

THE KARMA MAGNET

by

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On a rooftop, high above the city, the luckiest man in the world wants to kill himself for the good of humanity.

TREATMENT

A dark, stormy night: crowds and camera crews cluster around a tall building. Police try to keep the curious crowd back, there's a suicidal man threatening to jump and they don't want anyone to get hurt. The weather echoes the sombre mood, lightning plays across the sky. A reporter enlightens us: the jumper is the famous TV chef, JOEL MANNERS (28); the self-professed luckiest man in the world.

On the edge of the rooftop, amidst the raging storm: a policeman tries to talk Joel down. Joel is bitterly despondent; his tears mix with the stinging rain. He has no choice, he has to die. He explains his reasons through a series of flashbacks:

Joel has always been lucky. Nothing bad has ever happened to him. It started small, things you'd barely notice. At school: Joel and his friends are smoking. Joel's best friend RAJEEV and the others are caught; Joel is just out of sight. Rajeev can't believe his friend got away with it.

At catering college: A faulty oven catches fire. Rajeev is badly burnt; Joel escapes without a mark on him. Later, in hospital, Rajeev observes Joel always gets all the luck.

At work: in a fit of rage, the head chef throws a pot of boiling soup at Joel. The soup misses and the other chefs are covered in steaming red gunk while Joel remains spotlessly clean. The angry, scalded chefs are amazed Joel is untouched.

Joel knows these things are all minor good fortune, nothing special in themselves; but they always happen to him. It's obvious to him he's lucky, he just doesn't know why. More importantly, he doesn't understand the cost until the luckiest day of his life.

On the same day: Joel wins a modest sum on the lottery, gets a job as a TV chef on a reality show and meets SANDRA, the girl of his dreams. The date? September 11th 2001. Rajeev lost a friend in the terrorist attack; he's devastated and furious with Joel's ambivalence. Joel doesn't know how to react; he can't believe his good fortune happens on a day when the rest of the world is in mourning. He should be celebrating, but dark thoughts nag at him. Can this really be a coincidence?

As time passes, the link becomes clearer. Every time Joel has some good luck, something tragic happens to someone close to him.

When he opens his first restaurant; Rajeev has a near fatal car crash. Joel can't make it to the hospital, Sandra goes in his stead.

When Joel receives an award for his new TV cookery show; his sister gets raped. Joel apologises to his sister, but she doesn't understand his guilt. It's down to an angry Sandra and Rajeev to provide the emotional support.

When Sandra gets pregnant, something supposedly impossible with Joel's low sperm count; his parents are killed in an avalanche while skiing. Sandra berates her husband for seeing links which aren't there; but Joel knows better.

It's obvious to Joel; his good fortune is somehow linked to everyone else's misfortune. He has to find out why and what he can do about it before anyone else gets hurt. Sandra and Rajeev don't understand his obsession and why it occupies all his time. Joel apologises, but he's doing it for them.

First he tries a doctor, is there something wrong with him? The doctor explains the nature of human belief, how we perceive ourselves as the centre of the universe. It's easy to assume everything happening in the world has some kind of connection to us. He explains the human brain is designed to look for patterns and ends up connecting totally random events. Joel isn't convinced, there has to be something more; and no, he doesn't want to see a psychiatrist.

Joel turns to religion for the answers. A vicar tells him everything happens according to God's plan. God moves in mysterious ways and it's wrong to try and second guess his motives. God chooses trials and tribulations for each of us, to test us, to help us grow closer to Him. This isn't enough for Joel, he has to stop it. He's going to be a father and he can't risk something happening to his unborn child.

Joel explains his fears to Sandra and Rajeev. He's at the end of his tether; he doesn't know what to do. Sandra doesn't believe him; all this time spent on his quest just makes her angry. Rajeev calms Sandra down. He thinks he has the answer to all their problems and introduces Joel to ABHIJAT, a spiritualist healer.

Abhijat tells Joel the truth: he's a karma magnet. The universe is a careful cosmic balance of right and wrong, good and bad, lucky and unlucky. Most people get their fair share of both throughout their lives. Occasionally someone is born who upsets that balance. Joel attracts good luck to him, and since there is only so much luck to go around, there is a dearth of it for everyone else.

Joel needs to know the solution; he has to protect his family. How does he get rid of this curse?

Abhijat explains: he can't. As long as Joel lives, everyone he loves will suffer.

And so we find ourselves on top of the building. The policeman tries to convince Joel he's imagining it. Joel won't have it. He found a fifty pound note in the street this morning and this afternoon, Rajeev was stabbed in the street. His wife is in labour right now, he has to protect his family.

Joel leaps to his death.

At a private hospital: Rajeev and Sandra watch Joel's death on TV. Sandra cuddles her baby. Rajeev peels away a bloodstained bandage, his flesh underneath is perfect and unmarked. They look lovingly at their half-Indian child and kiss, they're rich now. Some people will believe anything.

The film is a dark tale of obsession, about the nature of belief and how we view our place in the universe. Joel's opinion of his good fortune versus others' misfortune ignores his connection to them and their effect on his life. You might argue losing both your parents is a bad thing to happen to you, Joel sees it as a bad thing to happen to someone else.

The world is full of coincidences, they don't necessarily mean anything. Once you start looking for patterns, you can find them anywhere. Joel is guilty of having a high opinion of himself, spending too much time looking for evidence to back up his theory and treating his friends and family as bit players in the drama of his life.

The human mind makes connections and it does so without any thought to logic or reality. Something only has to happen once or twice and we become convinced it always happens. "Every time I think of Uncle Bob, he rings." "Every time I wear these pants, I pull." Unfortunately, the world is less mystical than we want it to be. Unscrupulous people can, will and do take advantage of this.

Hopefully, this piece will mislead the audience into believing Joel's good fortune is connected to everyone else's misfortune; leading them to ignore the more rational explanations hinted at throughout. I want it to be an example of how easily we can be led and how we can't really trust our perceptions; particularly when we are only hearing one side of the story from one of the people involved.