Pip, for Pip seems to be gaining a closeness in Tom's life that only two others – Anabel and Andreas Wolf – ever have. Leila knows that Wolf and Tom are competitors for investigative news, with Tom investigating and Andreas leaking. Leila knows Andreas is winning, and finds it strange that Tom is respectful of Andreas while condemning Julian Assange.

In Moonglow Dairy, Pip is in the valley of Los Volcanes, Bolivia, to work for the Sunlight Project. She is one of the youngest at the Project, though all who work there are on average very young. There are people from all over the world at the Project, though most are girls. The Project is based on a compound located on farmland overseen by a man named Pedro. A Project worker named Flor explains to Pip that Andreas teaches that every hand is raised against the leaker, so they take their friends wherever they can be found. Pip explains to her fellow coworker, including Colleen, that she is there to find her father. Pip convinces Colleen to go skinny-dipping in a nearby river, amazed by the beauty of the place. Colleen says she won't feel that way when she meets the snake. She and Colleen quickly become friends, during which time Pip recognizes sadness in Colleen due to some sort of past with Andreas.

One night at dinner, Andreas Wolf suddenly appears. Though older, Pip finds him to be very handsome. He has been away consulting with the famous actress Toni Field, who will be playing Andrea's mother in a biofilm about his life. They meet the next morning to discuss how Pip can benefit the Project. Pip worries that Andreas is too much like Moonglow Dairies, a dairy who made its real money not selling milk, but selling manure to organic farms. She worries that Andreas is merely in everything for his own fame. She worries she will end up like Colleen, but Andreas waves these fears aside. He encourages Pip to work in research with Willow.

Pip later calls home to speak with her mother, filling her in on the good things about the Project. Her mother still worries about Andreas Wolf, calling him a lawbreaker, and saying that Pip herself might end up in trouble with the law. At work, Willow attempts to befriend Pip because she has been asked to do so by Andreas, which Pip finds strange. Colleen later explains that Willow is on meds for depression following the fatal snowboarding accident of her brother. Pip next meets with Andreas in town to discuss his past. Andreas reveals his past with Annagret. Only one other person has been told this, Andreas explains – an American he met in a bar after the killing. The American, he explains, now runs an investigative journalism nonprofit. If the story of the killing comes out, it will irreparably harm Andreas and the Project, both of which will be finished. He



and Pip then nearly have sex, but Pip ends up making Andreas stop. Back in their room on the compound, Colleen angrily confronts Pip over meeting with Andreas. She leaves two days later. Weeks pass, during which time Pip invests herself in research.

Andreas, impressed with Pip's progress, opens up to her to let her know his mother is dying of cancer. He also invites her to come along on a trip to meet potential investors. Pip agrees to go, and wonders if she is Andreas's woman. She realizes she is in love with him. Andreas later confesses to being in love with her, despite the age difference. She asks Andreas to order her to undress, which he does. However, Pip backs out from having sex with him again, thinking about her mother's warnings and realizing Andreas cannot be trusted. Pip is heartbroken and apologizes, but Andreas tells her not to be sorry. He shifts her to learning journalism, during which time she catches wind of the Facebook photos of the nuclear warhead. He then asks her to go and work for Tom Aberant, so that Andreas will know if Tom ever plans to move against him. She agrees.

Months pass. Pip has moved in with Tom and Leila, and has planted spyware for Andreas in Denver Independent's computer system. Meanwhile, Pip e-mails Colleen to tell her how much she is missed, and hoping to one day get a response. At the same time, Pip's mother is upset that Pip is now working for Tom at the Denver Independent, of all places. Pip reports to Andreas that Tom has not told anyone about Andreas's past – not even Leila. Pip says Tom and his people are all good, and asks for a way to remove the spyware. She ends up arguing by text with Andreas, who tells her he does not want her anymore. At work, Pip learns from Tom that a nuclear warhead did and did not go missing from Kirtland, and that more information is being uncovered.

Tom also reveals the Washington Post is pursuing the story. Pip feels horribly about betraying Tom and Leila with the spyware, so she delivers an ultimatum to Andreas: tell her how to uninstall the spyware, or she will go to Tom and Leila with the truth about everything. Andreas responds that he will ask Chen what can be done. The nuclear warhead story breaks a few days later, led by the Denver Independent, tracing the theft of the warhead to a Mexican cartel and drug abuse scandal, all stopped unwittingly by Facebook photos. As the story breaks, Tom confronts Pip, saying his IT guy has picked up the spyware she planted on them. Pip confesses everything and apologizes, but denies ever reading anything on Tom's personal laptop at home. She wonders what could be so explosive that Tom wouldn't want her to read it at all.

## Analysis

Franzen's assertion that some secrets must remain secret, while others should be exposed, is given further credence in this section of the novel. How a supposedly mock nuclear warhead came to be in the pickup truck of a degenerate is one such secret that is necessary to expose. How the warhead even came to be in the area is likewise a mystery – the sort of mystery which requires an answer because it immediately endangers the lives of millions of people. This can be compared in some ways to the secrets exposed by Sunlight earlier in the novel, regarding the bank forcing people into repossession.



The way in which the secrecy surrounding the nuclear warhead is exposed is also utterly important. The warhead's origins, and its part in a Mexican cartel and drug ring are rooted out through hard, investigative journalistic efforts. Leila travels around, interviewing various witnesses, tracing movements of the nuclear warhead, and doing whatever she can to get to the bottom of the warhead's presence. Eventually, she exposes the truth. While this investigative effort may matter little to the plot as the plot, it matters tremendously to the arguments Franzen makes. The efforts of Leila will be referenced again in future chapters, and the reader should bear this in mind moving forward.

Franzen notes that technology must surely have its limits. He does this through the use of spyware, planted into the Denver Independent computer system, and onto Tom's home computer, by Pip at Andreas's insistent. Pip has a moral awakening, realizing Tom and Leila are good people, and should not be subjected to such a technological invasion of privacy. That the Sunlight Project should have the amount of power that it does, to do the things that it does, is deeply troubling. With such technology behind it, Sunlight seems unstoppable, and capable of using technology to whatever end it so chooses. This has been seen already in the timing of the release of the bank data (why not release it sooner and save more people from hardship?), and is now seen in the violation of privacy.

While Franzen also argues that technology must have its limits, so too does he argue that it has a place. The reader will note that it was only through technology –through the internet and modern social media – that Pip received notice of the photographs of the nuclear warhead. It was through technology that Pip alerted Leila, and Leila managed to begin tracking down those involved in the warhead's movements. Note the contrast between Andreas's directives – spyware and obtainment of information without consent – and Leila's methods for investigation – following stories and gaining voluntary meetings with witnesses and informants.

## Discussion Question 1

What is Leila's investigative process like? How does this compare to the methods Andreas uses? Why do you believe these methods of seeking truth differ?

## Discussion Question 2

Consider Franzen's conception that not all secrets should be exposed in conjunction with the nuclear warhead, and the spyware planted into Denver Independent. Do you believe Franzen is correct in regards to these two instances? Or should all secrets, or no secrets, ever be revealed? Why?





## Discussion Question 3

Why does Pip confess everything about spyware and Andreas to Tom and Leila? If Tom has nothing to hide, why is he upset with being spied on?

