



Creep

By Jennifer Hillier

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“Top of the line thriller writing” (Jeffery Deaver): Jennifer Hillier’s fast-paced psychological suspense about a sexually addicted college professor terrorized by an ex lover.

IF HE CAN’T HAVE HER . . .

Dr. Sheila Tao is a professor of psychology, an expert in human behavior with her own hidden past. But she’s not the only one keeping secrets. . . . When Sheila began an affair with her sexy graduate assistant Ethan Wolfe, she knew she was playing with fire. Consumed by lust when they were together, she was riddled with guilt when they were apart. Now she’s finally engaged to a good man, and it’s time to end the dangerous liaison. But Ethan has something different in mind. He intends to make her pay for rejecting him.

. . . NO ONE CAN.

As Sheila attempts to counter Ethan’s increasingly threatening moves, he schemes to reveal her darkest, most intimate secrets by destroying her prestigious career . . . and then her. Caught in a terrifying cat-and-mouse game, Sheila must fight for her life and free herself from the ex-lover whom she couldn’t resist—who is now the manipulative monster who won’t let her go.

CREEP

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Editorial Review

Review

"Top-of-the-line thriller writing...."

--Jeffery Deaver, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Carte Blanche*

"An agreeably frightening debut...packs a considerable wallop." --*Publishers Weekly*

"Hillier will likely have best sellers in the future thanks to her suspenseful plotting and solid character development...this fast-paced page-turner will keep fans of Lisa Gardner and Chelsea Cain guessing."

--*Library Journal*

"An engaging thriller, with the kind of twisted story that makes you a bit queasy even as you can't look away...Hillier nicely keeps readers on their toes...Psychological thrillers are tough to execute, because their authors must create stories that infiltrate readers' minds, pulling them into the plots as more participants than observers. Hillier pulls off that sleight of narrative hand with remarkable skill." --*Booklist*

"As summer reads go, fans are going to have a hard time finding anything as tense, page-turning and bothersome as *Creep*, a truly frightening debut from Jennifer Hillier." --*Suspense Magazine*

About the Author

Jennifer Hillier makes her fiction debut with *Creep*. Originally from Canada, she has also lived with her husband in the Pacific Northwest. Visit her on the web at JenniferHillier.org.

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CHAPTER : 1

Three months. That's how long Dr. Sheila Tao had been sleeping with Ethan Wolfe. Three months, four days, and approximately six hours.

The problem wasn't the sixteen-year age difference. It wasn't even that she was his professor and he was her teaching assistant. The problem was that Sheila was engaged to Morris, and now the affair with Ethan had to stop. No more weekly "meetings" at the Ivy, the motel just off campus that rented rooms by the hour. No more sneaking around. No more lying. No more falling into that chasm of depression that consumed her for days after each of their trysts.

It had to end. All of it. Sheila and her therapist had been working hard on this. Yes, even psychologists had psychologists.

It wouldn't be easy. Ethan was good-looking and prone to getting his way. Hell, he had seduced her, though Sheila suspected not even her therapist believed that.

They were in her bright corner office on the fourth floor of the psychology building at Puget Sound State University. He was relaxed, casual, his jean-clad legs spread open in that cocky way he liked to sit. The desk between them was strewn with papers, an organized clutter that served as a makeshift barrier.

Observing him, she watched his full lips form words she only half-heard. There was nothing vague about

Ethan's attractiveness, but he downplayed it by wearing ratty vintage T-shirts, worn jeans, tennis shoes. His hard, flat stomach wasn't evident through the loose-fitting shirt, but Sheila could damn well picture it.

She had no idea how he was going to react to her news. She'd known him long enough to understand his propensity for structure, and she was about to upset the routine they'd established over the past three months.

Of her five teaching assistants, Ethan was the brightest and most ambitious. His intelligence and drive had been a big part of his appeal. They were discussing grades for her popular summer-session undergraduate social psychology class, and so far neither of them had commented as to why they were meeting here this morning, in her office, instead of room sixteen at the Ivy Motel. She knew he had to be thinking about it, because she was thinking about it, too.

She forced herself to focus on what he was saying.

"Danny Ambrose doesn't deserve a B," he said, fingers resting lightly on the arms of his chair. He never talked with his hands, even when he was passionate about something. "The similarities he drew between Milgram's experiment and the Nazis? Too obvious."

His brows were furrowed. Sheila was about to overrule the grade Ethan had assigned to one of her undergraduate students, and he didn't like it. He wasn't used to it. They didn't disagree often.

