



## CREEPY

クリーピー

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### 【About the Author】

#### Yutaka Maekawa

Yutaka Maekawa was born in Tokyo in 1951. He graduated from the Faculty of Law at Hitotsubashi University, and completed a comparative literature graduate program at the Graduate School of Humanities, the University of Tokyo. He served for many years as a professor at the Faculty of Intercultural Communication at Hosei University and, as of January 2025, holds the title of Professor Emeritus. In 2012, he made his debut as a writer by winning the 15th Newcomer Award of the Japan Mystery Literature Award for Creepy.

### 【Synopsis】

**Takakura**, a professor of criminal psychology at a university in Tokyo, has recently moved with his wife **Yasuko** to a single-family home in the residential area of Ogikubo. Takakura's next-door neighbor has introduced himself as **Nishino** and seems to be friendly and polite. Nishino apparently lives with his wife, son, and daughter, but Takakura has never met Nishino's wife and has only occasionally seen his son.

One day, Takakura attends a high school reunion and exchanges greetings and business cards with a former classmate named **Nogami**, now a detective with the Tokyo Metropolitan Police. Nogami is aware of Takakura's criminological expertise because of Takakura's appearances in the media, and not long after the reunion he contacts Takakura for his help with a reopened investigation into a missing-family case from eight years before in the nearby city of Hino. Shortly after Takakura analyzes the material Nogami sends and mails back a report of his conclusions, Nogami unexpectedly stops by Takakura's house to discuss the case, using the opportunity to ask Takakura about his neighbors. "I suppose," Nogami observes, "that in a living environment like this, no one might even notice the difference if one family simply took the place of another." Takakura asks Nogami what he means by this remark, but finds the response frustratingly vague. Nogami's visit is followed by a creepy sequence of events. First, Takakura learns that Nogami himself has gone missing. Then **Rinko Kageyama**, a female student of Takakura's in a seminar he teaches at the university, tells him about the unwanted attention she is receiving from a male classmate named **Ōwada**, who keeps sending her offensively suggestive emails. Finally, a fire breaks out in the house directly across

from Takakura's and three bodies are found, one of which is Nogami's. All three bodies have gunshot wounds to the head, and some of the detectives investigating the incident think that Nogami may have broken into the house with the intention of burgling it, but then for some reason committed suicide after killing both of the occupants. The bullets taken from the heads of the victims prove to be a match, and all are determined to have been fired from the same handgun—the one carried by Nogami. Nogami is also said to be heavily in debt, raising the possibility that his visit to Takakura was merely a pretext for setting up the burglary. Takakura, however, is not prepared to lend credence to what he considers unfounded speculation. The creepiness transforms itself into something more sinister as Takakura's doubts about Nishino's identity grow. Yasuko tells Takakura that she thinks there is something strange about the relationship between Nishino and his daughter, **Mio**. Moreover, for several nights after going to bed while her husband remains at work in his study, she has heard the sound of a girl sobbing coming from next door. Takakura and Yasuko suspect child abuse, but they lack any concrete evidence to confirm their suspicions. Then, one night, Mio flees to Takakura's house seeking protection from Nishino. Her voice trembling, she declares, "That man is not my father. He's a total stranger."

Nishino soon comes to take Mio back home, but Takakura refuses to open the door to him. Takakura is then shocked to see the lock on the door start to turn on its own, causing him to believe that Nishino has somehow acquired possession of a key to his house. Now only the safety latch prevents Nishino from entering, and Takakura and Nishino glare at each other through the partially opened door. Takakura is horrified to see that expression on Nishino's face has been distorted into something unrecognizable. Yasuko calls the police, but when they arrive, Nishino insists that his daughter has been abducted by the Takakura's, and the couple are questioned as if they might be kidnappers. The police eventually decide that Mio should be placed in protective custody at the local child consultation center.

This bizarre and disturbing episode involving their neighbor casts Takakura and Yasuko into a dark pit of fear and anxiety. Further investigation by the police leads to the revelation that Nishino is actually a man named **Yajima**, the same man responsible for the presumed deaths of the missing family members in Hino and who, here in Ogikubo, has murdered and assumed the identity of the real Nishino.