## Vocabulary

tedious, discomfited, languished, hereditary, bequeathed, reportorial, monopoly, noncommittally, spurious, somnambulism, compensatory, feckless, pinioned, preposterous, olfactory, enumerating, rejoinder, inordinately, adulation, ambiguous, immoderate



# [le1o9n8a0rd]

## Summary

Tom Aberant, narrating this chapter of the novel in first-person, explains that by allowing a divorce with Anabel on the grounds of abandonment, he is allowed to keep the apartment in Harlem while Anabel goes to live in New Jersey. Anabel continually calls Tom, trying to coax him into asking her to do something together. Tom eventually consents to asking Anabel to go on a hike where she leads him to a clearing to have sex.

The chapter jumps back to 1954. Clelia is 20, works at a bakery, and dreams of marrying a man who will get her out of Jena, East Germany for good. When this doesn't happen, Clelia sneaks in West Berlin. While straying into a bad neighborhood, she encounters American Chuck Aberant of Denver, Colorado, who escorts her out. Chuck, who has two little girls from a previous marriage, decides to marry Clelia not only to protect her from legal punishments, but because he quickly comes to like her. While the marriage starts out strong, and Clelia gives birth to Tom, passing years cause Chuck and Clelia to drift apart. While Chuck goes off for weeks on end with college students on projects, while Clelia became a housewife. Having dealt with the horrors of Socialism and Communism, she became a staunch conservative Republican, supporting Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan.

The chapter now jumps to Tom's college days at Penn State, where he works as executive editor of *The Daily Pennsylvanian*. An unflattering story about Anabel Laird's feminist art and political antics appears in the paper, which Anabel, very thin and two years older than Tom, confronts him about. Anabel dislikes that the story mentions her family being wealthy, and that her father is chairman of McCaskill, an agribusiness conglomerate. Anabel calls Tom a jerk, while Tom apologizes for the article. Tom later calls Anabel to apologize again, during which time Tom asks to see her work. Anabel invites him over, talks about how much she dislikes coming from a rich background, and the two later go on a date to an art museum. Anabel is quick to dismiss nearly all of the art painted by males, except for a few such as Thomas Eakins and Modigliani, because she says they don't lie about women.

Tom later gets together with Anabel when both bail on a party they are attending. They begin to feel out a relationship. Anabel tells him he will need to improve himself if he is to be with her. She encourages him to start his own paper, based on his explanation of his mother's conservatism, and his father's progressivism both urging him to find truth in all things. Tom learns that Anabel is a strange person, telling him things such as that when she first got her period at 13, her cycles were in synch with the moon phases, and that she has an intensely strong sense of smell. This weirdness, however, actually attracts Tom to her.



Meanwhile, Tom's mother begins to fall into ill-health, which greatly worries Tom. He and Anabel begin a full-fledged relationship, in which her pickiness fast becomes apparent. For example, she wants him to sit down to use the bathroom because it is cleaner, and because she is forced to sit down as a girl. When Tom's mother finally meets Anabel, she is unimpressed and thinks Anabel is too old for Tom. Anabel does not like Clelia, especially after Clelia cannot say she liked Anabel's art film in which images of Miss Kansas and Miss America 1966 are interposed with the bolt-gunning of a cow.

Tom later meets David Laird for dinner, who tells Tom he will need serious courage to date someone like Anabel. Anabel is angry with the idea of Tom and her father having dinner. She attends dinner as well, which goes as smoothly as it can. David offers to help Tom get a job at the Washington Post, but Tom politely declines. On the way home, Anabel tells Tom that her father is just looking to buy him. Tom sets to work on a manifesto for the magazine of truth he intends to found, *The Complicator*. One year into their relationship, Tom proposes to Anabel, who happily accepts. Clelia is appalled. As time passes, Anabel convinces Tom to become a vegetarian, while she becomes a vegan. Anabel also decides to compose a film about the human body, wherein she will divide her body up into grids and do something with each grid to reclaim her body from the world of meat and men.

Clelia's health takes a turn for the worst, so Tom goes to see her. This makes Anabel unhappy. She is even angrier when Tom agrees to take Clelia home to see East Germany one last time. Tom arranges to finance the trip by writing a story on the political and social landscape for *Harper's*. By the time they arrive in Germany, the Berlin wall has come down. Some weeks later, Clelia's colon ruptures, and she dies of sepsis in Tom's arms. Tom is devastated. No funeral is held at the family's request. Tom later goes to a pub, where he meets Andreas Wolf, who points out his speech about bringing secrets into sunlight on the television. Tom and Andreas quickly become friends with many similarities between them. To help Tom better understand the terror of living under the Communists in East Germany, Andreas, on the condition that it will not be for print, relate his own story, including the killing of Horst. Andreas begins to cry, as his story becomes more of a confession than anything else.

Tom agrees to help Andreas move the body, in exchange for Andreas vowing to get Tom access to the State Security archives. The body is moved. Andreas helps better Tom's ability to speak German while Tom drives to the Oder Valley, where he drives onto a river island used for hay in warm weather to rebury the body. Andreas insists on doing this part alone, as a symbolic act of burying his past life. Tom later drops Andreas off, but never sees him again. Years later, Tom and Anabel divorce. Tom knows he needs to be done with her after their sexual encounter while hiking. He tells her that he is prepared to accept an investment check for the magazine from her father. Anabel is enraged and cries, saying she hates Tom more than she loves him. Tom later calls David to decline the investment check. Anabel later mails a letter for David, postmarked Houston, saying she is no longer his daughter, and will not be found. In 2002, Tom receives a massive inheritance check from David, which he accepts. Tom still wonders to this day where Anabel has gone.



## Analysis

In this section of the novel, the reader is given a firsthand glimpse at Tom's background. Interestingly, this section of the novel is narrated in the first-person by Tom himself. This is seemingly done because Tom serves as the linchpin for all of the events surrounding the murder and the future of Andreas and Sunlight. Tom knows Andreas's secret, and so he is the one card that, removed, could cause Andreas's world to come tumbling down. Whereas everyone else in the novel seems to hide themselves in some way, with their lives having to be forced to be described by a third-person narrator – Pip is secretive about her first name and her relationship with her mother; Leila does not like to speak about her past with Charles; Andreas does not like to talk about anything relating to his past at all – Tom is forthcoming with his own story. The first-person narrative mode here is thus reflective of Tom's memoir – and the idea that this chapter is Tom's memoir.

Tom's rocky relationship with Anabel is contrasted with Andreas's own rocky relationship with Annagret. Just as Andreas earns Pip's trust through the sharing of a secret, Andreas earns Tom's trust through the sharing of secrets. Tom makes a pact with Andreas that the past shall never be revealed. This creates a condition of loyalty between the two, and helps to underscore Franzen's argument that sometimes secrets are necessary to keep. Yet again, there is irony and hypocrisy in a man like Andreas who will do everything he can to guard his own secrets, while doing everything he can to expose the secrets of others. This is especially true given the pact between Andreas and Tom – one rooted in the importance of secrecy.

