



The Ice Scream Man

J. F. Salmon

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There is a heartbeat that drives The Ice Scream Man, making it more than a run-of-the-mill serial-killer thriller.

The Ice Scream Man by J. F. Salmon is a wicked and enticing portrait of a little boy turned sadistic psychopath.

Young Eamon Masterson lives his life in palpable fear of his parents. The cocaine-fueled beatings he receives from his father are no match for the sexual and mental abuse administered by his mother. In a graphic twist, young Eamon is relieved of his familial burden and begins his metamorphosis into a murderous lunatic. Flash forward seventeen years, and Eamon is a handsome young dentist with a successful practice, a lovely wife, and a deep, sick desire for heinous crimes filled with sex and violence. His first victim is the young and beautiful Helen Dooley, one of his patients, and it is with Helen that the terrible spree begins and the Ice Scream Man is born.

Society is enthralled with stories of people like Eamon, those deviant individuals who fall into what Dr. Tony O'Callaghan calls "the Thirteenth Zodiac." O'Callaghan, an ex-cop and psychiatrist who is hot on the Ice Scream Man's trail, attempts to answer the nagging question of how these monsters are made. The book takes careful measures to answer this, allowing the story to unfold in a unique way. What makes this book most interesting is that Eamon is not just a serial killer, but also a sadistic sociopath who keeps his victims alive in order to heighten his own image. His desires are multifold, but infamy is at the top of the list; as he begins preparations for his premiere, he muses, "What will they call me?"

The writing is unflinching, weaving scary, shocking moments with meaningful backstory. It's the making of a psycho written with a keenly empathetic slant. Eamon's childhood is the stuff nightmares are made of, the torturous "bonding time" with Mother being far more terrible than anything Norman Bates could imagine. On the surface, the psychological beginnings of *The Ice Scream Man* read like research, but the book slowly peels away layers to reveal the dark places that make us human. It is visceral to read; disturbing images linger long, and the narrative pierces skin-deep. Not the typical cat-and-mouse game crime drama, *The Ice Scream Man* allows room for inner detectives to run free.

There is a heartbeat that drives *The Ice Scream Man*, making it more than a run-of-the-mill serial-killer thriller. The psychological horror is there, but so is a focus on the intricacies of relationships between mothers and children, husbands and wives, and the myriad ways people hurt each other. Although the story moves quickly and maintains interest, it is the beginning of the book that really shines, delving into the making of a psychopath. The book is sometimes difficult to read because of its graphic nature and emotional gravity, yet it manages to avoid gratuitous violence, instead relying on significant details to take the story forward.

Not for the faint of heart—or stomach—*The Ice Scream Man* is a tantalizing, disturbing, and seat-gripping ride; it's *Silence of the Lambs* meets *Criminal Minds*, with a few choice surprises along the way.

MEREDITH HARDWICKE (January 24, 2017)

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