HEART OF COAL

by

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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: