

KARMA MAGNET

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Rain lashes down on the dirty streets. Police struggle to control a crowd of gawking onlookers, who crane their necks in an attempt to see the top of a tall building.

POLICE OFFICER  
Back! Get back, will you? I'm not  
telling you again.

A TV REPORTER broadcasts live to the world:

EXT. CAMERA'S POV - NIGHT

The TV reporter addresses his camera.

TV REPORTER  
... joining me live at the scene  
where TV Chef, Joel Manners, clings  
precariously to life, high above  
the city.

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

30 storeys up: JOEL MANNERS (40) stands on the raised lip of the corner of a flat roof. The rain lashes his tear stained face as he gazes mournfully over the city. Behind his back, his hands grip tightly to an iron-lattice radio antenna.

TV REPORTER (V.O.)  
The question on everyone's lips:  
what could drive the self-professed  
'luckiest man in the world' to the  
brink of suicide?

Lightning splits the clouded sky. Joel looks glumly at the crowd below and dangles a foot over the dizzying drop.

A DETECTIVE hovers nearby, hunching in a vain attempt to protect himself from the freezing downpour.

DETECTIVE  
Mr Manners? Won't you at least come  
over here and talk about it?

JOEL  
What's there to talk about? I have  
to die.

DETECTIVE  
Now, now, no one has to die.

JOEL

Yes I do! It's for the good of humanity. Don't you understand?

DETECTIVE

Not really, sir. Why don't you come down here and explain it to me?

Joel chokes back a bitter laugh.

JOEL

You wouldn't believe me anyway.

DETECTIVE

Try me. I'm a good listener.

Joel closes his eyes and remembers.

JOEL

I've always been lucky.

DETECTIVE

The luckiest man in the world, that's what they call you, isn't it?

JOEL

Yeah, that's what they call me. Nothing bad has ever happened to me. It started small ...

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY - FLASHBACK

YOUNG JOEL (14) and his friends: YOUNG RAJEEV and SIMON, hide behind a high wall, smoking.

JOEL (V.O.)

... things you'd never notice.

A TEACHER rounds the corner. Joel is just out of sight, hidden by an angle in the wall; the others are not so lucky.

TEACHER

What the hell are you doing?  
Inside, now!

The teacher grabs the cigarettes from the startled boys and shoves Rajeev and Simon towards the school. Rajeev looks over at Joel. Joel silently implores his friend not to give him away. Rajeev scowls, but says nothing.

INT. CATERING COLLEGE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Young Joel, Young Rajeev and other trainee chefs bustle about the college kitchen.

JOEL (V.O.)  
Every time something bad happened,  
you could bet it wouldn't happen to  
me.

A rusty gas pipe leads into an ancient oven.

Joel frantically chops vegetables.

YOUNG JOEL  
Rajeev, mate. Can you check my  
roast?

Incredulous, Rajeev looks up from his own food preparation. Joel is oblivious. Annoyed, Rajeev grabs a dishcloth and yanks open the battered oven.

The gas pipe snaps. Gas spews over the lit hob and ignites. Rajeev is consumed in a sheet of fire. Screaming with pain, he drops to the floor. The students look on in horror.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY - FLASHBACK

Young Rajeev lies in the bed, half his face swathed in bandages, barely conscious under heavy medication. Young Joel looks on, guilty but unharmed.

JOEL (V.O.)  
My friend, Rajeev was the first to  
notice it.

YOUNG RAJEEV  
You get all the luck.

Joel smiles apologetically.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY - FLASHBACK

Young Joel, in his first job as a Commis chef, rushes around a busy kitchen. HEAD CHEF looks in a large pan with disgust.

JOEL (V.O.)  
And he was right.

HEAD CHEF  
What the fuck do you call this?

YOUNG JOEL  
Bouillabaisse, chef.

HEAD CHEF  
BOUILLABAISSE? BOUILLABAISSE MY  
FUCKING ARSE!

The head chef picks up the pot of boiling gunk and hurls it at Joel. Joel ducks, the other chefs aren't so lucky. The steaming food splashes all over their pristine whites.

HEAD CHEF  
DO IT AGAIN!

The head chef storms out. Young Joel stands up and dusts himself off. He looks round and grins at the furious chefs who drip with red goo.

END OF FLASHBACK.

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Joel leans back against the antenna. The detective edges slowly closer to him.

JOEL  
I know it's all little things,  
nothing special in themselves; but  
they always happen to me.

DETECTIVE  
Like you say, you're just lucky.

