

HEART OF COAL

by

P. Cook

FADE IN:

The screen fades from black to white. White to black.

A high pitched sound changes to a low drone. Low drone back to high pitch.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
They say autistic people and  
psychopaths are at the opposite  
ends of the spectrum of empathy.

**INT. DR. BERG'S OFFICE - DAY**

DR. LIANNE BERG (30) sits on the floor with a CHILD (8). Dr. Berg's gorgeous. Long dark hair. Infectious smile. She speaks (MOS) with the child's MOTHER.

The child pushes a toy truck back and forth without emotion. The mother nods to Dr. Berg. She bends down to hug her child. The child screams out (MOS).

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
Autistic people can be extremely  
sensitive to touch and can often  
feel the pain of others, but are  
unable to recognize the cues normal  
people can easily read.

The mother frowns at the child.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
Such as a frown.

Dr. Berg says something (MOS) to the mother who tries again, but with a smile. The child screams again.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
Or even a smile.

**INT. SENATOR'S OFFICE - DAY**

A large office. A large desk. THE SENATOR (55) sits behind it in a leather chair. He has a huge fake grin with perfect fake white teeth.

The senator gets up, strides around the desk, to shake hands with a MAN in a suit. They speak (MOS). The senator's smile never leaves his perfectly groomed face.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
Psychopaths are the opposite. They  
are good at reading other people's  
feelings, but feel nothing  
themselves.

The senator's intense gaze fixes on the man.

**INT. HOSPITAL - LOCKER ROOM - DAY**

Dr. Berg takes off her doctor's coat and comfortable shoes by  
one of the lockers. She puts on a leather jacket and high  
heeled boots.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
When I was nine, my mother was  
killed in front of me.

QUICK FLASH

A WOMAN (33) steps backwards in a living room. Terror on her  
face. She screams (MOS).

Dr. Berg leaves the locker room.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
She was stabbed sixty-seven times.

QUICK FLASH

The woman lies on the floor covered in blood.

**EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY**

Dr. Berg exits the hospital.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
That was before she was beheaded.

QUICK FLASH

The woman's head sits atop a television. Blood streaks down  
over the cheery face of David Letterman.

Dr. Berg strides across a parking lot. A MAN checks her out.  
She gives him a nice big smile.

**EXT. WOODS - DAY**

Police search through the woods.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
The cops searched for the killer  
for what seemed like forever.

**EXT. POLICE STATION - DAY**

A grim faced police SPOKESPERSON stands in front of multiple microphones. He speaks (MOS).

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
The police and media pleaded to the  
public for any information that  
could help them find the  
killer...but they never did.

**EXT. PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - DAY**

A young Lianne (9) is lead by hand towards the hospital entrance by an adult.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
Me? I was taken to the Georgia  
Pediatric Psychiatric Hospital.

**INT. PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - DAY**

Young Lianne sits at a table, draws a picture. She's all smiles. Happy. A FEMALE DOCTOR sits next to her. She seems pleased with Lianne.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
Everyone was amazed how well I did  
considering what I had just been  
through.

Lianne reads aloud to a group of doctors. Smiles all around. The doctors speak to each other with approval (MOS).

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
They said it was almost like  
nothing had happened to me at all.  
They even called me normal...

**INT. KITCHEN - DAY**

Lianne (15) sits at the kitchen table together with a nice FAMILY. They eat dinner. Talk and laugh (MOS).

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
 I grew up in a foster home. A nice family. I adapted well. I learned quickly what was expected of me. How to blend in and function in society.

**INT. SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM - DAY**

Lianne stands in front of the room. Happy. Radiant. She holds a diploma in her hand. She thanks the crowd (MOS).

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
 How to be liked. Admired...trusted.

**INT. BAR - NIGHT**

Dr. Berg sits at the bar. She's gorgeous. Various MEN flirt with her. Fights for her attention. She flashes that irresistible smile.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
 Emotionally, I don't feel anything. No matter how hard I try. I feel nothing.

