

Acting Edition

Goldie, Max & Milk

by Karen Hartman

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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GOLDIE, MAX & MILK premiered at Florida Stage Company (Louis Tyrrell, Producing Director; Nancy Barnett, Managing Director) and The Phoenix Theatre (Bryan Fonseca, Producing Director; Sharon Gamble, Managing Director), and was selected for a National New Play Network Rolling World Premiere.

The Florida Stage production opened at the Kravis Center for the Performing Arts in West Palm Beach, Florida, on December 15, 2010. The performance was directed by Margaret Ledford, with scenic design by Timothy R. Mackabee, lighting design by Jim Hunter, sound design by Matt Kelly, and costume design by Michiko Skinner. The stage manager was James Danford. The cast was as follows:

MAX Erin Joy Schmidt
GOLDIE Deborah Sherman
MIKE David Hemphill
LISA Carla Harting
SHAYNA Sarah Lord

The Phoenix Theatre production opened in Indianapolis, Indiana, on February 3, 2011. The performance was directed by Bryan Fonseca, with set design by Dan Tracy, lighting design by Laura Glover, sound design by Tim Brickley and Matt Kelly, and costume design by Ashley Kiefer. The stage manager was Anthony Morton. The cast was as follows:

MAX Sara Riemen
GOLDIE Wendy Farber
MIKE Kienan McCartney
LISA Angela Plank
SHAYNA Bridgette Richards

The Off Broadway premiere of *GOLDIE, MAX & MILK* was produced by Mary J. Davis and MDL Productions, and opened at 59E59 Theaters on May 1, 2022. The play was presented as part of 59E59 Theaters' first annual AMPLIFY Festival (formerly VOLT) celebrating the work of Karen Hartman. The performance was directed by Jackson Gay, with scenic and costume design by Junghyun Georgia Lee, lighting design by Kate McGee, and sound design by Sun Hee Kil. The production stage manager was Caroline Ragland. The cast was as follows:

MAX..... Shayna Small
GOLDIE..... Lauren Molina
MIKE Timiki Salinas
LISA Blair Baker
SHAYNA..... Beatrice Ethel Tulchin

GOLDIE, MAX & MILK was developed with support from New Dramatists and the Playwrights' Center.

GOLDIE, MAX & MILK was nominated for the American Theatre Critics/Steinberg New Play Award for best regional play in America, and a Carbonell Award for the best new play in Florida.

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CHARACTERS

MAX – Female, 30s. Big-hearted. A social worker. Postpartum, thus subject to emotional swings that are not part of her base personality.

GOLDIE – 40ish. A lactation consultant. Domineering in a comforting way. Orthodox Jewish.

MIKE – 20s. A well-meaning slacker waking up to consequences.

LISA – 30s. Max’s ex and Mike’s sister. A lawyer. Often seems calm, reasonable, and warm.

SHAYNA – Late teens. Goldie’s daughter. Sullen but quick. (Her middle name “Brucha” is pronounced *BRUH*-khuh)

Ethnicity is open for Max, Mike, and Lisa (even though Mike and Lisa are siblings).

SETTING

Most of the action occurs in Max and Lisa’s wreck of a pre-war townhouse in Brooklyn. Keep in mind that Max and Lisa are not *poor*; they are *moving* and in a mess. Some items are high-end. A glimpse of the “bones” of the house (molding, a staircase, etc) would be welcome.

Max’s apartment is probably the most realistic setting; the rest can be brushstrokes.

TIME

2009.

Fun facts about 2009: 1) It’s a recession and property values are down. 2) Weed use is a crime. 3) Same sex unions are not recognized in New York.

AUTHOR’S NOTES

Max is in love with her baby, so her misery in Act One never gets too dark. To quote the wise director Allison Narver, “It’s not a tragedy, it’s a shitshow.”

Overlapping dialogue is indicated by a slash (/) where the second line begins.

for Grisha and for Todd

ACT ONE

Scene One

(MAX sits rocking her newborn in a sling. MAX, haphazard chic under the best of circumstances, looks bad. Her home looks worse. The bottom unit of a once-elegant two-family house, it's a mess of uneven flooring, with a huge rip in the ceiling. Not a tenement, just a wreck.)

(Perhaps a few bright baby things, like a play gym on the floor.)