JOEL  
Yeah, lucky. That's obvious, but  
why? I never knew, never understood  
the cost. Not until that day. Not  
until the luckiest day of my life.

INT. NEWSAGENTS - DAY - FLASHBACK

SANDRA (28), pretty and bored, flicks through a magazine behind the counter. Joel (34) stands before her, trembling with excitement.

JOEL  
Sandra, you want to go out tonight,  
or what?

Sandra fires a dismissive glance in his direction and returns to her magazine.

SANDRA  
I keep telling you, love; you can't  
afford me.

Joel grins, he's been waiting for this. He slaps a scratch card down on the counter.

JOEL  
How's a hundred grand grab you?

Joel has Sandra's full attention.

SANDRA

You never?

She looks closely at the winning scratch card.

JOEL

That not good enough for you? How about Britain's newest celebrity chef?

Joel holds up a letter on BBC headed paper. Sandra gazes at it in amazement.

SANDRA

Pick me up at eight.

Joel's grin nearly splits his face in half.

EXT. HIGH STREET - DAY - FLASHBACK

Joel strides out of the shop, throws his arms wide and yells.

JOEL

YESSSS!

Joel looks around: the street is deathly quiet. A crowd glances disapprovingly at him as they cluster around a TV shop window. Curious, Joel wanders over. His eyes widen in shock when he sees what's on all the TVs:

ON TV - STOCK TV FOOTAGE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Roiling smoke pours from the twin towers. The people of New York run around in panic.

EXT. HIGH STREET - DAY - FLASHBACK

Joel sags. He staggers off along the street.

JOEL (V.O.)

It's all my fault.

INT. RAJEEV'S LOUNGE - DAY - FLASHBACK

The twin towers footage plays on a TV in the background of the shabby lounge. Joel sits with Rajeev (34), badly burnt from his childhood accident.

RAJEEV

Fuck you, mate.

JOEL

It has to be. I can't believe this sort of thing can happen on a day like this. I should be celebrating but ...

RAJEEV

But fuck you, that's what. My cousin was in there, he could be dead, yeah? And you're sitting here talking shit?

JOEL

I'm sorry, I just ...

Joel lapses into a brooding silence.

END OF FLASHBACK.

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

The detective looks quizzically at the distraught Joel.

DETECTIVE

You can't possibly believe --

JOEL

Can't I? It just got worse and worse. Every time something good happens to me, something equally bad happens to someone I care about. When I opened my first restaurant ...

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY - FLASHBACK

Joel and Sandra, dressed up to the nines, prepare to face the press queueing up outside the new restaurant. Sandra hangs up her mobile.

SANDRA

That was Rajeev, he's been in a car crash. He's in the hospital.

JOEL

Shit. I can't go. I can't leave --

SANDRA

I'll go, you look after things here.

Sandra pecks him on the cheek and rushes for the back door. Joel shakes off his guilt and steps out to meet the press.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Joel, Sandra and Rajeev, in black tie, rush in to see JANINE (33): sobbing in a hospital gown, face cut and bruised.

JOEL (V.O.)  
On the night I got my first BAFTA,  
my sister got raped ...

JOEL  
God, Janine, I'm so sorry.

Sandra and Rajeev huddle round the sobbing woman.

SANDRA  
We all are.

JOEL  
No, it's my fault.

SANDRA  
For fuck's sake, Joel. Not  
everything revolves around you.

Furious, Sandra and Rajeev comfort Janine. Joel watches impotently from across the room.

INT. JOEL AND SANDRA'S LOUNGE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Sandra shows Joel and Rajeev a positive pregnancy test.

JOEL (V.O.)  
And worst of all, the day I found  
out Sandra was pregnant.

JOEL  
But ... but I thought we couldn't  
get pregnant?

SANDRA  
I know.

JOEL  
My sperm don't ...

SANDRA  
It's a miracle!

Overjoyed, Joel hugs Sandra. Rajeev looks on in shock.

Janine appears in the doorway, eyes full of tears.

JOEL  
Janine? What is it? What's wrong?

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY - FLASHBACK

Joel, Sandra, Janine and Rajeev, all in mourning black, gather around a fresh grave. Janine breaks down in tears and buries her head in Rajeev's shoulder. An odd look passes between Sandra and Rajeev. Joel stares at the grave.

JOEL

Goodbye, mum. I'm sorry.

JOEL (V.O.)

I had to do something about it.

INT. JOEL AND SANDRA'S LOUNGE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Joel paces around the room. Sandra sits on the sofa, a ball of rage. Rajeev is bored, he's heard it all before.

SANDRA

It's your fucking imagination!

