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playing guitar. As Richard sat with the six-month-old Ian on his lap, the guy strummed "Over the Rainbow." Richard danced the smiling child around as Brandy stood a few feet away.

Unlike Ian, she wasn't smiling. First, she'd been unable to speak to her 8-year-old daughter, Skye, in Idaho earlier in the day. Then the neighbor's girlfriend was giving her an earful about bringing Ian out close to 10 o'clock. When the woman wouldn't shut up, Brandy had enough. She wanted to leave, and Richard, sad about missing free beer, carried Ian back to the apartment.

Inside, as Brandy lay Ian on the love seat, she asked Richard why the woman didn't like her.

Women are bitches, Richard said. "I didn't like hearing it," remembers Brandy. An argument began.

Another knock at the door interrupted it. The neighbor's girlfriend. She wanted to apologize. At least, that's what Richard thought, but he was drunk and couldn't be too sure. Tomorrow, he told her, come back tomorrow.

When he closed the door, Brandy asked why he hadn't let the woman in. But Richard was in the mood for bed, not talk. Brandy wouldn't let go of her question. Richard couldn't hold back his annoyance.

Shut the fuck up, he yelled.

And in an instant - Brandy was done. All the arguing, the yelling, the hitting at Tent City 3, in the Georgian Motel, at Way Back Inn. For weeks, months, 16 long months, she'd been telling herself she'd leave him, go somewhere, anywhere. But when would she do it? When?

Tonight. Now.

I don't want to be with you anymore, Brandy said. I want to go home, back to Idaho.

There's the door, Richard said. I need money for a bus ticket for Ian and me.

No, Richard said.

The rent money: It was in the drawer. But before Brandy could get there, Richard moved. Opening it, he shoved the cash into

his pocket. Then the drawer took flight: Richard pulled it out and flung it across the room. Another followed right behind.

Brandy's mother bear kicked in.

Her first thought: Ian. Where was he? On the love seat, awake. Afraid he might roll off, Brandy placed him on the floor.

Her second thought: cell phone. Where was it? On the windowsill, across the room. She ran for it. It felt so far away.

Brandy held the phone and dialed. Or tried to. But she couldn't.

Butterfingers.

Who are you calling? Richard barked.

911, she answered.

Her third thought: Oh, no. I shouldn't have said that.

Richard, aware the police wanted him for breaking a no-contact order, raced to her. He yanked the phone away and snapped it in half.

And that's when Brandy knew. Something bad was about to happen. She could feel -

Richard's fist hammered the right side of her head. The room swirled, turning circles.

Another fist - direct - to the head.

Spinning. The room, spinning.

A fist. Her head. The room, dark, going ...

Knees, buckling. Falling, falling. Fist. Head. Falling. Room. Darker, darker -

Time passed: Seconds? A minute?

Coming to. On the floor. Brandy was on the floor. Fist. Who? Wha- Richard.

Standing over her. Straddling her. Yelling. She was yelling. Stop! Stop! Fighting.

Clawing. Scratching. Biting.

Where was Ian? Her throat. Pressure. What? Richard's hands? Strangling her? Couldn't breathe.

Slapping. Get off me! Get off me! Fight - And the front door opened. Francisco, home from the bar.

Richard kicked Brandy in the side. Francisco stood in the hallway. Richard

ran to him.

She stabbed me, Richard said.

Brandy lay on the floor in the living room, holding her face. Ian was nearby. Francisco looked at Richard.

Give me your keys, Francisco said.

Richard handed them over. He wanted his coat. Francisco obliged.

Now get out of here, Francisco said.

Richard fled.

Walking over to Brandy, Francisco saw her face. Bloody, and her eyes were all black.

Ian cried, so Brandy picked him up. She struggled to her feet.

Go clean yourself up in the bathroom, Francisco said.

How does my face look? she asked.

Bad, he said.

Handing Ian to

Francisco, she stumbled to the bathroom mirror.

Swollen right cheek. Black eye. Bloody split lip. Red mark on her throat.

Yes. It was bad.

Francisco didn't think the fight was bad enough to tell the cops.

More than an hour after the assault, Brandy sat holding Ian. Her cheek throbbed.

Don't call, Francisco said.

Why not? Brandy asked.

Because you drink, too. You yell, too.

Brandy would never deny it. But did that mean Richard should hit her? No.

What if he comes back? she asked.

Don't worry, Francisco said. I took his keys.

That didn't convince Brandy. Richard always came back. And when he did, he'd be furious. With a landline that only offered Internet, she had to leave, get to a phone. So she thought of a solution: to lie.

I'm going to the store, Brandy said. Even with her split lip and black eye, Francisco didn't stop her.

The rent money: It was in the drawer. But before Brandy could get there, Richard moved. Opening it, he shoved the cash into his pocket. Then the drawer took flight: Richard pulled it out and flung it across the room. Another followed right behind.

Forgetting her own coat, Brandy stuffed Ian into his snowsuit. She grabbed the stroller. Strapped him inside, walked out of the apartment. She rolled him down the stairs, opened the front door. More stairs, the sidewalk. Brandy stopped

Across the street was the construction site where Richard worked. Could he be hiding there? Or around the corner?

Inside, she had devised a plan. Go to Hope Place, three blocks away. She grabbed the stroller's handlebars. She moved.

She zoomed past the apartment building, the bushes, the taco truck. She looked. No one. She passed the empty lot. Orange streetlights shone above. She reached the intersection of South Othello Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Way South.

One block.

She entered the crosswalk. Barely a car on the road. No light rail train. On to the sidewalk on the other side. She pushed the stroller faster. On her right, a parking lot with cars. Was he behind one? She didn't stop. She hustled past the Bank of America, the Safeway.

Two blocks.

She picked up speed. Her feet raced. A driveway. The stroller's wheels clicked. The side of Hope Place. Almost there. Was he behind her? Don't look. Go, go. The building's lights. The door.

She was there.

Brandy pounded the glass entrance with her fist. The security guard looked up, came to the door. Are you OK? he said.


I just left Hope Place awhile ago, Brandy said. I got beat up. I need to call the cops.

He let her in, and she rolled Ian into the foyer. The guard gave her his cell phone.

Brandy's fingers, working in a way they hadn't in the apartment, before she broke free from the abuse, dialed.

Nine. One. One.

You can read parts one and two of The gravity of abuse on our website, www.streetroots.org. Look for the fourth and final part of the series in the next Street Roots. Republished from Real Change News, Seattle, Wash.



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