(MAX doesn't move so well. She sings to her baby.)

MAX.

HUSH LITTLE BABY DON'T SAY A WORD,
MAMA'S GONNA BUY YOU SOMETHING ABSURD.
AND IF ABSURD DON'T MAKE YOU LAUGH,
MAMA'S GONNA SLICE HER FOOT IN HALF.
AND IF HER BLOODY FOOT WON'T WALK,
MAMA'S GONNA TEACH YOU HOW TO TALK.
AND IF YOUR MOUTH CAN'T MAKE THE WORDS,
MAMA'S GONNA... MAMA'S GONNA...

(Doorbell rings. MAX can't quite stand up. Doorbell rings again. MAX rises clutching her abdomen, which is covered by a medical support belt.)

*(She partway unlocks the door, revealing
MIKE, about ten years younger than MAX.)*

MIKE. Hey, uh, sorry.

MAX. For what part.

MIKE. Sorry I know you're busy, uh –

MAX. I have no plans, Mike. No foreseeable plans.

MIKE. I brought some stuff?

MAX. Stuff.

MIKE. For the little one.

(Baby cries.)

He's got pipes.

MAX. That she does.

MIKE. She. Wow. Could I come in?

MAX. You have a key.

MIKE. I wouldn't use my key.

MAX. Of course not.

MIKE. I wouldn't do that.

*(MAX, still holding the baby, opens the door.
MIKE tumbles in with large boxes.)*

MAX. Whoa.

MIKE. I came to the hospital.

MAX. I know, Mike, I just –

MIKE. I wanted to see.

MAX. It was rough for a while. A little touch and go.

MIKE. In what way touch and go? In what way go?

MAX. Complications. Obstructions. The cord was wrapped and the heartbeat went down.

MIKE. The *heartbeat*?

MAX. Hospital caught it. Total backup. That's why I didn't do a home birth.

MIKE. You didn't do a home birth because look at your home.

MAX. That too.

MIKE. Holes in the ceiling, god knows what layers of chipped paint, untested water out of ancient pipes...

MAX. We're selling.

MIKE. In this market?

MAX. New York is strong.

MIKE. This is Brooklyn.

MAX. Everyone wants to live in Brooklyn.

MIKE. No, they don't.

MAX. Everyone with kids. Wants a house in Brooklyn.

MIKE. No one with kids wants a shithole.

(Baby cries.)

MAX. I gotta nurse.

MIKE. I'll wait.

MAX. You have no role here, Mike.

MIKE. Can I see her?

(MAX tilts the sling so MIKE can see.)

Oh god.

MAX. Right?

(They smile. They soften.)

MIKE. Nice work.

MAX. Nice work.

(They shake hands. The baby keeps crying.)

MIKE. Oh god. You go, girl. Sing out.

(MAX begins to nurse. MIKE turns away and goes through shopping bags.)

I brought gifts.

MAX. You're dealing again?

MIKE. Why would you assume –

MAX. You have no skills. You can barely use the internet.
Look at your hair; you didn't suddenly get a job.

MIKE. Just weed. Very classy, secure situation I lucked into. I won't have to rent a place and host, you know, dubious clientele; this is doorman buildings. I'm basically a very welcome UPS guy. And the financing is superior cause it's a vertical operation. I'm sourcing, and delivering.

MAX. Mike –

MIKE. I got responsibilities now.

MAX. You do *not* have responsibilities.

MIKE. Did you get a carseat?

MAX. You can't leave the hospital without a carseat.

MIKE. But do you own one? Or did you borrow it?

MAX. I don't have a car anymore.

MIKE. There are trips. There are pediatric appointments and emergencies. Okay:

(MIKE pulls a carseat out of a large bag from a superstore.)

Consumer Reports ran a study comparing all the carseats of 2009, and what they discovered is, at a crash of over thirty-five miles per hour every one of them will spit your baby onto the pavement, except for two. One of those is made in Germany and on backorder. The other one is this. The Snugride.

And what's great about the Snugride is it's part of a travel system. Meaning you have different kinds of mobility. You can lift from the handle, like so. You can set it in the stroller, like the picture. You can take a long ride.

MAX. (*The sling.*) No stroller. I'm keeping her close.

MIKE. You have to lose contact at some point, right?