Yajima's next horrifying act is to kill **Nishino's wife** and deposit her lifeless body, tied to a Japanese sitting chair and with one of her legs completely leg severed, inside the entrance to Takakura's house. Yajima goes into hiding but resurfaces to attack the child consultation center where Mio has been placed, stabbing the head of the center to death and also wounding Yasuko in the attack. Yajima escapes, taking Mio with him, and then seemingly disappears. The police and Takakura do their best to track down the pair, but find no clues to their whereabouts.

Meanwhile, Takakura receives a letter and a ticket for a concert from **Sonoko Kawai**, a pianist with an international reputation who was also a high school classmate of Takakura's. Sonoko, Takakura recalls, suffers from a slight paralysis in her legs as a result of childhood polio. Takakura meets Sonoko for the first time in 30 years and learns from her that she and Nogami were married but had divorced. Sonoko then tells Takakura that Nogami had entrusted her with a letter she was to give Takakura in the event of his death. In

the long letter, Nogami reveals that Yajima is in fact Nogami's half-brother, and that Nogami, his parents, and his half-sister had long been subject to Yajima's domination and control. Nogami goes on to describe Yajima as nothing less than an "evil genius." Once Nogami had become a detective with the Tokyo Metropolitan Police, Yajima had even been able to deceive him into becoming his accomplice in fraud. Nogami identifies Yajima as the perpetrator in the missing-family case in Hino, and says that he now suspects Yajima of murdering and impersonating Nishino. The purpose of Nogami's visit to Takakura's house was to pursue his investigation of this half-brother imposter.

Events take yet another turn when an anonymous letter arrives at Takakura's house containing a photograph of Takakura with Rinko in an elevator at a famous hotel in Tokyo. Takakura has never had any sort of romantic involvement with Rinko, but the letter accuses Takakura of having an affair with her. Because of the eerie emails Rinko has been receiving, Takakura believes that Ōwada is responsible and presses him for an explanation after summoning Ōwada to his office with Rinko also present.

Ōwada denies Takakura's suspicions but admits that he did give a list of the email addresses of the students in Takakura's seminar to the man living in the apartment next to his, who had introduced himself as **Masuda**, an employee with a job-recruitment advertising agency. Masuda had asked for the list so that he could conduct a survey of the students' job-hunting efforts. Takakura has Rinko and Ōwada accompany him to Ōwada's apartment building, where inside Masuda's room Takakura heatedly confronts him about the emails Rinko has been receiving. Masuda, however, abruptly pulls out a knife and puts it to Rinko's throat, taking her hostage. Ōwada leaps onto Masuda to rescue Rinko, but he is stabbed to death on the spot. Masuda runs off, and later proves to be none other than Yajima.

Because he has involved his students in a situation that has led to the death of one of them, Takakura takes responsibility by resigning his post at the university. He subsequently obtains a less prominent appointment at a small private university in Fukuoka, Kyushu, spending weekdays there while returning to Ogikubo on the weekend, a routine that continues for a number of years. In Fukuoka, Takakura attends a piano concert given by **Yū Kawai**, his curiosity piqued by the Kawai name. The brochure for the concert describes Yū as the daughter of the famous pianist Sonoko Kawai, and Takakura is taken aback to learn of the existence of this previously unknown daughter. After the concert, Takakura enters a restaurant where he happens to see Yū having dinner with her staff and the concert organizers. Takakura is struck by the complete lack of resemblance between parent and child.

Takakura also goes to a concert held by Yū in Ogikubo. Takakura approaches Yū on the street afterward and invites her to a nearby coffee shop. During the ensuing conversation, Yū explains that she is actually Sonoko's foster daughter and that she was adopted after her parents died of illness. Takakura asks Yū whether she knows Mio, and she answers, "Yes, because I've heard about her from my mother." But as Yū sips the orange juice she has ordered, Takakura recalls Mio drinking the orange juice his wife had given her to calm her after she had fled from her "father," and their images overlap. Takakura explains to Yū how desperately he has tried to find Mio and how deeply responsible he feels for her having been abducted by Yajima. Yū tells him that she is sure Mio would be grateful for Takakura's concern, but that it is best to let

her go. Takakura sees the tears well up in Yū's eyes as she speaks.