"He loses points for originality, but don't you think his argument is solid?" Sheila smiled to soften her words. "This is only a sophomore class. He did what was asked of him and it was better than average. I spoke to Danny personally the other day. He risks losing his scholarship if we give him that C. He's a good kid. I'd really hate to see that happen."

She could almost hear the wheels in Ethan's mind turning as he thought of a counterargument. Most of the time she encouraged healthy debate, but she wasn't in the mood this morning. There was a conversation they needed to have, and she was having a hard time steering them in that direction.

She waited, saying nothing. If she didn't push it, he'd come around. The key was to let him work through it on his own.

"Okay," Ethan said finally. "You win, Sheila. Danny gets a B. Lucky bastard. God, I hate it when you assert your authority over me." Lowering his voice, he glanced over his shoulder at the open door behind him. "You'll have to make it up to me later." He leaned forward and ran a finger down the back of her left hand, lips curled into the half-smile she liked so much.

His finger brushed over the band of her new diamond ring, turned inside out so the stone was tucked into her palm. His gaze dropped down to her hand.

She was surprised it had taken him this long to notice. *Here we go.*

Her first instinct was to yank her hand away, but that would only make things worse. Willing herself to appear relaxed, she twisted the platinum band around. Ethan's eyes widened at the sight of the four-carat diamond.

"What's this?" The lightness of his tone did not match his face. A flush emerged just above the neckline of his T-shirt. He touched a finger to the top of the stone, leaving a smudge.

She resisted the urge to wipe it off. The face of a diamond this size was like glass. Morris was a senior partner at Bindle Brothers, the largest investment bank in the Northwest, and he hadn't held back.

She withdrew her hand. "Could you close the door?" she asked. "Just for a few minutes. There's something we need to discuss."

Ethan stiffened, as Sheila knew he would. He was fine in a lecture hall, but they both knew he didn't like closed doors in small spaces. Something to do with his childhood and getting locked in a closet for hours—she didn't really know, he'd always been vague. In their tiny motel room, the windows always had to be open, even if it was raining.

"Please?" she said. "Just for a bit so we can talk in private. I'll open the window."

He closed her office door reluctantly while she cranked open the casement behind her. A blast of August warmth entered the air-conditioned room. Ethan waited in silence, his expression betraying nothing.

There was no way around it except to be direct. "Morris and I are getting married."

Ethan leaned back in his chair and stared at her with unreadable light gray eyes. Again, she waited. The thrum of the air conditioner reverberated in the room.

"When did this happen?"

"Saturday." Five nights ago.

He looked around the office. He wasn't one to avoid eye contact, so she guessed he was digesting this information. His gaze focused briefly on a small, framed picture of Sheila and Morris on the window ledge before returning to her face. "Well, this is big news. But it doesn't change anything between you and me."

"It changes everything." The words were out before she could consider their impact. Biting her lip, she forged ahead anyway. "I can't be involved with you anymore outside of class."

He didn't blink. "Just like that?"

"I'm sorry."

He exhaled and she caught a whiff of the cinnamon gum he'd been chewing earlier. He always chewed cinnamon gum, and if she closed her eyes, she could almost taste it, could almost feel his sweet, spicy tongue in her mouth—

"Congratulations." The smile didn't quite touch his eyes.

"Thank you," she said.

"When's the wedding?"

"October tenth."

His smile turned into a grin she couldn't read. It wasn't amusement, or annoyance, or even a desire to please;

it was something else entirely.

“So soon. Why the rush?”

She had prepared for this question, rehearsing the answer in her head during the drive to work that morning, and it rolled off her tongue. “I’m thirty-nine and I’m not getting any younger. I’m tired of living alone, Ethan. I love Morris. We want to start our life together. We—there might still be time for kids.”

“What should I wear to the wedding?”

Shocked, she opened her mouth, but no words came out.

“I’m kidding,” he said, his eyes finally showing a hint of amusement. “Joke, Sheila. I wouldn’t come even if I was invited. Isn’t there a rule about going to the weddings of people you used to fuck?”

She winced. She had no problem with cursing, but here, in this moment, it sounded unreasonably harsh.

“Ah, well. It’s better that it’s over anyway.” He ran a hand through his short, mussed hair. “It really should have ended ages ago, now that I think about it. Remember when your father died? How messed up you were?”

Her stomach lurched. “Of course I remember.” It had only been three months since her estranged father had passed away from liver cancer. Three days before the affair had started. She knew it had been the trigger.

His voice became low, accusing. “I never wanted this to be a long-term thing. But you were so goddamned needy. You kept telling me not to go.”