Perceptions of people can indeed be dangerous. Tom originally believed Andreas to be trustworthy, even after the details of the murder of Horst were exposed. Andreas has since demonstrated he cannot be trusted. Andreas, for his part, believes his betrayal of Tom by using Pip to spy on him is justified given Leila's knowledge of his own secrets. To Andreas, the perception of Tom as a trustworthy person has been destroyed. The same is true of Pip and Andreas. Obviously by the time of Pip's moral awakening, she has come to recognize that – even despite all the failed starts with Andreas that will be revealed later – Andreas is not the man who many believe him to be. The popular conception of Andreas as a gentle, trustworthy individual is clearly wrong.

Franzen also makes strong arguments in the manner of the way that Tom and Andreas conduct their pursuit of truth. Leaking, Franzen argues through Leila, is not journalism. Leila explains that journalism involves consideration, collation, contextualization, and so on, while leaking is the equivalent of spewing. Filtering is what makes a civilization possible, Leila goes on to argue, whereas the power to indiscriminately release information does not always actually help. As the reader has previously noted, there is a profound difference between spying and exposing, and investigative journalism. Leaking is raw; journalism is refined. Leaking does not always make sense; journalism can always make sense. The real heroes are those like Leila, who pursue stories morally and ethically. Likewise, Franzen argues that leaking is not necessarily heroic. Whereas Leila puts her reputation and her safety on the line to pursue a hard story ethically and



legally, someone like Andreas will use someone like Pip to spy and gather information illegally from thousands of miles away.

## Discussion Question 1

Leila asserts that leaking is not real journalism. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

## Discussion Question 2

Is Andreas a hero or a villain (or something in between) for exposing truth in the way that he does? Why?

## Discussion Question 3

Is Andreas right to have spied on Tom? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

capitulation, dismay, guileless, benign, hermetic, amoral, salacious, monochrome, dissolution, indigence, modicum, elephantine, betrothed, extirpated, implored, exodus, ghastly, penumbra, inurement, voluble, belatedly



# The Killer - The Rain Comes

## Summary

In *The Killer*, Andreas Wolf has stopped doing interviews. He is disappointed that the Internet, which is claimed by many to be the enemy of the elite, the friend of the masses, and dedicated to consumers. Andreas sees the Internet only as a popularity contest rather than a means to truth. Andreas counters this with the Sunlight Project. Andreas Wolf begins to consider the past.

The chapter jumps to several decades before. After disposing of Horst's body, Andreas thanks Tom and goes to find Annagret in Leipzig. Despite now being safe, Annagret does not want to see Andreas, based on what they have done together. Annagret admits that she is attracted to Andreas because he is a killer, and says if they are to be together, they must atone for the past by doing good things in the future. Andreas readily agrees to this. Meanwhile, his fame for his television speech continues to grow. The first few years of their relationship are good, but over time, Andreas and Annagret drift apart, becoming bored with one another. Still, they remain loyal to each other. Annagret also grows close to Andreas's mother, Katya, who has become a different woman since the death of her husband. Andreas becomes jealous of this closeness. Andreas comes to have episodes of fury and anger, which he keeps inside and comes to nickname "The Killer."

Andreas experiences such a bout of *The Killer* when Annagret suggests telling Katya about the past, but overcomes it. To keep himself busy and ride on his continued fame, Andreas brings together hackers, malcontents, and others online to begin the Sunlight Project. Andreas begins to spiral, losing grasp of things while he argues with himself about morality and *The Killer*. This further strains Andreas's relationship with Annagret. Katya comes to tell Andreas that Annagret has the right to leave him, that Annagret is having an affair with a woman named Gisela, and that Andreas needs to wake up. She also says she will remain loyal to her son, not to Annagret. Andreas endeavors to straighten himself out and recommit to his life. He and Annagret agree to break up, and do so peaceably. However, Andreas also cuts ties with his mother.

Andreas later agrees to meet up with his real father, who has a document he wants published. It is his memoir, "The Crime of Love" by Peter Kronburg. Seeing his father's name for the first time makes the man seem all the more real to Andreas. He explains the book isn't to shame Andreas, but to rail against prison injustice, the injustice of Socialism, and Andreas's parents. Andreas agrees to help if he can, but says he does not want to see Peter again. When Katya learns of this, she is beside herself with anger and sadness. She calls it all a lie. Andreas finds a publisher for the book, which goes on to be a bestseller. As Andreas's work continues, and as he begins serious leaks, he runs afoul of the law in numerous countries.



Andreas meets with Tad Milliken, a Silicon Valley venture capitalist who now lives in Belize to avoid charges for statutory rape. It is Tad who leases the property in Los Volcanes, Bolivia, to Andreas. The meeting is photographed by a paparazzo, Dan Tierney, who Tad sets his Rottweilers loose on. Andreas goes to see Dan in the hospital, explains that he cannot be seen anywhere with Tad, and then offers Dan work at the Sunlight Project. Dan then deletes photos of the two together. Andreas, paranoid, continues to monitor social media and the internet at large for any mention of the relation between the Sunlight Project and Milliken.

One day, Andreas finds an interview with Leila Helou, in which she says real journalism consists of collecting, condensing, and contextualizing, not just spewing information like leakers do. Journalists, she says, are adults trying to communicate with adults, while leakers like Julian Assange and Andreas Wolf are savages, who think adults are hypocrites for filtering what comes out of their mouths, and who expose secrets without any consideration. Leila goes on to say that filtering is not phoniness, but civilization. Leila says Wolf is a man so full of his dirty secrets that he thinks the world is composed of nothing but dirty secrets. This stuns Andreas because after a past friendship and leaking things to Tom for stories, Andreas believes he has been betrayed, and The Killer is awakened.

Andreas then searches into Tom's background, and has his lead hacker, Chen, do the same with facial-recognition software to track down Anabel. This leads to grainy images of a woman identified as Penelope Tyler working at a grocery store in Felton, California. Learning that Penelope/Anabel had a daughter by Tom, he contacts Annagret, who agrees to reach out to Pip to make up for the past. As this unfolds, Tom learns that a film is to be made out of the book *The Crime of Love*. When Pip comes to Sunlight, Andreas falls in love with her. But her demands to remove the spyware from Tom's computer later had made him afraid and hurt. He likewise feels idiotic to have had his spyware discovered by Tom's people. Tom comes to Bolivia to confront Andreas. The two men go for a hike. Tom is furious for Andreas's role in revealing his daughter, and hacking into his computers. Tom lays his demands out: Andreas is never to bother or communicate with Pip again, and Andreas is to destroy any and all files lifted from Tom's computers. In exchange, Tom will keep his mouth shut. Andreas is stunned to learn that Tom has not told anyone other than Leila his secret. He agrees to Tom's demands, but is furious Leila knows.

Tom then decides to begin speaking about Pip, and about everything he knows about Tom, Pip, and their lives, such as that Tom has a billion dollars that will be left to Pip. Tom and Andreas agree to meet again, during which time Andreas reads the secret document Tom has so carefully guarded – his memoir. He sends the memoir to Pip. When he and Tom meet again at the top of a mountain summit, he begins to taunt Tom by saying he saw Pip naked, and to relate key scenes of Tom's memoir, as well as his sending of the memoir to Pip. Andreas feels himself losing control mentally, and fully expects Tom to kill him. Andreas continues on, saying he was glad to pollute Tom's daughter. Andreas tries to coax Tom to push him off the summit, but Tom refuses. Andreas then shows Tom a written confession about the 1987 murder of Horst Kleinholz



on his arm. Tom calls Andreas what he is – psychotic. The Killer overwhelms Andreas, who jumps to his death.