(**MAX** keeps nursing the baby.)

This is awkward.

MAX. (*Zen as possible.*) I am holding a human being in my arm, feeding a human being from my body. "Awkward" is a town I left behind.

MIKE. Like Portland?

MAX. I guess.

MIKE. Is she supposed to still be crying?

MAX. No.

MIKE. What's up?

MAX. I don't have milk.

MIKE. Is that bad?

MAX. The hospital recommended a consultant. Goldie.

MIKE. Goldie.

MAX. I have to wait cause she doesn't work Saturdays.

MIKE. Goldie doesn't work Saturdays?

MAX. She's an Orthodox Jew.

MIKE. Whoa. I guess they'd know.

MAX. They know fuck all. My baby's starving and she doesn't work Saturdays. Jews are supposed to prize life above law.

MIKE. If you don't have milk...what are you doing?

MAX. She will bring the milk by suckling.

MIKE. Isn't that a lot of responsibility?

MAX. It's awful.

(MAX stops nursing.)

I'm supposed to be providing her with everything, with nourishment; until four days ago she didn't even have to cry, she didn't have to breathe, or shit, or eat, she just *was* – and I just was – doing and giving everything she needed and there was like no possible way to fuck it up except by taking drugs which is so easy to avoid. I was the perfect mother. I was the perfect world. And now it's like self service. You want milk you gotta suck on nothing, make the milk come. It's cruel. It's such a cruel cruel start to this miserable life!

(MAX, who had a c-section four days ago and has barely slept, begins to lose it. Tragic for MAX but lighter for us.)

MIKE. I'm sorry.

MAX. Don't feel sorry for ME. Feel sorry for HER!

MIKE. Okay...

MAX. SHE's the one beginning life in a toxic unfixed fixer-upper! SHE's the one with an unemployed lesbian mom and five gender-neutral hand-me-down outfits and a box of generic diapers and NOTHING. SHE's the one stuck with ME. Feel sorry for HER!

MIKE. I don't feel sorry for her.

MAX. Why not?

MIKE. Because you really really love her.

(MAX bawls.)

I'm sorry.

MAX. I forgot my pain medication, that's all. I'm supposed to go every four hours and I think it's been eight.

MIKE. Are you in pain?

MAX. YES I'm in fucking pain.

(MIKE goes to the counter. It is unstable.)

MIKE. You need a new counter.

MAX. Shut UP.

MIKE. Colace?

MAX. That's constipation.

MIKE. Percocet.

MAX. *Percocet.*

MIKE. Acetaminophen plus oxycodone. Nice.

(He pours water and shakes out a pill.)

This is a really limited supply.

MAX. Right, why would I kill myself *now*?

(MIKE hands MAX a pill. She breaks it and swallows half, hands the other half back.)

MIKE. Take the whole thing.

MAX. It's bad for the baby.

MIKE. I think your doctor knows about the baby?

MAX. I need to stay alert.

MIKE. I hear you.

(He swallows the other half of the pill. MAX stares.)

My knee hurts.

MAX. Your *knee*?

MIKE. I had that tubing incident sophomore year?

(MIKE swallows another pill. MAX glares.)

MAX. Do you know what happened to me on Wednesday? This being Saturday? My uterus was pulled through an incision in my abdomen, sliced open around a live baby, stapled shut, and stuffed back in. I was hooked to a pain pump until yesterday, and I still haven't taken a shit. I don't want to hear about your sporting mishaps.

MIKE. I can get you more drugs.

MAX. Just respect, Mike.

(MIKE looks at the baby. Melts.)

MIKE. Wow.

MAX. She slept in my arm all night. At the hospital.

MIKE. They let you do that?

MAX. The day nurses don't. They're white and have sticks up their butts. But I asked the first night nurse who came to move her, "Can I keep my baby here?" She said, "You're the mommy. What you say go." I couldn't even sit up. I couldn't roll over. I had to ring the nurses to change her. But I could hold her. Right here. It was like: I can love you from a broken place. I can love you from whoever I am. I can take care of you from wherever, as whatever I am.

God that drug works fast. I think I'm gonna rest. We are going to rest.

MIKE. I'm sorry about my sister.

MAX. (*Trying to hold the bliss and calm.*) Could you just please never mention her fucking name in this house?

MIKE. I feel really bad.