It was a subtle but unmistakable slap in the face. *Please don’t go*. Oh, yes, those had been her words exactly, words she’d whispered to Ethan the morning after her father’s funeral while lying next to him naked under the scratchy motel bedsheets. It hurt to think he could bring it up now as if they were talking about the weather.

“The timing was bad,” he said with a shrug. “I couldn’t do it to you. But really, it should have ended right after it started.”

“You said that already.”

“Are you mad?” His face was open, interested. “Don’t be mad, Sheila. I don’t regret that it lasted as long as it did. But all good things must come to an end. This won’t change anything professional between us. We still work really well together.”

He sat back with a Cheshire-cat smile.

She was suddenly infuriated. Exactly who was dumping whom here? She had agonized over this conversation for days, wondering what to say to him and how to say it, alternating between supreme bliss at her new engagement and pangs of regret over the affair, worried about hurting Morris, hurting Ethan, hurting herself. Nothing about this had been simple. Nothing.

But here he was, easy like Sunday morning, his handsome face a mixture of pity and regret.

She arranged the papers on the desk into neat stacks to keep her hands from trembling, thinking hard about what she wanted to say next.

“All right, about that.” Sheila’s words were tight as she forced herself to stay calm. “I don’t think we should continue to work together. I’m going to recommend you work with Dr. Easton from now on.”

This caught him off guard. “You’re not fucking serious?”

“I am.” She smiled, pleased at his reaction, then made a grand show of wiping her brow. “You know what, I need to close the window. It’s really hot in here and the air-conditioning’s escaping. You know how I get when it’s stuffy.”

“Sheila, don’t close—”

She stood up quickly and cranked and latched the window. By the time she turned back to Ethan, his body had gone rigid. She sat down again and crossed her legs, not bothering to hide her own little smile.

“I promise you it’ll be an easy transition. Dr. Easton was impressed with the work you did in his advanced personality theory class last term. His expertise on deviant behavior can only help your thesis.” Sheila’s smile widened. “Don’t worry, the department won’t have a problem with the switch. You can stay until the end of next term as my TA, but after Christmas—”

“I don’t want to switch,” he said. Beads of sweat appeared at his hairline even though the room was cooling. “I have less than a year to go. I don’t want to work through the kinks of a new adviser.”

“I’ll do everything I can to help.”

They sat staring at each other. It was awkward waiting out the silence, but she knew whoever spoke first would lose.

“You’re trying to get rid of me,” Ethan hissed. Circular sweat stains had formed at his armpits, soaking through the cloth of his gray T-shirt. “Well, guess what, I’m not switching. I’ve been working with you for going on three terms now. You’re not passing me off to someone else because you’re getting married and don’t want a reminder you fucked the help. My thesis is nearly done.” He was breathing hard. Perspiration trailed down his left temple.

She had about thirty seconds before he’d totally lose it; claustrophobia could be debilitating. “And I promise you nothing will change,” she said again. “Dr. Easton’s always admired you and—”

“Dr. Easton’s a fucking fag!” Ethan slammed his hands down on the desk and the stack of term papers fell over. At that moment the air conditioner paused and the room was suddenly quiet. Pointing a finger at her, he stood up. “I am not working with him. You *are* going to finish what you started with me.”

Sheila did her best to appear impassive. “You don’t have a choice. I can reassign you anytime I like, for any reason.”

“Really? And what would the dean say about that?” Ethan was towering over her desk. Little drops of sweat hit the term papers, blurring the ink into shapeless forms.

“Dean Simmons will back me up, of course,” she said, looking up at him.

“Even after he sees you on the Internet taking it up the ass?”

“What? What are you—” She stopped. Her throat went dry and she swallowed. Her heart started thumping in her chest so hard she thought she could feel her silk blouse moving. “You deleted that off your phone. I watched you do it.”

“Are you sure about that?” His eyes were flat, devoid of emotion. He was still sweating but his voice was once again controlled. “I didn’t e-mail it to myself first? You’re absolutely sure?”

Her temple began to throb. The fluorescent lights overhead were suddenly too bright, the walls too yellow, the air conditioner too loud. Her armpits tingled and she could smell onions. Ethan’s body odor. Or was it her own?

“You wouldn’t dare,” she whispered.

“Wouldn’t I?” He grinned triumphantly as he wiped his sweaty brow with his hand. Turning away from her, he finally yanked open the office door and stepped out, taking deep breaths of the semi-stale hallway air.