In *The Rain Comes*, Pip begins work at Peet's Coffee. Jason is among her first customers. They both apologize for their failed attempt at romance a year and-a-half before. It makes Pip think of the past weeks, in which she learned of Andreas's suicide from her father, Tom, and in which time he told her to delete anything sent to her from Andreas without looking at it. Still half in love with Andreas, Pip reads the memoir, and learns more about her past and the past of her parents – something she realizes too late that neither parent wanted her to know about. Obituaries of Andreas's death describe him as mentally ill and suicidal. Pip is also stunned that her mother pretended to be poor, while Pip is set to receive a billion-dollar trust fund.

Pip comes to befriend Jason, telling him about her time at Sunlight Project. She also reestablishes contact with Colleen, who urges Pip to go public about Andreas Wolf's past. Pip then reaches out to Tom's sister, Cynthia, and asks for a meeting to learn more about Tom. Jason continues to get closer to Pip, who refuses to go anywhere else with Jason while he is in a relationship. Jason consents to this, as his relationship is rocky as it is. After he breaks up with his girlfriend, Jason and Pip get into a relationship and fall in love.

Jason encourages Pip to go and see her mother, for it has been too long. While their first meeting does not go well, the second goes better. Anabel, who does not want Tom to have the only word about the past, gives her side of the story to Pip. Pip urges her mother to use some of the trust fund money to pay off her student debt, save the house in which Stephen and the others live, to fix up the cabin, and to give Pip breathing room to get into a career. Anabel does not care how the money is spent, but just wants it to go away. Pip then encourages Tom to come see Anabel, which he reluctantly does during a rainstorm. Jason is also present for the reunion between Tom and Anabel, but waits outside with Pip while the two reconnect and argue over their accounts of the past. Pip hopes for a future where she, and life, will be better than her parents'.

## Analysis

The background to the formation of the Sunlight Project is discussed in the final chapters of the novel. Andreas's desire to find the truth through the exposing of secrets is given a legitimate beginning. After having lived against the fear of Communist secrecy, brutality, and immorality for so long, it is only natural that recently liberated German citizens would want freedom, honesty, transparency, and morality. Yet, Andreas becomes so wrapped up in his own image, and so transfixed by the suppression of his own truth while exposing secrets everywhere he can, he becomes delusional, paranoid, and ultimately, suicidal. In other words, Andreas becomes the very thing that he claims to hate. He betrays himself through his methods, and his death is the only possible end to his state of mind.





Franzen's case that some secrets should be exposed, while others remain hidden, is again explored here. Noted previously, it is one thing for long-oppressed peoples to want the truth about the past, but some secrets are better off left to themselves. Pip learns this when she reads her father's memoir, and learns far more about her parents than she ever really realized she wanted to know. Only belatedly does she accept her father's contention that some things – like his memoir – are best left alone. For some, these secrets have nothing to do with things which are illegal or unethical, but merely painful to the person involved – such as relating to the stormy romance between Tom and Anabel.

Here, Franzen's argument that leaking is not necessarily heroic is again explored. One of Andrea's final acts is one of defiance – to e-mail Pip Tom's memoir – goes against what Andreas has just promised Tom he would not do. Andreas does this in the deluded attempt to undermine whatever developing father-daughter relationship exists between Tom and his daughter. By then, however, Pip has largely seen through Andreas's persona to his true nature, and rather than disturb Pip, the memoir reminds her that sometimes, the past is better left in the past. Meanwhile, the reader will hearken back to the strange timing of the release of the bank records – an act that is clearly not heroic, but designed to impress Pip. Even those who claim to pursue the truth – like Andreas and Sunlight – can very easily have ulterior motives.

By the end of the novel, Pip is struggling to understand who she is and what she will do with her life. Money will obviously be no object, but money is not the summation of a human life. Consider the fact that, at the beginning of the novel, Pip believed all her problems could be solved through finding the truth, and doing away with the secrecy surrounding the identity of her father. Now, Pip knows who her father is and knows she will have financial security for the rest of her life – and she is still dissatisfied. She takes work at a coffee shop not because she financially has to, but because she mentally and emotionally must. In reference to Andreas's conversation with his real father, truth is not always the neat and tidy ending that many expect it to be.

## Discussion Question 1

Although Pip has financial security, and knows the identity of her father by the end of the novel, she still does not have happiness or peace of mind. Why?

## Discussion Question 2

Franzen's contention that some secrets should be exposed while others should remain secret is given new examination through Pip's reading of Tom's memoir. What conclusions does she reach in relation to the memoir and to secrets? Do you believe she is correct? Why or why not?



## Discussion Question 3

Why does Andreas e-mail Pip Tom's memoir? What does he hope to accomplish? What is the result instead? Why?

## Vocabulary

totalitarianism, apparatchik, intolerably, esoteric, defilements, sidled, spectral, sublime, sanctity, deification, substantial



# Characters

## Pip

Purity “Pip” Tyler is a 24-year-old college graduate who is working a dead end job in power purchasing, is active in the antinuclear community, and is \$130,000 in debt from student loans when the novel begins. Pip is beautiful, kind, and perceptive, though frustrated by her financial situation. She appeals to her mother, Penelope, for information about her father, whose identity is unknown, with the hopes that he will pay off her debt as repayment for his absence in her life. Frustrated further by her mother’s refusal to provide information, heartbroken over being rejected by Stephen, and intrigued by an offer from Annagret to work at the Sunlight Project, Pip changes her life. She agrees to work for Andreas Wolf at Sunlight, where she hopes she will learn more about her father.

Pip falls in love with Andreas and nearly has a sexual affair with him, but heeds her mother’s warnings about getting involved with such a man. At Andreas’s bidding, Pip goes to work for the Denver Independent, where she is used to download spyware onto Tom’s computers. Pip comes to realize that Tom, Leilia, and their people are good, and should not be spied on. Pip demands Andreas remove the spyware, or she will expose his secrets, while confessing her role in things to Tom. Pip comes to learn that Tom is actually her father, and while Tom urges her not to read his secret memoir that Andreas has sent to her, Pip does so anyways out of respect for Andreas. However, Pip comes to realize that not all secrets should be exposed, and that the past is sometimes best left in the past.

## Andreas Wolf

Andreas Wolf is the founder and CEO of the Sunlight Project. The name “Wolf” is reflective of Andreas’s stature as a predator who becomes more interested in self-preservation than truth. Andreas, a native of East Germany, got his start in exposing secrets when he ran afoul of the Communist government by publishing a poem critical of the ideology. Forced into counseling at-risk youth, Andreas developed a penchant for sleeping with teen girls, and eventually met Annagret with whom he actually fell in love. Andreas, seeking to protect Annagret from her abusive stepfather, killed him. The two later got together, though their relationship slowly fell apart. During the collapse of Communism in East Germany, Andreas stole files from State Security, and on television, became an overnight sensation when he declared that secrets and lies would be exposed to sunlight. He met and befriended Tom, to whom he confessed the murder, and who helped Andreas rebury the body.