MAX. You're not responsible.

MIKE. I was central to the project. I feel really bad.

MAX. Call your own mommy, okay?

MIKE. Do you like the travel system?

MAX. It was generous, Mike. Go in peace.

MIKE. Lisa feels really bad.

MAX. Um, what did I just say?

MIKE. She doesn't know I'm here. She wants to see the baby.

MAX. Ha ha.

MIKE. She, um... I came to tell you...

MAX. Lisa can make her own baby. She's got a whole sperm supply now, right?

MIKE. Actually she, um...

MAX. I haven't really slept the last three nights, and from what I hear I'm not gonna sleep much the next three years, so can you let us get some rest?

MIKE. Things aren't working out the way Lisa hoped.

MAX. How devastating.

MIKE. And...I am the dad.

MAX. So?

MIKE. Lisa says I have rights.

(Massive silence.)

MAX. Oh my god.

MIKE. Lisa wants a family, and she says this baby is family.

MAX. Oh my god.

MIKE. I thought you should know.

(Blackout.)

Scene Two

(Next day. MAX sits with GOLDIE, who inspects the baby at MAX's breast. GOLDIE is not much older than MAX, in a long skirt and a wig.)

GOLDIE. She has the latch!

MAX. Good.

GOLDIE. Good for her, good for you. The kid's a champion. Aren't you, aren't you? You bore a beauty.

MAX. Thanks.

GOLDIE. She's doing her part, Maxine.

MAX. Just Max.

GOLDIE. See how your nipple is flat in her mouth, with her lower lip curved around the bottom; she's got this just right. I see some serious suck issues, and believe me, there is no suck issue here.

MAX. *(Genuine.)* Great. Ow!

GOLDIE. Sore, or violent searing pain?

MAX. Sore.

GOLDIE. Fine, sore is normal. Sore is, hello, you're a mommy.

MAX. My nipples are sore. The searing pain is everywhere else.

GOLDIE. How are your meds?

MAX. I stopped. I have to stay aware.

GOLDIE. There are no medals for courage in motherhood, Maxine.

MAX. My ex wants her.

GOLDIE. I saw the picture of you alone, but I didn't want to pry...

MAX. What do I do?

GOLDIE. It's good for a child to have a father. Maybe it didn't work out between the two of you, but if he's interested, why not consider some kind of a joint –

MAX. No, my ex. Lisa.

(Micro-pause.)

GOLDIE. You are facing complications I couldn't possibly understand. What shall we do for your milk?

MAX. What's wrong with me?

GOLDIE. You need to let down.

MAX. Oh, I have years to let her down.

GOLDIE. In my line of work there is an odious repetition of puns.

MAX. Sorry.

GOLDIE. Usually from fathers.

MAX. Well, I'm both.

GOLDIE. She needs both.

MAX. Good, because I am.

GOLDIE. Fine but for now you should please focus on being her mother, which is natural, no?

MAX. We are the most natural family in the world.

GOLDIE. Do us all a favor and don't make this infant a spokesperson for your marginal beliefs.

MAX. *My* marginal beliefs? How's that wig, in July?

GOLDIE. It's warm. Where is your support, Maxine?

MAX. I have four months unemployment, and then I look.

GOLDIE. Please tell me you understand the question.

MAX. It all happened so fast.

GOLDIE. I assume it happened at the usual speed. You can't do this all by yourself. Your parents are living?

MAX. Just my mother. She's coming next week.

GOLDIE. Good. Friends?

MAX. I'm still new to the city.

GOLDIE. If the father were in the picture he could make omelets and rub your feet.

MAX. Sounds great.

GOLDIE. Usually that's not what happens, so don't think you're missing anything. In this "progressive" neighborhood more likely he'd be taking up space on the couch, using the first person plural to brag about the birth. "We" pushed. "We" tore.

MAX. Goldie, do you have a problem with men?

GOLDIE. I have seven children.

MAX. Jesus.

GOLDIE. (*Dirty joke.*) How could I bear seven children if I had a problem with men? And yet, bearing seven children, how could I not have a tiny problem with men?

MAX. Does your husband discuss your body in the first person?

GOLDIE. My husband is a holy combatant for the chosen people.

MAX. Oh.

GOLDIE. The let down reflex is a miracle but it's not guaranteed. You must work for what God gave you.

