

The Full Treatment

by Jeff Goldberg

I'd embraced the idea that you could no more change your karma than the color of your eyes. We were all vibrations on the impermanent ripple of time and space and every creature along the way was a manifestation of it. My goldfish, for instance—I'd bought it when Sasha was in kindergarten, 12 years ago. Nearly blind in one eye with the other hanging loose from its socket, the anonymous fish, until then called simply "fish" or "the fish," deserved a real name. So, now, out of respect for its amazing longevity, I'd renamed it *Ma Gan Sem*—Tibetan for "dear old mother"—and composed a verse in its honor: *How many 12-year-old goldfishes have you met? Damn few, I'll bet.*

If the fish wasn't my mother now, it had certainly been my mother at some time. The laws of rebirth make it virtually inevitable that we've all been each other's dear old mother—although we sure don't act like it. *Ma Gan Sem* seemed happy with its new name as it fanned its gauzy tail and glided in circles around its bowl.

I'd also become convinced that the answers to my own intimate issues might be lodged somewhere in the ample karmic bundle called Kiki, the cat I'd brought along when I'd moved out of my ex-house. She was the cat no one wanted. I didn't even want her. She weighed about 30 pounds and resembled a giant sea slug more than a feline. She'd taken up residence under my bed, where she wallowed away most of the day, coming out only to eat and to get the full treatment when I got home.

The full treatment consisted of scratching her belly, tickling her armpits, chucking her under the chin, smoothing the top of her head, and stroking the lower portion of her abdomen almost to the great gaping "U" of her splayed legs, while all the while staring attentively into her big green cat's eyes. Besides eating, this was her greatest pleasure.

It had gotten so routine that as soon as I walked in the door, she'd promptly flip over on her back.

"But I'm tired."

"Meeeenooooow. Meenoow."

"I've got a headache."

"Nooooow?"

"Okay, just let me pee."

"MEenowww?"

"Okay, okay—and get a glass of wine."

As the nights became cooler, when I went to sleep, she would plant her furry and not very clean butt next to my face and start snoring. She was a boring cat, and I was wondering if this was going to be the permanent state of our relationship when the curious possibility began to dawn on me—that, in a past life, the creature who was now the fat cat had once been my wife!

Had I been unfaithful or done something else bad to her? Had my past-life indiscretion with Kiki-the-Wife seeded the karma that caused Big Jakey to marry Rosie and Little Jakey all this withering Willie wort worry? But why then was the wife I cheated on lying here spread-eagled on the floor with her stumpy cat legs suspended in the air? No matter what I'd done I'd still been virtuous enough to come back human. What had she done?

"I guess we had some issues, huh. Things didn't go so well. Kinda got fucked up, and you, fuckin-A, what did you do?"

Kiki cuddled her head against my hand as I petted her, then turned and showed me her ass.

"You came back a cat. And fat!"

She rolled onto her back and spread her hind legs. Her lewd poses were fine on a fat cat, but as I rubbed her belly I wondered if that's what might have gotten her into trouble as a human. I tried to reassure myself that her indiscretions weren't my fault. "We were affectionate enough, weren't we, Kiki? We never had intimacy issues, did we? Not like me and Rosie, right?" I asked aloud.

"MEENOAWWW!"

I imagined going to marriage counseling with Kiki, seeking closure from the festering wounds of our former-life marriage.

"Kiki?" the therapist would say.

“Meeenoow?”

“Kiki, can you tell me what you want out of your relationship with Jake?”

“MEEENOWWWOWWWW!”

The marriage counselor didn't know what she was saying, but I did. She was saying, “Do it. Yeah, do it. All day, all night. Touch me, rub me, there, yes, yes, YES, there, ooooOOOO, that's it, roll your finger around my navel, down my belly, oh yes, and between my hind legs. Yeah, baby, yeah. Don't stop. Never stop. Never ever stop. Oh yes. Let me stuff my beautiful butt in your face. How do you like it? Is this what you like? Like this? I can do this all night. Meeenooooow!”

That was her: insatiable Kiki, Katie, Karen, whoever. “The strange thing, doctor, is I've begun to believe it. I come home, ‘Hi my love, how was your day?’ And she'll flop down, roll over on her back, and spread her legs. We're like newlyweds.”

“Yes, umm,” the marriage counselor deliberated, then asked. “Perhaps this does have something to do with your past marital problems. Were you umm,” ruminating, “up to the task?”

Oh, no, I thought, he knew. Everyone knew.