Andreas went on to found Sunlight, growing ever more paranoid and psychotic about exposing the secrets of others while protecting himself. In the present, Andreas fears that Tom will expose him, so he orders Annagret to bring Tom’s daughter, Pip, into the



fold. Andreas then falls in love with Pip, whom he manipulates into working for Tom and planting spyware on his systems. Tom, later learning the truth of things, confronts Andreas who has by now become wholly psychotic. Andreas e-mails Tom's secret memoir to Pip, pens a confession of murder on his arm, and commits suicide by leaping to his death.

## Tom Aberant

Tom Aberant is the founder and CEO of the Denver Independent. He is a good man dedicated to exposing truths in a moral, ethical, and legal way. Tom founded his company with inheritance money bequeathed to him by his ex-wife Anabael's father, and later becomes romantically involved with reporter, Leila Helou. Tom does not know that Pip is his daughter, but suspects that she might be after she comes to work for him.

Tom comes to learn that Pip has planted spyware in his workplace and in his home at the bidding of Andreas. In the past, Tom and Andreas had been friends, during which time Andreas confessed a murder to Tom. Tom agreed to keep it a secret, and never made it public - and in the present, has no plans to do so. Tom forgives Pip for her role in things, then confronts Andreas over his duplicity and in defense of Pip. Tom comes to develop a good relationship with Pip, and at her request, begins speaking again to Anabel.

## Leila

Leila Helou is an investigative reporter for the Denver Independent, and is the girlfriend of Tom despite being married to a paralyzed man named Charlie. Leila is utterly professional in her work, going to great lengths to land a story and get to the truth – but always does so in a moral and ethical manner. It is Leila, acting on a tip from Pip, who exposes a near-situation with nuclear weapons and Mexican cartels. Leila gives an interview on journalism, saying that leakers are children with no filter and who do not make sense of the things they do. Her criticism of Andreas Wolf as a man who jealously guards his own secrets while wanting to expose everyone else catches Andreas's attention, making Andreas believe that Tom is about to betray him.

## Annagret

Annagret is a young German woman who first meets Andreas as a teenager when she is being sexually abused by her stepfather. She helped lure her stepfather into a trap where Andreas then murdered him to protect Annagret. Annagret and Andreas ultimately ended up in a relationship that began wonderfully, but later fell apart as their lives diverged and the secret of the murder between them was too much to bear. Nevertheless, Annagret remains friends with Andreas to the present day. It is at Andreas's request that Annagret proposes work at Sunshine Project to Pip.



## Anabel Laird

Anabel Laird, known now as Penelope Tyler, is the mother of Pip and former girlfriend of Tom Abernathy. Mentally and emotionally unstable, Anabel is nevertheless a strikingly beautiful woman who has raised Pip well. Anabel's marriage to Pip's father, Tom, begins well, but Anabel's nature, resentment of her family's wealth, and odd ways lead to a love-hate marriage. Even after they divorce, Tom and Anabel continue to sleep with each other, from which Pip is conceived. Wanting to break things off for good, Tom tells Anabel he is prepared to accept investment money from her father, which in turn causes Anabel to go off the deep end, change her name to Penelope, and move to California where she later gives birth to, and raises Pip.

## Clelia

Clelia Aberant is the mother of Tom Aberant, and a native of East Germany. Meeting Chuck Aberant of Denver, Colorado, while escaping, Chuck and Clelia married and fell in love. Their marriage gave birth to Tom. Clelia's experience under the brutality of Communism led her to become a staunchly conservative Republican, supporting Goldwater and Reagan for president in their respective elections. Clelia comes to worry about Tom's relationship with Anabel, and opposes the marriage. When Clelia's health declines and she wishes to visit East Germany as Communism falls, Tom agrees to take her. She dies in his arms just as freedom comes to Germany.

## David Laird

David Laird is the father of Anabel Laird, and is an immensely wealthy man due to the family's agribusiness conglomerate, McCaskill Foods. David is kind but strict, and does his best to maintain a rocky relationship with his daughter, who resents him for his corporate dealings and business-mindedness. It is later David who leaves an inheritance for Tom, who in turn uses the money to begin Denver Independent.

## Jason

Jason is a mathematician who meets Pip at Peet's Coffee early in the novel. After a failed sexual liaison with Jason, Jason does not hear again from Pip for a year and-a-half. When he does hear from her again, she is now working at Peet's, while Jason is struggling in his own relationship. Jason comes on to Pip, but Pip will not date him while he is in a relationship. When Jason breaks up with his girlfriend, he and Pip become friends before moving into a relationship. They are still together when the novel ends.

## Colleen

Colleen, who studied law, is a member of the Sunlight Project. She has been in love with Andreas for the three years she has been there, and is agonizingly wanting a relationship with Andreas, who will not go too far with her. Colleen befriends Pip when Pip comes to work at Sunlight, but becomes jealous when Pip and Andreas grow close. Eventually, Colleen is cut loose and sent home after objecting to Andreas and Pip being involved. She only later begins speaking with Pip again, saying perceptions of people can be dangerous, and that her perceptions of Andreas messed her up.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Student debt

\$130,000 in student debt serves as Pip's motivating factor to find her father early in the novel. Stuck at a dead-end job and feeling financial frustration, Pip decides that she will find her father to ask him to pay off her debt in exchange for being absent from her life for so long. Pip approaches her mother about her father's true identity, but Pip's mom is not forthcoming. Pip decides, in part, to join Sunlight because she hopes she will be able to use the group's resources to find her father.

## Spyware

Spyware is a kind of software installed on computers which enables monitoring and theft of files, and is symbolic of Andreas's paranoia and increasing psychotic break. Andreas, fearing that Tom is about to expose his secret, forces Pip to infect the Denver Independent's computer system, and Tom's home computers, with spyware. Andreas then uses spyware to monitor and steal files from Tom, including Tom's memoir. Pip is later horrified by this because Tom is a good person, and so she presses Andreas to have the spyware removed.

## The Sunlight Project

The Sunlight Project is an information leak organization begun by Andreas Wolf in order to expose secrets all around the world in a quest for truth. Andreas begins his work following the fall of Communism in Germany, in which he steals files from State Security pertaining to his past. Andreas's impromptu television declaration that secrets and lies will be exposed to sunlight inadvertently begins him on his quest which will soon culminate in the Sunlight Project. At present, the Sunlight Project and Andreas are considered fugitives, wanted for exposing classified secrets in numerous countries, and has become too powerful for its own good, using technology to pry into the lives of good people.

## The Denver Independent

The Denver Independent is an online investigative journal founded by Tom and worked on by Leila and numerous other investigative reporters. The Denver Independent's goal is the pursuit of truth through ethical, moral, legal, and reasonable means. The Independent is very successful and very highly regarded. It is at the Denver Independent that Pip comes to work at Andreas's urging, with the intent that she will compromise the security of the journal's computer system by installing spyware.



## Tom's memoir

Tom's memoir is a private and secretly-kept recounting of Tom's life which he keeps on his personal laptop, and symbolizes the fact that not all secrets should be exposed. The memoir is among the files that Andreas steals from Tom, and is the one file that Andreas e-mails to Pip to ruin her growing relationship with her father. Pip reads the memoir, but then comes to realize that there must be a limit to what secrets and what parts of the past are exposed, and that sometimes, secrets should stay in the past because they are simply hurtful.

