1985. I’ve always called it the worst year of my life. A series of unfortunate events tripped me up the summer I turned twenty-three. In no particular order: sex, a really bad boss, unemployment, and a 1968 Buick.

The sex: great! One of my first orgasms.

The job: itself, not bad. Great pay for typing and answering phones. But when I lost my only pair of glasses, I couldn’t work. The boss I had considered nice convinced me to quit. She suggested that missing a week of work while I waited for new specs to arrive would “let down the team.” Fine, I thought. I didn’t really love the job. I’d had great student placements there in the past; this one wasn’t one of them. Earlier that year, another boss, a.k.a. The Dragon Lady, had hauled me into her office and tried to guilt-trip me into taking full-time hours during the summer months. I told her I couldn’t. She shouted. I cried and insisted I was taking summer classes. Had I known then what I now know about collective agreements and workers’ rights, that meeting would have gone differently!
So when the nice boss started in on me, I quit. Unemployment meant spare time. On my way to my dad’s for coffee one summery day, a teenager failed to yield as posted. His hot red car smashed into the rear driver’s side door of my blue Buick. My car spun counterclockwise through the intersection, up onto the sidewalk, and stopped abruptly when the passenger side door hit the solid steel light post. Police eventually arrived to take my shaky state-

ment. An ambulance hauled me to the hospital, where my dad met me. I was diagnosed with sprains and whiplash and sent on my way with a back brace and painkillers. Flexoril, a painkiller, became my friend.

In Canada in 1985, Madame Justice Bertha Wilson had not yet played her role in striking down Canada’s abortion law, the law that created regulations so strict that it was nigh impossible for women to access the procedure. It required a woman to secure the approval of a doctor and the local hospital’s Therapeutic Abortion Committee (TAC) if she wanted to terminate a preg-

nancy. In Saskatchewan, only two hospitals performed abortions, Regina General and Saskatoon City. Few women received the necessary approval in Regina. Some sought services elsewhere. My friend travelled nine hours to a private clinic in North Dakota and experienced severe complications afterward. Wealthy women, and those who could find the money to do so, flew to Toronto, where the Morgentaler Clinic operated. Still others tried to induce their own abortions by various means. Knitting needles, coat hangers, and onions were a few of the methods I’d read about.

My injury had me back and forth to the doctor’s office. I’d been thinking that having unprotected sex with a friend was probably not wise. So on one of those trips, I told my doctor I wanted to try the pill. During his process of figuring out which one would work, I learned I was pregnant. I immediately knew I’d have the pregnancy terminated. I did not want, and was not ready for, parenthood. Adoption was out of the question, along with travelling to Toronto or anywhere out of province, for that matter.

The friend who’d had post-abortion complications told me about an underground network she had learned about. This led to my first visit to the Regina Women’s Community Centre, an organization to which I would give volunteer time in the future. The woman who offered counsel, Abby, had counselled many women like me over the years. She shared the options available to me. I took a chance on the one doctor in Regina who occasionally supported a woman in jumping through the TAC’s hoops.

His office was an ordinary one for older buildings in the downtown core.
The lobby, lined with rows of black vinyl and chrome chairs, had white walls and dark-stained wood trim. Three of us, in various stages of pregnancy, waited. A faint quiver ran through my body. My face felt flushed. He made me nervous. After the physical exam, he confirmed my pregnancy. I then explained why I needed an abortion. I told him it had been the first time this man and I had had intercourse, that I was studying to be a teacher and wanted to finish my degree, that I couldn’t afford parenthood. Before I could finish, the doctor turned and walked away from me, shouting, “I will not be a welfare doctor!” What the hell that meant, I did not know. I can suppose, now, that he meant he wouldn’t terminate a pregnancy in order to keep a young woman off of welfare. I’ll never know for sure. I didn’t stick around to quiz him; I left, in tears, more determined than ever to put an end to the pregnancy.

The TACs operated under a residency restriction regarding which hospital could treat which woman. The town of Davidson divided the province. Women living to the north were to use Saskatoon; women in the south, Regina. I lived in Regina, and a woman with the underground network informed me that Dr. John Bury, a Saskatoon doctor sympathetic to women’s rights, would perform abortions on women who could provide a Saskatoon address. This option didn’t sit too well with me—I didn’t want to lie. But I knew beyond a doubt that this road would be the only one available to me. It meant I’d have to tell more people about my pregnancy. I could live with that. But could I live with lying to officials to secure the procedure?

I pulled Lesley, my former roommate and friend living in Saskatoon, in on my plan, made an appointment, and travelled to Saskatoon. My official identification had me living at my dad’s house in Regina, but I offered Lesley’s Saskatoon address as my own to the intake worker at Dr. Bury’s clinic. She did not ask about the address discrepancy. Per the advice I’d received, I added that my studies at the University of Saskatchewan brought me to live here in Saskatoon. Until then, I’d believed my capacity as a liar lacked a certain strength of conviction, but in that moment, I surely could have convinced anyone of the veracity of my statement. I held my quivering nerves in check from the time I arrived until I left. My resolve was firm.

I thought she’d bought my story, along with my very real concerns about the consumption of pain medication during my early pregnancy. She informed me that the doctor’s office would call the first week in September. I had a long, sweaty month ahead of me. What if they discovered I’d lied? What if the TAC denied my request?