JOEL

No. No it can't be. It happens too often.

RAJEEV

It's all in your mind, mate.

JOEL

Somehow, my good luck is linked to everyone else's bad luck. I need to find out how.

SANDRA

You need your fucking head examined, that's what you need.

JOEL

I'm doing this for you.

SANDRA

I can't talk to him, I just can't ... fuck it.

Sandra storms out.

RAJEEV

Nice one, mate. She's fucking pregnant, yeah? She don't need the stress.

Rajeev follows Sandra. Joel stands alone in his lounge.

JOEL (V.O.)

I was doing it for them.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY - FLASHBACK

The DOCTOR finishes his examination of Joel.

JOEL (V.O.)

I tried the best Doctors money  
could buy.

DOCTOR

As far as I can tell, you're fit  
and well.

JOEL

There must be something unusual?

DOCTOR

Nope. You know, it's easy to  
understand how one can be convinced  
the universe revolves around us.  
It's the nature of human belief,  
we're each the centre of our own  
personal universe. The human brain  
is designed to look for patterns.  
Indeed, pattern recognition is the  
basis of all our thinking. It's not  
surprising we occasionally make  
connections which just aren't  
there.

JOEL

No, there has to be more to it than  
that, there has to be.

DOCTOR

Perhaps you'd like to see a  
psychiatrist?

JOEL

Perhaps you'd like to fuck off?

INT. CHURCH - DAY - FLASHBACK

Joel talks to a VICAR.

JOEL (V.O.)

I've never been a praying man, but  
I had to find the answer. I thought  
maybe a man of God might know?

VICAR

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.

JOEL  
That's not good enough. I'm going  
to be a father, I can't risk  
something happening to my kid.

INT. JOEL AND SANDRA'S LOUNGE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Sandra and Rajeev form a united front against Joel.

SANDRA  
You're out of your gourd; and  
you're wasting our money. Nothing's  
going to happen to me or the baby.

JOEL  
But what if it does?

RAJEEV  
He's right.

Really? JOEL What? SANDRA

RAJEEV  
Maybe. I met this guy.

SANDRA  
Oh for ... Don't you fucking start.

RAJEEV  
No, hear me out, babe. This guy,  
he's a spiritualist, yeah? I told  
him what you was doing, and he  
thinks he can help.

Joel hugs his friend.

JOEL  
Thank you.

RAJEEV  
It's alright, mate, it's alright.

INT. SPIRITUALIST CENTRE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Joel meets with ABHIJAT, an Indian guru. They both sit cross  
legged as Abhijat mutters and waves incense at him.

ABHIJAT  
You are being Karma magnet.

JOEL  
I ... I don't -- ?

ABHIJAT

Karma magnet. The universe is being a careful cosmic balance of right and wrong, good and bad, lucky and unlucky. Most people are getting their fair share of both. Occasionally someone is being born who upsets this balance. You are this man. You are like magnet, see? Yes, yes, you draw good luck to you; and since there is only being so much to go round, there is not being enough for anyone else.

JOEL

Of course. It all makes sense. How do I stop it?

ABHIJAT

Oh no, no, no. You cannot stop what Karma has set in motion. As long as you live, you will always be magnet.

Joel slumps in despair.

END OF FLASHBACK.

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

The detective stares at Joel in disbelief.

DETECTIVE

You don't seriously believe that, do you?

JOEL

I found a fifty pound note this morning. This afternoon, Rajeev was stabbed in the street. Sandra's in labour right now, I have to protect my family.

DETECTIVE

Yeah, no; but hang on. Nothing bad happened on your wedding day, right?

JOEL

There's no more time.

Joel lets go of the antenna and steps out into space.

DETECTIVE

No!

The detective lurches forward, but he's too late. Joel plummets to his death.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

The crowd screams as Joel's body thuds into the ground.

EXT. CAMERA'S POV - NIGHT

The TV reporter looks at the twisted body with disgust.

TV REPORTER

Oh my god, oh my god. He did it ...

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Rajeev, a blood stained bandage around his chest, and an exhausted Sandra, with her new born baby, watch the TV.

TV REPORTER (V.O.)

(filtered)

He actually did it.

Rajeev clicks off the TV and looks quietly at Sandra.

Rajeev peels away his bandage - the flesh is perfect and unmarked underneath. He leans over and pulls the blanket away from his half-Indian child's face.

Sandra looks adoringly up at him and smiles.

They kiss.

SANDRA

We're rich. It's all ours now. All of it.

RAJEEV

(smiles)

Some people will believe anything.

FADE OUT.

THE END