## Confession note

A confession note is written on Andreas' arm by Andreas before he commits suicide. Made paranoid by the murder he committed decades before, and rendered psychotic by the idea that Tom might expose him, Andreas decides to out himself. The confession note admits to the murder of Horst.

## Inheritance

Tom receives an inheritance of \$20-million from Anabels' father, David, which Tom accepts in order to begin work on the Denver Independent. The money is a delayed gift to Tom, which he earlier refused from David following the breakup with Anabel. The \$20-million inheritance allows Tom to get his business off the ground and running, during which time the Denver Independent becomes hugely successful and well-respected.

## Trust fund

A trust fund is established in the name of Anabel, and exceeds a billion dollars in its amount. Anabel, disgusted with wealth, never touches the money because she believes it has nearly all been dishonestly earned. Pip presses her mother to use the money for good purposes, ranging from paying off her student debt to saving a friend's house.

## State Security files

State Security files on record about Andreas are pilfered by Andreas, and symbolize his first act of exposing secrets that will one day lead to the Sunlight Project. Andreas is able to see the files in the first place by way of his father's leverage, and is able to steal carbon copies of the files, escaping from the State Security compound shortly thereafter. Andreas stole the files not merely as an act of defiance, but to discover what information the State had kept on him, and if they suspected him in Horst's death.





## Reburial of Horst's body

After learning of Horst's murder, Tom participates peripherally in Andrea's reburial of Horst's body, which comes to symbolize the burying of the past and a birth of a new life for Andreas. Worried that the body of Horst may be discovered, Andreas commits to the reburial to ensure that he and Annagret will be safe in the future. Andreas considers the act a break with the past, and the possibility of a new future.

# Settings

## Bolivia

Bolivia is a country in South America in which the Sunlight Project operates. Wanted in numerous countries ranging from the United States to various places in Europe, Tom arranges to rent land in Bolivia owned by Silicon Valley venture capitalist Tad Milliken on which to live and operate the Sunlight Project. It is to Bolivia that Pip initially travels to work for Andreas, and it is to Bolivia that Tom later travels to confront Andreas. While the country is a liberating experience for Pip, who enjoys the scenic beauty and unspoiled nature, the country seems more like a prison of last resort for Andreas. Andreas ultimately commits suicide in Bolivia by jumping off a mountain.

## East Germany

East Germany is the half of Germany controlled by the Communists from the end of World War II until the fall of Communism in the country in 1990. East Germany is the birthplace and original home of Andreas Wolf, who runs afoul of the state by publishing a poem critical of Communism. East Germany is also the birthplace of Tom's mother, Clelia, who moves to the United States when she escapes the East and marries Tom's father. It is in East Germany after the fall of Communism that Tom makes his declaration about exposing secrets with sunlight on television and becomes an overnight celebrity. It is in East Germany that Tom and Andreas later meet following the final trip Clelia makes to her homeland, and after Tom murders Horst to protect Annagret.

## California

California is the birthplace and home of Pip. While Pip lives and works in Oakland, her mother lives and works in the quiet mountain town of Felton. It is in California that Pip first meets Annagret and is hired to work at Sunlight. It is also in California that Pip first tries to learn about her father through her mother, but is repeatedly denied. Gone for a year and-a-half between working for the Sunlight Project and the Denver Independent, Pip finally comes home to California to reunite with her mother, and to see her mother and father begin speaking to one another again.

## Texas

Texas is where Leila travels in pursuit of a story tipped off by Pip. Leila heads to Amarillo to investigate how a nuclear plant worker could have brought a nuclear warhead off-site to show his girlfriend, and to show off at a Fourth of July party. Leila's investigation exposes a secret Mexican drug cartel plot, and is meant to demonstrate the difference between the honest, ethical, and legal pursuit of truth through investigative journalism to the often unethical, illegal, and immoral work of leakers.

## Peet's Coffee

Peet's Coffee is a place in Oakland, California, that Pip visits weekly to get coffee, during which time she meets Jason. After a failed romantic encounter with Jason, and following the year and-a-half that she is gone working for Sunlight Project and Denver Independent, Pip comes to work at the coffee place as she struggles to find her place in the world. Pip meets Jason again when he becomes a regular customer for her, and the two ultimately end up in a committed, traditional relationship.



## Themes and Motifs

### **Secrets are sometimes necessary to keep, and sometimes necessary to expose**

Secrets are sometimes necessary to keep, and sometimes necessary to expose, Jonathan Franzen argues in his novel “Purity.” Secrets are kept for different reasons, but just because something is a secret doesn’t give another the right to expose it. Pip initially believes that all secrets should be exposed, but comes to change her mind by the end of the novel.

Andreas Wolf contends that all secrets (except his own) should be exposed. That Andreas will do whatever it takes to expose all secrets in the world while doing whatever it takes to protect can be considered both ironic and hypocritical. Andreas is only right to an extent. Some secrets absolutely should be exposed. These include the illegal actions of the bank in Oakland to repossess houses of customers; and the truth behind how a nuclear warhead ended up in the back of a pickup truck at a Fourth of July party.

Strangely, Andreas himself – apart from his own personal secret – is not ready to learn the truth of the identity of his father. Andreas is startled by the revelation of who his father really is. His father’s appearance essentially reveals that truth is not always a timely or a comfortable thing. Andreas takes this to heart in his own work. Meanwhile, Pip is doing everything she can to learn the true identity of her father – something which her mother keeps a secret. Pip never stops to consider why her mother has kept the secret a secret, but is rather determined to know the answer.

Andreas’s final act before his death is to e-mail Tom’s secret memoir to Pip. Andreas obtained the memoir through illegally using spyware, something which Pip comes to reject based on the idea of the right to privacy, but also on the idea that Tom is a good person. Some secrets have a right to be kept. Nevertheless, Pip reads Tom’s memoir even after he asks her not to. Pip comes to feel badly about this, realizing that sometimes the past is kept a secret not out of any illegal or immoral concern, but merely because the past is painful.

### **Leaking is not journalism**

Leaking is not journalism, argues Jonathan Franzen in his novel “Purity.” In the present world in which Franzen’s novel “Purity” appears, leakers – those who hack, spy, and steal troves of secret and classified information, only to publish them online in massive leaks – are given positive support and admiration from many people throughout the world. As such, among certain circles, leakers have achieved the kind of respect traditionally accorded to journalists – but this, Franzen explains, should not be so.



Franzen makes his argument about journalistic integrity and the often immoral and unethical practices of leakers through an interview conducted by the character, Leila. Leila explains that journalism is a practice whereby information is morally and ethically collected, collated, condensed, and contextualized in written form. This is the rational communication of one adult to another, which is an investment in a civilized world grounded in respect for privacy and certain secrets.

Leila goes on to explain that all leakers do is spew to see what sticks. Leakers have no concerns for privacy, because they believe that privacy is tantamount to keeping secrets, and the keeping of any secrets for any reason is wrong. Leakers do not consider what information they publish, but simply publish to expose. In so doing, legitimate secrets are exposed and lives can be compromised. Likewise, the leakers do not attempt to make sense of what they publish, but merely publish.

It takes a real journalist to be able to make sense of the things that are being published. It takes a real act of journalism to be able to effectively communicate those things to people who have a vested interest or genuine right to know them. Most journalists, Leila explains, live up to standards of decency, and standards of moral and ethical conduct in that the means are just as important as the ends, while the leakers believe the ends justify the means – even if that means breaking laws and hurting innocent people to do so.