MAX. I don't believe in God.

GOLDIE. I don't believe in single homosexual parenting.
And yet you exist.

MAX. Help me.

GOLDIE. Would it be the worst thing to get the father involved?

MAX. The donor?

GOLDIE. Whatever you call him. Can you call him? Or was he in a tube?

MAX. He bought the travel system.

GOLDIE. Snugride, very nice. He has resources?

MAX. He's a drug dealer.

GOLDIE. Has he been caught?

MAX. Not yet.

GOLDIE. So he can help!

MAX. He's Lisa's brother.

GOLDIE. (*Shocked.*) No wonder she left you!

MAX. No, oh God no – we never... Lisa wanted to be related to our baby, so she and I talked, and talked, and talked, and finally we called Mike and he said yes right away. He even moved out here for the project. We decided, no doctors, no papers. At home, we would just –

GOLDIE. Okey dokey, no details.

MAX. You asked.

GOLDIE. Not exactly.

MAX. Well, you're here.

(*Pause.*)

GOLDIE. Maxine, do you think there might be a reason why people do things the normal way?

MAX. I don't like that word.

GOLDIE. Good, because no one's ever going to use it about your child. In my community a new mother's feet don't touch the ground, there is so much support. Cooking, childcare, groceries. We're like a fence, bound together, strong in one another. You're more of a post. What good is one post?

MAX. Goodbye, Goldie. I'll bottle feed.

GOLDIE. Forgive me.

MAX. You are the only one here.

GOLDIE. Let me help you, Max. You and your little girl. I don't want you to give up on yourself. Give up on yourself and you give up on – who is this beauty?

MAX. Lakshmi Rose.

GOLDIE. *Who?*

MAX. Lakshmi was the Hindu goddess of love, fertility, and the lotus flower. And Rose...in case she needs an out.

GOLDIE. You're Hindu?

MAX. No, I like the concept.

GOLDIE. Do you want to give up on Lovey Rose?

MAX. Lakshmi.

GOLDIE. Do you want a mass-produced can of inverted corn syrup solids and hormone-injected dairy byproducts to mother Lovey Rose? Or do *you* want to mother Lovey Rose?

MAX. I want to mother Lovey Rose.

GOLDIE. Imagine waterfalls.

MAX. What?

GOLDIE. Close your eyes. A memory near a waterfall.
Breathe.

MAX. Oh.

GOLDIE. You never saw a waterfall?

MAX. We backpacked through the Cascades.

GOLDIE. Washington State.

MAX. You've been?

GOLDIE. *(Present tense.)* I read.

MAX. Norse Peak. We climbed too high too early, past the snow line, lost the trail and built a fire. It was my idea to go so soon. I wanted the season to start.

GOLDIE. A fire in snow.

MAX. We sat by a lake all the next morning, fighting over how to get back. Then a dam of ice broke, and fresh water jumped straight down the face of the mountain. The lake started roaring, churning, it was spring.

(Closing her eyes.)

Oh. Milk.

(She repositions the baby, who is completely quiet.)

Thank you. Thank you, Goldie.

GOLDIE. Is this the face of God, or what?

MAX. Um...

GOLDIE. Head down, tushy up. You two are a team.

MAX. We are.

GOLDIE. For life, you two are a team.

MAX. Oh my god I've never been so happy.

GOLDIE. I'll make tea.

MAX. I should be making you...

GOLDIE. You should be waited upon like a queen. I'm going to make you one cup of tea while the *baybele* nurses so perfectly.

(GOLDIE goes to the stove. She gasps.)

MAX. The back right burner works, it just needs a match.

GOLDIE. Didn't you *nest*?

MAX. We were gonna remodel...

GOLDIE. You have six months to get this place in shape, or move.

MAX. Please Goldie, I'm all let down.

GOLDIE. It is your job to create a sane world for this child.

MAX. If your God couldn't do that, how should I?

GOLDIE. Fix the stove.

MAX. I'm unemployed.

GOLDIE. Have you got a toothpick?

MAX. Probably not.

(GOLDIE finds a toothpick and cleans the burner.)

GOLDIE. You are exhausted and overstressed. It affects your supply and will continue to do so. Someone needs to take care of you, Max, if you are going to feed this lotus rose.