When Takakura relates the incident to Yasuko later at home, Yasuko declares, "She must be Mio." Soon Takakura receives a phone call from Sonoko, who asks him not to meet Mio again. Instead, she wants Takakura to come to her house in Kamakura, saying that she has something to tell him in person. Yasuko is against it, warning her husband that it might be a trap: Yajima could be lying in wait to attack him.

Takakura nevertheless goes to see Sonoko, who makes an astonishing confession. Sonoko starts by admitting that Nogami's letter to Takakura was a fake. She had written it herself after shooting Nogami with his own pistol. Nogami had fallen asleep after getting drunk, and seeing him lie there defenselessly had caused the latent resentment she felt over their divorce to erupt in an impulsive burst of violence. Sonoko had then asked Yajima to dispose of the body. Sonoko says that she knows how evil Yajima is, but that she had found herself compulsively attracted to him when he approached her after her divorce. Yajima had then concocted that elaborate charade in Ogikubo, feigning the burglary at the house across the street from the Takakuras, shooting the occupants, and setting fire to the house with Nogami's body also inside. Sonoko acknowledges a powerful sense of guilt over the deaths of two innocent victims at Yajima's hands, but says that she felt she had no choice because of Yajima's knowledge of her role in Nogami's death. His control over her was so complete that she had allowed him to use her house as a hideout from the police, at the same time imprisoning Mio there.

Sonoko goes on to describe the strong emotional bond that had gradually formed between her and Mio. At first, Mio had seemed lost in despair because of the deaths of her parents and brother at Yajima's hands. But Sonoko had treated her with kindness and compassion, constantly shielding her from Yajima's violence. And once Mio realized that Sonoko was the famous pianist Sonoko Kawai, she had become even more affectionate and trusting because she had taken piano lessons herself since childhood, dreaming of becoming a pianist like Sonoko. Mio began practicing the piano seriously under Sonoko's guidance, and when Sonoko eventually proposed formal adoption, Mio had gladly accepted.

After confessing all this to Takakura, Sonoko implores him to keep Mio's background a secret. Takakura agrees but says, "That doesn't mean I can overlook what Yajima has done. Too many people have died because of him." Sonoko then tells him, "You can meet Yajima today. That's the reason I asked you to come." Sonoko leads Takakura to a room on the second floor where the terrified Takakura finds a set of skeletal remains on a futon laid out on the floor. Sonoko says, "This is what's left of Yajima. It's been 10 years since he died." Sonoko then confesses that she had poisoned Yajima with the cyanide he planned to take if the police were ever to close in on him.

Sonoko also has a vial of cyanide on hand for her own contemplated suicide, but Takakura flushes it down the toilet, telling Sonoko that she must go on living. For his part, Takakura resolves to keep Sonoko's confession to himself and not tell anyone, a promise he keeps as Yū's own reputation as a pianist continues to grow. Eight years after meeting Sonoko in Kamakura, Takakura hears that she has died of cancer. But there is no news of the discovery of skeletal remains in Sonoko's house. Yajima is therefore believed to be

still at large.

**【Characters】**

**Takakura** : A Professor of criminal psychology at a university in Tokyo

**Yasuko** : Takakura's wife

**Nishino/Yajima** : Takakura's next-door neighbor, who later found to be an imposter and murderer, whose real name is Yajima, and also Nogami's half-brother.

**Nogami** : A detective with the Tokyo Metropolitan Police. Takakura's high school classmate. He approached Takakura to pursue his half-brother, Yajima.

**Rinko Kageyama** : A female student who belongs to Takakura's university seminar.

**Ōwada** : A male student who belongs to Takakura's university seminar, who approaches Rinko aggressively.

**Sonoko Kawai** : A Pianist. Takakura's high school classmate. Nogami's ex-wife.

**Mio/Yū Kawai** : A child who was abducted by Yajima, and was later adopted by Sonoko Kawai.