## **Leaking is not necessarily heroism**

Leaking is not necessarily heroism, and there must be a limit to what leakers are willing to expose and to do in order to expose, Jonathan Franzen argues in his novel “Purity”. Franzen presents his arguments through a series of events and illustrations, and through the evolution in Pip’s thoughts relating to secrets.

Early in the novel, Pip has a favorable view of Andreas Wolf and the Sunlight Project. They have been instrumental in exposing secrets of concern to the antinuclear community, and the various groups in Oakland. Annagret’s insistence that Pip come to work for Sunlight is complemented by the suspiciously timely release of information in which a local bank is illegally finding ways of repossessing peoples’ houses. It is apparent that the information was released when it was to impress upon Pip the power of Sunlight. Yet such an exposure is not heroic, Franzen demonstrates through the timing of the release. Heartache, agony, and suffering could have been avoided much earlier had the Sunlight Project moved sooner. Instead, for their own gain, Andreas held off on the exposing. This is not heroic, but selfish.

The idea that Pip could use Sunlight to help locate her father is likewise not a matter of heroics, but selfishness. The reader does not know why Pip’s father’s identity is a secret – or if Pip’s father himself even wants it that way. However, whatever reason there may be for this, Sunlight finds irrelevant in pursuit of the truth. When Andreas comes to suspect (erroneously) that Tom is preparing to expose him, Andreas decides to use the tremendous power of the Sunlight Project for his own purposes. This, again, is not



heroic – but selfish. When Andreas steals Tom’s personal, secret memoir and mails it to Pip, this is not an act of heroic defiance but a violation of privacy rights. It is done not to inform Pip, but to ruin her relationship with her father.

Pip is asked by Tom not to read the memoir, but Pip reads the memoir anyways. She discovers nothing horribly illegal or immoral on the part of her father – but recognizes then that she has violated her father’s right to privacy. Her father is a good man who has wanted to record the past, but to keep it a secret because much of it is a matter of heartbreak to him. Tom has every right to keep his past a secret. Pip’s reading of the memoir is not a heroic act of defiance, but a cruel violation of privacy. Pip recognizes this, feels horrible about it, and comes to agree that some secrets should remain a secret.

## Technology must have its limits

Technology must have its limits, Johnathan Franzen argues in his novel “Purity.” Technology is capable of many incredible things, but whether this technology is used for good or bad is a question of responsible exercising of such power. The ill-use of such technology can have deadly consequences.

One such potential deadly consequence is illustrated through the nuclear warhead observed in the back of Cody Flayner’s pickup truck. Although declared a mock warhead, the warhead itself had fissile material inside, and could have been activated and detonated – all while Cody showed off for his girlfriend, and later at a party. Technology also comes to the rescue in this incident, however, as the antinuclear community of which Pip is a part learns of the warhead through Cody’s Facebook posts. Leila is thus able to get to the bottom of the story. Likewise, the online leaking of hacked documents relating to illegal bank activities is an incredible thing, as it exposes criminal corruption.

However, that same sort of technology is used to ill ends by Andreas Wolf. When Andreas comes to believe that Tom is on the verge of exposing his past, Andreas uses the vast resources of Sunlight to pry into Tom’s life. This includes facial-recognition software, the same kind as used by the NSA, to track down Tom’s long-lost wife. This is a total violation of the privacy rights of Anabel, who does not want to be found by anyone other than her daughter. This likewise comes to violate the privacy of Pip herself, as her hiring is part of an elaborate ruse to get back at Tom – all made possible by technology.

This scheme to get back at Tom is further developed when Andreas preys on Pip’s emotions to get her to plant spyware on Tom’s home computer, and on the Denver Independent’s computer network. The Denver Independent is a legitimate, honest, and morally ethical investigative news service, and Tom and Leila are good people who do not deserve to have their privacy rights violated, Pip comes to realize. This is why Pip pushes back against Andreas, knowing that technology must have its limits, especially where it violates the rights of another. When Pip reads an electronic version of Tom’s



memoir despite his asking her not to, she feels as if she has violated his rights, and feels badly afterward. Andreas, however, made paranoid by technology in the fear that his secrets will be found out and exposed, realizes at last that he cannot control all technology. He commits suicide.

## **Perceptions of people are dangerous because they often do not live up to reality**

Perceptions of people are dangerous because they often do not live up to reality, Jonathan Franzen argues in this novel “Purity.” There is the perception of a person when it comes to secondhand knowledge, and then there is reality through firsthand knowledge. The perceptions of two people especially become the source of such considerations – that of Andreas Wolf, and Tom Aberant.

When the novel begins, Pip is \$130,000 in debt from student loans, and wants to find her father in the hopes that he will pay off her debt. She imagines him to be wealthy and distant, and so expects to prevail upon the reasoning of his being absent as a cause for owing her this favor. However, Pip’s perceptions of her father could not be further from the truth. She comes to find that Tom is warm and personable, and is both a moral and ethical man who simply did not know that Pip existed to begin with.

Andreas Wolf presents a more complex case. To many in the world, including Pip at first, Andreas is something of a selfless, noble hero dedicated to the truth who is misunderstood and wrongly persecuted by many governments of the world. His exposing of secrets – such as the bank repossessing scandal in Oakland – lead to the improved lives of, and restoration of justice to, countless people. His supporters speak not only of his latest work, but also of his first televised appearance during the fall of Communism in East Germany when he said that secrets and lies would be exposed by sunlight – which made him an overnight celebrity. However, Pip’s mother objectively considers Andreas to be dangerous.

Anabel’s perceptions are correct. In reality, Andreas is a manipulative, paranoid man who is at best psychotic, and at worst a hypocrite for wanting to guard his own secrets while exposing everyone else’s. He preys on the girls who work for him, and leave them out in the cold such as in the case of Colleen. In other situations, where even genuine feelings are known, Andreas uses these feelings to manipulate Pip into installing spyware on Tom’s computers. Andreas has no discretion in the leaks he orchestrates, and has no discretion in the timing of them, either. He acts immoral, unethically, and illegally, often for very selfish reasons –such as in the violation of Tom’s privacy, and in his attempt to destroy Tom’s relationship with Pip. Pip ultimately comes to realize that her perception of Andreas was very wrong.

# Styles

## Point of View

Jonathan Franzen tells his novel “Purity” predominantly in the third-person limited omniscient narrative mode, with the exception of the chapter [le1o9n8a0rd], which is told in the first-person reflective perspective from the point of view of Tom Aberant. The third-person perspective is used by Franzen as a common unifying thread that pulls together a story which takes place across several decades and three continents, and which involves several important characters, and innumerable secondary characters. The third-person allows for smooth transitions between different places and different people, using a familiar voice to navigate a wide-ranging and diverse plot. The exception in [le1o9n8a0rd] is where Tom Aberant narrates his own experiences. This may be seen either as Tom’s importance as the linchpin of the plot, being the connection between Andreas and Pip; and it may also be seen as being the actual memoir of Tom.