MAX. Who takes care of you?

GOLDIE. My eldest, Shayna Brucha, a gift among gifts. Also God.

MAX. Maybe She has time for me. God. Your daughter sounds busy.

GOLDIE. Ladies and gentlemen, two burners.

MAX. How did you do that?

GOLDIE. I live rent controlled. No one fixes but me.

MAX. Thanks.

GOLDIE. (*Kind.*) It was recent you lost your father?

MAX. Five years.

GOLDIE. That's recent.

MAX. Thank you. Yeah.

GOLDIE. Imagine now: *you never had him.*

MAX. That's not fair. Mike is not an option. There's only...
Lisa.

GOLDIE. Lisa shmisa.

MAX. The project was her idea.

GOLDIE. Project? *Idea?* When you become a mother, you become more animal, and also more divine. Idea has nothing to do with it.

MAX. My politics suggest otherwise.

GOLDIE. Will your politics love you back? Look, this one already knows who's mommy. You are her heaven and her earth. Your breast is her sun and moon and stars. Enjoy.

MAX. You'll come back tomorrow, right?

GOLDIE. It would be taking advantage.

MAX. What if I can't nurse without you?

GOLDIE. Your body knows what to do.

MAX. I thought this was a relationship.

GOLDIE. I'll follow up by phone.

MAX. How do I protect her?

GOLDIE. Maxine. In your many outdoor expeditions, did you ever see a mother bear with cubs?

MAX. Once I saw cubs.

GOLDIE. And?

MAX. We backed up and cancelled the hike.

GOLDIE. Learn from the rest of God's realm.

(Tea kettle whistles.)

How do you take it?

MAX. I'll wait actually; I don't want to burn her.

GOLDIE. You see? You already know.

MAX. *(Closing her eyes.)* This is really good.

GOLDIE. Bliss. The body releases waves of bliss.

(They sit together for a sweet moment.)

One-seventy-five.

Scene Three

(A few days later, the empty apartment. MAX enters wheeling a small grocery cart, with Lakshmi in the sling. MAX is drinking a smoothie, looking a little better. She takes groceries out of the suitcase, with some effort.)

MAX. Vitamins. Yogurt. Water filters. Baby, we are on the rise. Napping? Napping like the contented little milked-up eight-day-old molecule you are? Mommy's going to sleep too, one of these nights, and then we'll be all –

(A crash from offstage.)

Who's there?

(MAX grabs a butter knife, hyperventilating.)

You picked the wrong house, motherfucker! I got a baby. I got a knife. I am in prime fighting condition!

(LISA enters from the bedroom. Around Max's age, corporate chic.)

LISA. Hey, Max.

MAX. You don't live here!

LISA. I used my key.

MAX. I'm changing the locks!

LISA. That's kind of extreme.

MAX. Extreme? Extreme? Lisa, your behavior is extreme. Yours! You don't live here. You "couldn't" live here. You. You Lisa you!

LISA. You asked me to get my things.

MAX. Four months ago! I did not ask you to sneak unannounced into the home where my daughter and I –

LISA. Stay calm.

MAX. Calm? You filled a syringe with your brother's semen, expelled it into my vagina, then left me pregnant, with a mortgage, unemployed –

LISA. That happened earlier –

MAX. – so you could more freely fuck your boss. The man who offered you that miracle goddamn job in the first place, bringing us to this lunar landscape where I can't plant a tomato in dirt without paying nine hundred bucks for a lead inspection –

LISA. Get the inspection; send me the tab.

MAX. It's too late in *summer*, do we not occupy the same *planet*?

LISA. I don't know, Max. I buy tomatoes at the store.

MAX. Me too, now. Thanks a lot! Twelve years of gardening and I buy spongy red bullshit wrapped in cellophane from the store!

LISA. I just said I'd *pay* for the *inspection*.

MAX. And I just said *it's too late!*

(*Beat.*)

Why are we talking about tomatoes? You do this. You twist things.

LISA. You brought it up.

MAX. I did not. Did I?

LISA. Mmm –

MAX. Yes I did! I was saying! How after breaking big promises, lifetime promises, you made a crappy little promise to clear out your belongings, then failed to do even that, leaving my home clogged with your athletic gear, legal briefs, and winter coats, up to and through the delivery of this child!

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