Sheila sat, dazed. There was a 99 percent chance he was bluffing—her gut told her there was no video anymore, he wouldn’t have had time to send it somewhere else from his phone before she’d made him delete it—but goddamn it, it wasn’t good enough. If anything like it ever showed up on CampusAnonymous.com, a website notorious for outrageous gossip and nasty comments about all things involving the university, she’d be ruined. The video would go viral before she could blink twice, and two decades of hard work would be snuffed out like a campfire in a thunderstorm.

Having an affair with a student was one thing. It happened all the time—she could think of three professors who’d been involved with students in the past, who’d gotten nothing more than slaps on the wrist. And Ethan was twenty-three and neither of them were married, which counted for something.

But a video? It wouldn’t matter whom she was screwing—a video of her writhing naked on the Internet would get her fired. No hearing, no chance to defend herself, just an hour to collect her personal belongings and she’d be out the door on her ass. Do not pass Go, do not collect two hundred.

How could I have been so fucking stupid?

A voice broke into her thoughts, and she looked up. Valerie Kim, one of Sheila’s other TAs, stood in the doorway just behind Ethan.

“One sec, Val,” Ethan said to the petite young woman. His tone betrayed no hint of the tension that filled the office. “The professor and I are almost done here.”

“That’s cool.” Valerie looked past Ethan into the office at Sheila. “I can come back in five.”

“No need.” Sheila’s smile felt clownish. “Come in, Valerie.”

Ethan stepped back into the office and made a show of bundling up the scattered term papers on the desk. Slinging his worn leather bag crosswise over his torso, he grinned at Sheila. “Dr. Tao, I’ll see you next week.

Thanks for your time.”

“Sure,” Sheila said. Her shoulders slumped and her back ached.

Ethan winked at Valerie as he left the office. “She’s all yours.”

She heard him whistling as he ambled down the hallway, not a care in the world, and her mind reeled. What the fuck had just happened?

“So, Professor Tao, did you hear?” Valerie’s voice was breathy. The ponytailed teaching assistant plopped into the chair across from Sheila and rummaged in her bag for her own stack of papers to be reviewed.

“Diana St. Clair’s body was found this morning.”

“Hmmm?” Sheila could not process what the graduate student was saying. Somehow, she had completely underestimated Ethan Wolfe. He had outsmarted her, and how was that possible? Damn him. *Damn her*. This was a disaster. Could he really still have that video? He’d made it several weeks ago, and maybe her memory was foggy, but she was certain she’d seen him delete it right afterward, could remember her relief when she saw it was gone . . .

“The swimmer? Diana St. Clair?” Valerie was saying.

“Yes, of course I know she disappeared,” Sheila said, irritated. A drop of Ethan’s sweat remained on the desk and she swiped at it. She forced herself to focus on Valerie’s pretty face. “What’s the update?”

“I don’t know all the details yet.” The grad student sounded appropriately somber, though her eyes were alight with morbid excitement. “She was found floating in Puget Sound early this morning. A ferry rider spotted her.”

“She *drowned*?” Sheila’s hand flew to her mouth. Valerie had her full attention now. “How is that even possible?”

Everyone was familiar with the story. It had been all over the news. Diana St. Clair was the pride and joy of PSSU, a champion Division I swimmer and Olympic hopeful. She’d gone missing after swim practice over a week before, and it was all anyone on campus could talk about. There’d been multiple theories about her disappearance: she’d eloped to Brazil with a guy she’d met online; she’d quit swimming but didn’t have the heart to tell her parents; she was pregnant and hiding it from her sponsors . . .

“She didn’t drown, that isn’t how she died. I heard she was stabbed first.” Valerie paused for dramatic effect. “Multiple times.”

Sheila sat up straight. “Holy shit!”

Valerie looked pleased to hear her professor swear. “I heard they’re going to be putting new security measures in place because of this.” Clearly Valerie had heard a lot. “My boyfriend works part-time in the communications department. They’re sending out a bulletin later today.”

“Holy shit.” Sheila felt disoriented as she tried to process the news.

Diana St. Clair had been her student. Sheila had never known someone who was murdered.

Until now.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Marie Aultman:

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Sandra Williams:

A lot of people always spent their particular free time to vacation or maybe go to the outside with them family members or their friend. Are you aware? Many a lot of people spent these people free time just watching TV, or playing video games all day long. In order to try to find a new activity honestly, that is look different you can read a book. It is really fun for you personally. If you enjoy the book you read you can spent 24 hours a day to reading a e-book. The book Creep it is quite good to read. There are a lot of individuals who recommended this book. They were enjoying reading this book. If you did not have enough space to bring this book you can buy often the e-book. You can m0ore quickly to read this book from a smart phone. The price is not too expensive but this book features high quality.

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