## Language and Meaning

Jonathan Franzen tells his novel “Purity” in language that is simple and straightforward. This is done for at least three reasons. First, the language is reflective of the contemporary era (the 1980s through the 2010s), both in the plot of the novel and the time in which the novel has been written (the 2010s), in which language is casual, simple, and straight to the point. This adds a sense of realism and believability to the plot. Secondly, the sheer size, scope, and length of the novel (563 pages that cross continents, decades, and numerous primary and secondary characters) is made easily accessible by simple and straightforward language. Third, the simple and straightforward language allows Franzen to clearly and concisely make his points. For example, he clearly demonstrates through the interview with Leila that he does not consider leaking to be journalism, and that he considers leaking to be irresponsible while journalism has tremendous integrity.

## Structure

Jonathan Franzen divides his novel “Purity” into seven unnumbered but titled chapters. The title of each chapter is based in some way on the events contained in that section of the novel. For example, “Purity in Oakland” deals with Pip’s life in Oakland, California, while “The Republic of Bad Taste” deals with Andreas’s early life in East Germany during the final decade of Communist control. The chapters are arranged in a kind of alternating fashion, in which the novel begins in the present, and each succeeding chapter fills in more and more details relating to the present time, until the final chapter continues the narrative in the present. The first chapter, “Purity in Oakland,” deals with Pip’s time in Oakland, and her decision to attempt to find her father. The next chapter,



“The Republic of Bad Taste,” begins in the 1980s and works its way toward the present without actually arriving (yet) at the present time, and so on. The final chapter, “The Rain Comes,” returns events to the present wherein Pip has returned to Oakland, and has encouraged her father and her mother to speak to one another again.



## Quotes

I have to warn you that I want to talk about something you don't like to talk about.  
-- Pip (Purity in Oakland)

**Importance:** Here, Pip speaks to her mother by phone. Pip reveals not only that she will be visiting her mother for the weekend, but that she wants to talk about her mother's least favorite subject. That is the mystery of who Pip's father is. In fact, Pip's mother hates talking about the past in general, but in particular, Pip's father. Pip wants to do so to get out of debt.

She had no interest in 'getting to know' her father, she already had her hands full with her mother, but it seemed to her that he should give her money. Her \$130,000 in student debt was far less than he'd saved by not raising her and not sending her to college.  
-- Narrator (Purity in Oakland)

**Importance:** Here, the reason Pip wants to find out about her father is clearly explained. She has no interest in catching up or making up for lost time. Instead, she feels as if her father owes her financial help based on the debt he has incurred with her for not being in her life. She is now determined to find her father, and will demand real answers at long last from her mother.

I'm sorry you're feeling bad and powerless. Sometimes a change of scene can help with that.  
-- Andreas Wolf (Purity in Oakland)

**Importance:** In being accepted to a paid internship with the Sunlight Project, Pip begins to e-mail Andreas Wolf to determine what he is all about. She admits to feeling helpless and powerless given her situation with work and romance, so Andreas does his best to convince Pip to come and work for him. He does this in every way that he can, including using the generic argument that a change of scenery can help change one's life.

Sometimes you imagine something for so long, you find that you have no choice but to do it. Maybe you'll have a son of your own someday. You might understand better then.  
-- Andreas's real father (The Republic of Bad Taste)

**Importance:** When Andreas's real father confronts him with the truth about who he is, Andreas is stunned and wants to know why now, of all times, this truth has had to come out. While it has been something Andreas's real father has been considering for a long time, the truth itself for Andreas is untimely. In other words, truth is not always a timely thing, though it is arguably necessary no matter the timing. It is a lesson Andreas will bear with him into the future with the Sunlight Project.

You hate Assange, but somehow Wolf gets a free pass. Everyone gives him a free pass.  
-- Leila (Too Much Information)



**Importance:** Leila finds herself questioning her relationship with, and the life of Tom. Leila is jealous of how close Pip and Tom have become, but is also angered that Tom regards Andreas Wolf so well. This is especially true because Tom has only criticism for Julian Assange, while Andreas gets a pass. Leila does not know why, but wants to find out.

Every hand is raised against the leaker... That's the first thing you learn from him. We take our friends wherever we can find them.

-- Flor (Moonglow Dairy)

**Importance:** When Pip begins work at the Sunlight Project in Bolivia, she learns many things very quickly. One of them is that leakers have few friends, and that in any given situation, one should expect every hand to be against the leaker. This is because leakers claim to not take sides, for their loyalty is supposedly always given to the truth no matter what it is. This makes leakers uncontrollable.

It destroys the Project, yes.

-- Andreas Wolf (Moonglow Dairy)

**Importance:** Andreas meets with Pip, during which time he reveals the killing he orchestrated on Annagret's behalf. He explains he confessed the killing to an American, Tom Aberant, who now runs an investigative journalism nonprofit. He is worried the story will come out through Tom, which will forever damage his reputation, and destroy the project. He wants Pip to plant spyware on Tom's computer, which Pip agrees to do.

Like the old politburos, the new politburo styled itself as the enemy of the elite and the friend of the masses, dedicated to giving consumers what they wanted, but to Andreas... it seemed as if the Internet was governed more by fear: the fear of unpopularity and uncoolness, the fear of missing out, the fear of being flamed or forgotten.

-- Narrator (The Killer)

**Importance:** Here, the narrator demonstrates the growing isolation of Andreas Wolf, based in part on disenchantment. Andreas is very unhappy with how the internet is turning out. He considers it a modern-day politburo that claims to be for the people, but is in reality something else altogether. In this case, the internet is less about truth, freedom, and information, and is more about popularity.

His paranoia was evidently a fixed quantity.

-- Narrator (The Killer)

**Importance:** As time passes, Andreas becomes paranoid about what the world may or may not know about him, including his deepest secret. He hires a photographer, Dan Tierney, onto the Sunlight Project in exchange for Dan deleting photographs featuring Andreas together with Milliken. He consistently monitors the internet, social media, and



other forms of information to ensure Tierney does not speak, and for Andreas to see what anyone else says or knows about him.

Filtering isn't phoniness – it's civilization. ... Andreas Wolf is a man so full of his own dirty secrets that he sees the entire world as dirty secrets.

-- Leila Helou (The Killer)

**Importance:** In an interview, Leila distinguishes journalists from leakers, saying journalists collate and contextualize, while leakers only spew. She goes on to say that journalists are adults attempting to communicate with other adults by filtering, whereas leakers are children who do whatever they want. Leila's hint at secrets panics Andreas, who then contacts Annagret to force her to bring Pip to him.

Consider this a free vacation in America.

-- Andreas Wolf (The Killer)

**Importance:** Andreas Wolf, panicked at his secrets being discovered, pressures Annagret into agreeing to bring him Pip under the guise of working for the Sunlight Project. Andreas does this by prevailing on their past together. He also explains it would be like a paid vacation to go to America that Annagret could bring Martin along on.

She saw that she'd done a very bad thing to both her mother and Tom by getting it. Both of them had known, and neither of them had wanted her to know.

-- Narrator (The Rain Comes)

**Importance:** Pip reads the secret memoir of her father to honor Andreas's last act on Earth, but realizes later it was a mistake to do so. Some secrets are meant to remain a secret. This includes the strange past between her father, her mother, and Andreas. These are things of which are hurtful to those involved, and which they would rather leave buried behind to keep on with life – but no longer, thanks to people like Andreas Wolf.