Dr. Berg fixes her gaze on a STUD of a man. He grins. Knows he has won the cockfight.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
 I make up for that by indulging in the things I can feel.

**INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT**

A GIRL (19) sits on the toilet. Tears stream down her face. Her jeans are pulled down. She has a razor blade in her hand.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
 Some people cut themselves so they can feel something...Anything.

The girl carves a three inch cut into her thigh. Blood seeps out. She bites her lip in pain.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
 The pain releases endorphins. Makes them feel better...I'm not one of them.

**INT. CAB - NIGHT**

Dr. Berg and the stud are in the backseat. Clothes are unbuttoned. Chests exposed. Greedy hands grab what they can.

The DRIVER adjusts his rearview mirror. Grins. Don't want to miss a show.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
Other people turn to sex. Pure  
unadulterated sex.

Dr. Berg meets the driver's lusty gaze in the mirror. She runs her tongue across her lips.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
Some become addicts...I'm one of  
them.

Dr. Berg straddles the stud. Rides him like a cowgirl on a bucking bronco. Their faces contort into masks of pleasure.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
Sex releases endorphins too.

They work their way towards climax. The driver's eyes, glassy. His tongue scrapes over his dry lips.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
I much rather have sex than cut  
myself. It's a no brainer, if you  
ask me.

**EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT**

A shadowy lot outside a road house. Music blares from inside.

Dr. Berg, together with a DIFFERENT STUD on the hood of vintage muscle car. Hot and heavy.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
Although I feel nothing for my sex  
partners, I know what is expected  
of me, so I play along.

Dr. Berg drops to her knees. She peers up at the stud with hungry eyes. She thrusts her face into his crotch. The stud gasps.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
Try to give the guy some pleasure  
out of it. Sort of like a thank you  
for letting me use you.

**INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Dr. Berg and STUD #3 on a bed. Clothes come off in a hurry.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
Sometimes, I forget and think only  
of myself and my needs.

Dr. Berg grabs the stud's head, shoves him down between her legs. Keeps him there with a firm grip.

**INT. HOSPITAL - BREAK ROOM - DAY**

A handful of DOCTORS, including Dr. Berg stand around a television. A REPORTER speaks to the camera (MOS).

Horrified at what she hears, a female doctor gasps, covers her mouth with her hand.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
Last week, on the news, they talked  
about a serial killer. The Muncher.

Dr. Berg peers discreetly at her coworkers. Studies their reactions to the news.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
He killed twenty-two women up and  
down the California coast over the  
last ten years. Biting off their  
toes then letting them bleed to  
death.

On the television, the KILLER's mug shot. Scruffy white male. Defiant. Smug. Eyes as dead as a shark's.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
I wonder what he felt when he  
killed those women. A rush of  
excitement? Sexual arousal?

**QUICK FLASH**

The killer grinds his teeth into a woman's big toe. Blood spurts out.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
One of the two or maybe both.  
Otherwise, why would he do it again  
and again?

**INT. UNIVERSITY - LECTURE HALL - DAY**

Dr. Berg stands at a podium. She's gorgeous as usual. A big smile. The crowd gives her a standing ovation.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
Would they ever suspect someone  
like me to be a killer?

**INT. GOVERNMENT BUILDING - DAY**

A large imposing building. High ceilings. Marble floors.

Dr. Berg shakes hands with the senator in front of cameras. They both smile wide.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
Someone with a high social  
standing, who's attractive.  
Likable. Admired...Trusted.

**THROUGH A CAMERA VIEWFINDER**

Close-up of Dr. Berg and the senator. They speak (MOS).

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
No. I don't fit the profile of a  
serial killer. But then --

Dr. Berg turns to the camera. Looks straight into the lens. Eyes that feel nothing. Her smile a slight tinge of evil.

DR. BERG (V.O.)  
-- neither does a nine year old  
girl...

FADE OUT: