

Soulful Songs and Stories

With a song and your stories, we co-create a soft place for hard conversations and a brave space for personal and spiritual growth.



Hi Soulful Song Lovers and Story Tellers,

Soulful Songs and a Story: Is there any there there?

This kind of **Soulful Songs and Stories** is long overdue. It still is about songs and stories, but it's not piled high with quotes in service of a theme. What that means is that you have to ferret out the meaning of the story, and see if that meaning has any implications for you. Rather than statements, we have questions. There is only one story. It's intriguing, compelling, and an easy read. And it has been recommended by at least two other longform journalism e-newsletters. Listen to the songs, read the story, and then we'll ask you some (rhetorical) questions. Feel free to share your thoughts about this exercise with the group—or with us.

“Shallow,” Lady Gaga, Bradley Cooper

(from “A Star Is Born” soundtrack) *lyrics below*

https://youtu.be/bo_efYhYU2A *movie clip* 3:35

https://youtu.be/aU_bj9SxvdU *same clip, but with lyrics instead of video* 3:35

“The Trappings,” Goat Rodeo (Stuart Duncan: fiddle, vocals; Yo-Yo Ma: cello; Edgar Meyer: bass; Chris Thile: mandolin, vocals; Aoife O'Donovan: vocals) *lyrics below*
Song: <https://youtu.be/6yR-nFBnd9E> 3:38

Article & videos, *The Bluegrass Situation*: www.j.mp/TBS-TheTrappings

Article & videos, *NPR*: www.j.mp/NPR-TheTrappings

“Toby Dorr’s Great Escape,” Michael J. Mooney

The Atlantic, Oct 2020 (*podcast* also available), ~7,300 words (*read/listen online or read below*)
“You’ve read prison escape tales and misbegotten romance stories. This true story will still surprise you. Running away together, it turns out, is just the beginning. ‘I was a rule follower for sure,’ Michael J. Mooney’s protagonist declares, before adding, ‘I mean... except the one time.’” —*The Sunday Long Read*

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/10/toby-dorrs-great-escape/615487>

And the time came when the risk it took to remain in a tightly closed bud became infinitely more painful than the risk it took to blossom. —Anaïs Nin, “Risk”

*The truth is, in order to heal we need to tell our stories and have them witnessed. The story itself becomes a vessel that holds us up, that sustains, that allows us to order our jumbled experiences into meaning. —Sue Monk Kidd, *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter**

Questions

- What does the *great escape* in the title refer to?
- Are or were you in a prison of one kind or another? Did you escape? How?
- What title would you have given this piece?
- Sidonie Gabrielle Colette said, “What a wonderful life I’ve had! I only wish I’d realized it sooner.” What does it take to realize what a wonderful life we have? Or don’t? A feeling? A fantasy? A book? A person? Pain? Toxicity? Self-realization/reflection?
- How do we differentiate imagination, fantasy, obsession, hope, and dreams?
- How much would you risk for something “better”?
- Are the songs a good match for the story? Would you have picked other songs instead?
- Have you ever done something you’re glad you did, but would never do again?
- Are these question helpful or are they annoying?

Contemplate the story and the questions with Mozart:

“12 Variations in C on ‘Ah vous dirai-je, Maman’,” K. 265, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart/ Myung-Whun Chung (“Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star”) <https://youtu.be/MYSk2r9YqeU> 9:08
(the melody is an anonymous pastoral song dating from 1740; lyrics added in 1774)

“Clarinet Concerto in A major, ii Adagio,” K.622, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart/ Sharon Kam <https://youtu.be/6QAAZ29cvfU?t=7> 6:53
(And/or listen to the entire concerto with Arngunnur Árnadóttir and the Iceland Symphony Orchestra https://youtu.be/YT_63UntRJE?t=27 30:38 >11M views)

“Alla Turca Jazz,” Fazil Say/Ayse Deniz, (based on Mozart’s Rondo Alla Turca/Turkish March, K. 331) <https://youtu.be/HG4wPVysgxM> 2:18 (street piano)

“Eine Kleine Nachtmusik,” K.525 (Serenade for Strings in G Major), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart/Claude Bolling <https://youtu.be/OPMyNBNejec> 3:20 (jazz)

Wishing you the best of songs and stories; make them soulful.

Namasté,

Alice and Steve



To be longing for this thing today and for that thing tomorrow; to change likings for loathings, and to stand wishing and hankering at a venture – how is it possible for anyone to be at rest in this fluctuant, wandering humor and opinion?

Roger L'Estrange

“Shallow,” Lady Gaga, Bradley Cooper

(from *A Star Is Born* soundtrack)

[Verse 1: Bradley Cooper]

Tell me somethin', girl
Are you happy in this modern world?
Or do you need more?
Is there somethin' else you're searchin' for?

[Refrain: Bradley Cooper]

I'm fallin'
In all the good times
I find myself longing for change
And, in the bad times, I fear myself

[Verse 2: Lady Gaga]

Tell me something, boy
Aren't you tired tryna fill that void?
Or do you need more?
Ain't it hard keepin' it so hardcore?

[Refrain: Lady Gaga]

I'm falling
In all the good times
I find myself longing for change
And, in the bad times, I fear myself

[Chorus: Lady Gaga]

I'm off the deep end, watch as I dive in
I'll never meet the ground

Crash through the surface where they
can't hurt us
We're far from the shallow now

[Post-Chorus: Lady Gaga & Bradley Cooper]

In the sha-ha, sha-hallow
In the sha-ha, sha-la-la-la-low
In the sha-ha, sha-hallow
We're far from the shallow now

[Bridge: Lady Gaga]

Oh, ha, ah, ha
Oh-ah, ha

[Chorus: Lady Gaga]

I'm off the deep end, watch as I dive in
I'll never meet the ground
Crash through the surface where they
can't hurt us
We're far from the shallow now

[Post-Chorus: Lady Gaga & Bradley Cooper]

In the sha-ha, shallow
In the sha-ha, sha-la-la-la-low
In the sha-ha, shallow
We're far from the shallow now



“The Trappings,” Goat Rodeo (GOAT = Greatest Of All Time)

Stuart Duncan: fiddle, vocals; Chris Thile: mandolin, vocals; Yo-Yo Ma: cello; Edgar Meyer: bass; Aoife O'Donovan: vocals, from their CD *Not Our First Goat Rodeo*

There are no official lyrics for this song on the Web. These are cobbled together from what one person (mis)heard, with corrections from others, as posted on YouTube.

We sing in the chill of the mornin' still drunk on our options

To the angel of settling down

Stirring in our beds

Never thought I'd find you in the trappings of potential happiness

Was a soft ray of moonlight

Thus we anchor each other

Strollers in Brooklyn

with the ghosts of living alone

whisperin' in our heads

bet ya thought you'd lose me in the trappings of kinetic happiness

anchor each other

is a sharp ray of sunlight piercing our dreams in a dark room

are the things we made of loneliness

a double LP spun from a late night text

Love's at the loom we are the spools of thread/Being woven into and out of our element.

now the deadlines are breathing down our necks

what ya going make from me of your happiness

Love's at the loom we are the spools of thread/Being woven into and out of our element.

So we danced through a lull in the evening

worn as sleeping children?

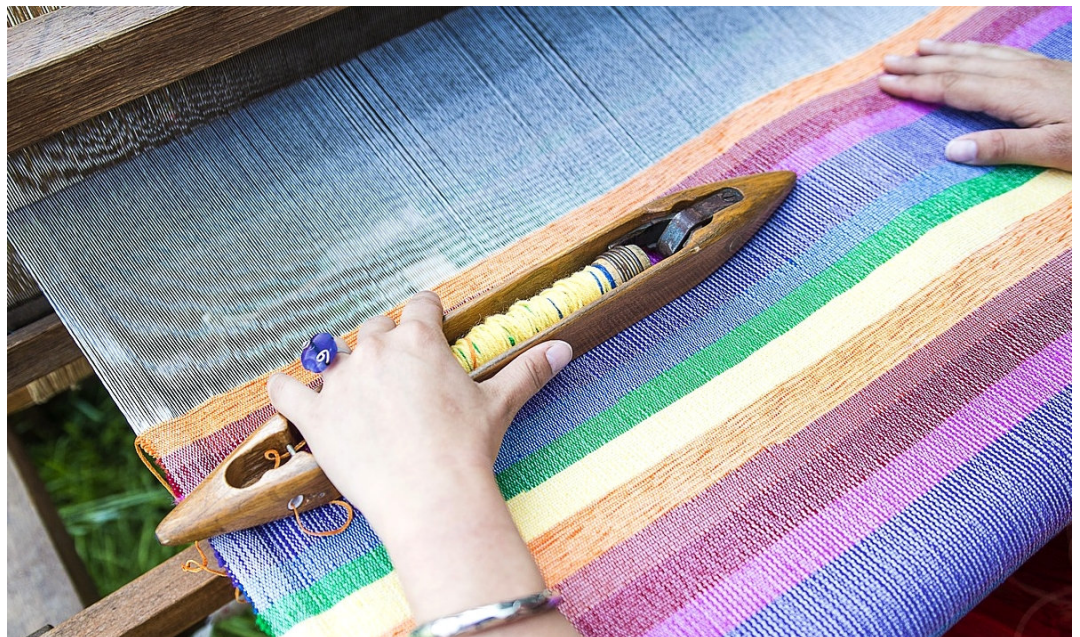
With a sense of solidering on

Trying to forget we ever donned the rose-colored trappings of potential

doubting the perfect incompleteness sucking any happiness

is a sharp ray of sunlight piercing our dreams in a dark room

til we throw back the curtains and sing in the cold clear mornin'



Toby Dorr's Great Escape

Michael J. Mooney, *The Atlantic*, Oct 2020 Issue (also available as a podcast) www.j.mp/TobyDorr

Toby Dorr never ran a red light, never rolled through a stop sign, never got so much as a speeding ticket. As a kid, she was always the teacher's pet, always got straight A's. Her parents never bothered to give her a curfew, because she never stayed out late. She married the only boy she'd ever dated, raised a family, built a career, went to church. She did everything she was supposed to do.

She's in her early 60s now, just over 5 feet tall, and with her wry smile and auburn curls, she could be your neighbor, your librarian, your aunt. But people in Kansas City remember Toby's story. She's been stared at in restaurants, pointed at on sidewalks. For more than a decade, people here have argued about whether what she did was stupid and selfish or brave and inspirational. In the papers, she was known as the "Dog Lady" of Lansing prison, but that moniker barely hints at why she made headlines.

Looking back now, it all seems surreal to Toby, like a dream or a movie. Watching news clips from that time in her life makes her sick to her stomach. She has to turn away. She says the woman in those videos is another person entirely. She can hardly remember what she was thinking.

"I was a rule follower for sure," she says with a sweet Kansan lilt. Then she catches herself. "I mean," she says, "except the one time."

We love to tell the world how happy we are. Our relationships, our children, our jobs: #blessed. But from time to time, it's only natural to imagine a different life. What it might be like to escape our responsibilities, to get away, to start over. Of course, for most of us, that's just a fleeting thought.

Growing up on the Kansas side of Kansas City in the early 1960s, Toby Phalen was the oldest of seven children—five girls, two boys—in a middle-class Catholic family. When she was 5, her father was burning willow branches in their backyard and the fire flared in his face. She saw him come into the house. His ears were gone and his flesh looked like it was rolling down his shoulders and arms, "like it was my mom taking off her pantyhose at night," she recalls.

He was hospitalized for eight months, and Toby felt it was her responsibility as the eldest child to help take care of her younger siblings. Even then, she wanted to solve whatever problem was in front of her. She changed diapers, packed lunches, tried to provide stability in a stressful time. "She was less like a sister than like a third parent," one of her siblings would later tell *The Wall Street Journal*.

Her father eventually came home, and although he could barely move his arms, he started working again as a machinist at the railroad. He had a big family to feed. Every day, he'd crawl under the engines and spend hours reaching up to service the equipment, stretching his scalded skin. And he never complained. "Deal with what life gives you," Toby's dad would say whenever he heard one of his kids whining. It became the family mantra.

Toby internalized the lesson. She was a perfectionist, the type who spoiled the curve for her younger siblings. She never got drunk, never tried drugs. In high school, she was the president of the pep club and dated the star of the baseball team.

She tried not to question her circumstances. She tried to be positive and just go along. She doesn't remember how her high-school boyfriend proposed, for example: "It was probably something like 'We might as well get married.'" She said yes because she thought that was what she was supposed to do. They got married at 20, bought a house not far from her parents, and had three kids in four years. The middle child, their only daughter, died a few hours after birth.

Toby dealt with the pains of life by staying busy and ignoring whatever hurt. Her husband was a firefighter, and Toby worked at a utility company. Her sons played baseball, basketball, football, soccer. She tried not to miss a single game. On top of everything else, Toby attended college at night. She graduated summa cum laude with a double major in accounting and business administration.

In 1987, when she was 30 years old, she started working at Sprint. She was a project manager special-

izing in systems development. There was always a new problem to solve, a more efficient way to do something, and she'd work relentlessly to figure it out. But her 14-year career ended with the dot com bust of 2001.

She started working part-time at a veterinary clinic, assisting with procedures, answering phones, scheduling appointments. She'd always loved animals. As a girl, she'd sometimes wander out into the woods and stand there, listening to the sounds of nature, watching the spiders on a tree.

In 2004, Toby asked one of the vets about a lump on her neck, and the vet told her she needed to see a doctor immediately. It turned out to be thyroid cancer. It was treatable, but she was 47, and it got her thinking about how much time she might or might not have left. "I decided I wanted to do something to make the world a better place," she says.

In the fog of cancer treatments, she spent a lot of time watching television, especially the Animal Planet reality show *Cell Dogs*. Each episode focuses on a different prison's dog-adoption program, following inmates as they train unruly shelter dogs and prepare the animals to be sent to new homes. Toby decided that's what she wanted to do: start a prison dog program.

Her husband dismissed the idea, she recalls. "Toby, that's just TV," she remembers him saying. "People don't do that in real life." So she tried to do the closest thing possible, and started a dog-fostering program. She made a website, and within a week she heard from someone at the Lansing Correctional Facility, a state prison in Leavenworth County, Kansas, asking if she'd have any interest in starting a program there.

"I was like, 'Yes! Oh my gosh, yes, that's my dream!'"

Two days later, she drove to the prison and gave the executive staff a presentation. Two days after that, on August 13, 2004, she brought seven shelter dogs into the prison, and the Safe Harbor Prison Dog Program was born.

The idea was to let inmates who qualified with good behavior house dogs in their cells. With Toby's guidance, they would prepare the dogs for adoption. A lot of these men had gone years—some, decades—without the affectionate touch of a human. But a prisoner could hug a dog, lie in bed with a dog, tell the dog his troubles—and the dog would look back with

nothing but love.

The program changed the atmosphere in the prison. During the day, there were dogs in the yard, dogs walking down the halls with their handlers. "Anybody who wanted to come up and pet a dog could do so," Toby says. "It softened everybody up."

More inmates wanted dogs. And more people in the community started calling Toby when they found abandoned dogs. She quit working at the vet clinic and turned the barn behind her house into a kennel, where she kept the dogs before they were assigned to an inmate. Soon she was working from 6 a.m. to midnight every day: organizing adoptions, shuttling dogs back and forth to vet clinics for spaying and neutering, letting all the dogs in her barn out to run and play a few times a day.

She also spent several hours a day helping inmates train their dogs. Before Safe Harbor, she'd never been inside a prison, didn't even know anyone who'd served time. Now there were weeks when she was at Lansing every day, more than some of the guards.

In 18 months, she facilitated about 1,000 adoptions. In the local news, she posed for photos with dogs and inmates outside their cells. She started getting donations—money for dog food, leashes, vet visits—from across the country. She sent a weekly newsletter to thousands of subscribers.

Toby says her husband resented the program. Though she didn't admit it to anyone at the time, not even herself, when she looks back now she sees that she was unhappy in her marriage from the beginning. She says that her husband would sometimes disappear to play golf. A few months after they were married, Toby decided she'd take lessons, so they could play together. But when she told her husband, he said that before she took lessons, she should find someone to golf with.

"Well," she said, "I thought I would golf with you."

"No," she remembers him saying. "I golf with my friends."

The affirmation she wasn't getting at home, she now got from the dogs, who adored her. When prison officials and guards noticed the mood in the prison improving, she became popular with them, too. And the dog handlers? They seemed to love Toby most of all.

The first time Toby met John Manard, the sun was behind him and it looked like a halo. Other in-

mates would approach her with some degree of hesitation, but Manard walked right up and told her she needed him in her program. "I'm probably the best dog handler you've ever met," he said.

His confidence captivated her. But she told him he'd have to get approved by the prison, just like everybody else.

He did, and a few weeks later he was among the prisoners gathered to receive their foster dogs. Most were happy with whatever dog they got, just glad to have a companion. But not Manard. He evaluated each dog. He petted them, examined them, then took a second or two to contemplate. When he finally made a selection—a pit bull mix, Toby recalls—she was amused by the whole interaction. She'd never seen anything like it.

Manard was 6 foot 2 and lean, with close-cropped red hair and an assortment of tattoos. The one arching over his navel read hooligan. He walked with a swagger. "There was just something different about him," Toby says.

She learned that he was serving a life sentence for his participation, at age 17, in a carjacking that resulted in a man getting fatally shot. Manard said he wasn't the one who pulled the trigger, and even the prosecutor said he believed that—but nonetheless, Manard had committed a felony that led to someone's death, so he was convicted of first-degree murder. Toby didn't think that seemed fair; Manard appeared capable of redemption. He was 25 when he met Toby. She was 47.

A few months after starting the dog program, Toby heard some inmates making sexual comments about her. When she informed prison officials, she says, she was told to keep some of the dog handlers she'd gotten to know with her when she was inside the prison.

Related Stories

One day she was with two handlers when another inmate threatened her. He wanted his girlfriend to adopt the dog he'd fostered, but she lived a few hours away and was having trouble getting a ride to the prison. It had been eight weeks. When Toby asked the inmate about it, he started yelling at her, swearing and raising his fists. Toby turned to the other handlers for help, but they were looking down, unwilling to challenge the man. She was certain she was about to get hit when she saw Manard walking toward her. She could feel the relief deep in her chest.

Manard told the man to go back to his cell. "Nobody was going to mess with John Manard," Toby says.

He walked her out to the prison gate. As soon as she got to her van, she collapsed in tears. She could barely keep her hands from shaking long enough to call her contact at the prison, to inform him that she was never going back inside. She said she'd keep running the program, but only from outside the prison walls.

That was a Sunday. The next day, she says, she got a call back: Her contact in the warden's office told her she could have Manard paged whenever she arrived, and he would meet her at the front gate and walk her to her appointments. He was only supposed to escort her through the prison, but Manard stayed with her during her training sessions. Soon they were spending hours together every day.

Later, the warden disputed the idea that Toby ever had an assigned escort. In an interview with *The Kansas City Star*, he said that she could go wherever she needed to in the prison alone. Of course, Toby was married, religious, such a responsible citizen—nobody at the prison could have anticipated what eventually happened.

One morning, Manard noticed that Toby looked distraught and asked her what was wrong. She'd been at the hospital all night, she explained. Her father had Stage 4 bladder cancer and had needed surgery. She'd come to the prison straight from the intensive-care unit.

"Well," Manard said. "Thank God your husband was there to drive you."

"He wasn't there," she recalls telling Manard. "He said there's no sense in both of us not getting a good night's sleep."

Manard shook his head.

"Toby, why are you married to him?"

She thought about it for a moment and didn't have an answer. She thought about it later that day, too, when she left the prison. She thought about it all that night and the next day. She knew it shouldn't be such a hard question—she'd been married for close to three decades—but she couldn't come up with an answer.

"That's when I realized, *This isn't a marriage. This is a convenient house-sharing arrangement,*" she says. "Once you open your mind and you think those things, you can't stop them."

She says that she'd told her husband 10 years earlier that she was thinking about leaving, but that he'd dismissed the idea. She had no reason for a divorce: He didn't hit her, he didn't cheat on her, he wasn't an alcoholic, and he had a good job at the fire department. Besides, her family loved him—her siblings considered Toby's husband their own brother—and they would never want her to divorce him.

"I did believe him that my family would talk me into staying," she says. "I didn't see any way out."

But now she felt someone notice her. She felt someone recognize that she had needs.

"If someone had flirted with me at a gas pump when I was pumping gas, I would have just not even responded to them and I would have gotten in my car and drove away," she says. But Manard's flirting seemed safer, harmless. He was in prison, after all. Nothing could come of it. She allowed herself to think about Manard more and more. The way he'd compliment the color of her eyes and tell her how much he liked her hair.

"You deserve someone who wants to make you the center of their world," he said.

She'd never heard anything like this. Looking back, she says it was "like pouring water on a dying plant."

They spent hours a day together but weren't allowed to touch. No physical contact, that was the rule. Sometimes, though, she'd part a dog's fur for a tick treatment and Manard would lean over to help, and their hands would brush against each other and linger for a moment.

"It was so insanely desirous," Toby says. "It was something you wanted so bad and it was so off-limits. So it just made the chemistry even more sparky." Sitting in her kitchen, thinking about it 15 years later, she sighs. "It was just so intense."

The electricity between them built over weeks, months. Once, Manard asked her if she'd be with him if he weren't in prison. She thought about this hypothetical scenario. "I believe I would," she said.

He told her he loved her. And that he wanted to escape and be with her. At first she laughed it off. That would break so many rules! But he brought it up again and again. Sometimes, as she was driving around town, she'd see a for rent sign and think: *If he was out of prison, I would get this little apartment.*

Manard would later say in an interview that the question about being with him had been sort of a joke,

but when Toby said yes, he became obsessed with the notion. He'd toss out ideas for how to escape. Maybe he could put himself in a box and have it mailed out? Maybe he could sneak out on the truck that delivered food to the kitchen? At one point he contemplated just climbing the fences in the yard.

"There were a lot of bad ideas," Toby says. It became a puzzle, a game.

The prison was full of 18-by-36-inch cardboard boxes; the inmates used them to carry their belongings when they moved to a different cell. Manard set about trying to fit himself into one of these boxes. Every time, the box either collapsed or burst. He lost more than 20 pounds in a few weeks to make himself fit. Then one day he told Toby that he'd dreamed of a certain way of pretzeling himself in. When he woke up, he tried it, and it worked.

Then one of the unit leaders at the prison asked Toby to remove some old equipment that had been sitting around: bowls, leashes, and a big wire dog crate. A crate big enough to fit an 18-by-36-inch box inside. Piece by piece, it felt like they were solving an abstract problem together.

Around the same time, Manard told Toby he wanted a cellphone, so that they could talk anytime. She remembers him saying he knew someone who could get him one, but it would cost \$500. She liked the idea of being able to talk anytime, but the price seemed exorbitant. Toby didn't get searched going into the prison, so she snuck in a phone and gave it to him.

"That was one line crossed," she says. "And then the next lines just got bigger."

Over the course of a few weeks, they talked on the phone for 12,000 minutes—200 hours. One morning, Toby's husband found a text message that read: "good morning, baby. I love you." Toby told him it was a wrong number. He said he didn't think she was capable of cheating. "My naive thought was that if she wasn't having relations with me," he would later say, "then she wouldn't be having them with anyone else either."

Toby took more than \$40,000 out of her 401(k). She bought a used truck for \$5,000 and parked it in a storage unit between her house and the prison. When she first stopped in to look at the storage facility, she was told that because the building was new, it didn't have security cameras yet—which seemed perfect.

It all still felt like a game. She wasn't plotting to help a convicted murderer escape from prison. She was just figuring out solutions to new problems. Then, suddenly, they were setting a date—Sunday, February 12, 2006—and going over details. Manard told her he would get in the box, and that the box would be inside the crate when it was loaded onto a farm wagon and transferred into Toby's van, along with some dogs she was taking to an adoption event that day. She went to Walmart and bought men's clothes and enough food to last a month.

Toby says Manard assured her that she wouldn't get in trouble, that everyone would think he'd manipulated her. She says she never thought she'd be gone forever. She figured she'd come home in a couple of months, tops. She convinced herself that her family would hardly notice: Her sons were 21 and 25 by then and had left home, and she already felt invisible to her husband.

Looking back, Toby says a lot of what would have been reasonable questions were crowded out by an all-consuming desire to be with this man she'd now known for a year but had never kissed, never hugged, barely even touched. Instead of thinking through all the foreseeable consequences of their plan, she spent a lot of time imagining what it might be like to hold Manard's hand, to hug him, to, as she puts it, "live like real people."

The night before the escape was both terrifying and exhilarating. Toby was in the living room, finishing that week's Safe Harbor newsletter. Her husband was in the recliner, watching TV. He got up and told her he was going to bed. She said she still had work to do.

"Okay, goodnight," he said as he ascended the stairs.

Instead of saying "Goodnight" back to him, though, Toby accidentally said "Goodbye."

As she heard the word leaving her mouth, she panicked. She could feel a twisting dread in her chest.

"I thought, *Holy crap! What if he asks me why I said goodbye?*"

He didn't.

Toby didn't sleep that night. She kept going over all the things she needed to do. She worried she'd forget something, say something awkward, do the wrong thing.

The temperature the next morning was in the teens, and the wind was spitting snow. When she

pulled her van up to the prison gate, she could see the dog handlers lined up, stomping their feet to stay warm while they waited for her to take their dogs. But there was no farm wagon, no wire dog crate. So she went into the officers' shack to make small talk and wait.

As the minutes passed, she figured the wagon wasn't coming. She was almost relieved. She could just go to the adoption event and go back to her life. But then she saw the farm wagon come around the corner.

Suddenly it all seemed real. She saw how flat the wagon's tires were, how it just *looked* like it was carrying something much heavier than a few bowls and leashes. But nobody else seemed to notice. She asked the guards to open the gate.

She opened the back of her van for the dogs. She remembers an officer patting one of the dogs and saying, "Well, I hope you get adopted today!" As the dogs were loaded into the back, she opened the side door, so the inmates could load the crate. Once it was in, she quickly slid the door closed.



Driving away from the prison, she thought maybe Manard wasn't in the box after all. She called back behind her: "John, are you there? Are you in the crate?"

There was no answer. Again, she felt relieved. Planning the escape had been fun, but she was glad to be going to the adoption event. Then an arm burst out of the box, and she heard Manard laughing.

He told her he was hyperventilating and asked her to let him out, so she pulled over to open the crate. In the back of the van, he changed into the clothes she'd brought him. "Drive, Toby, drive!" Manard said. She headed toward her house, to put the dogs back in their kennels. Manard said they'd save time if she just let them out in a field, but she insisted. "I was not about to drop these dogs out in the field," she says.

At her place, while Toby put the dogs in the barn, Manard went into the house and took two pistols. Toby never liked guns, but Manard told her they'd be carrying a lot of cash, and this would scare away anyone who tried to mess with them.

Then they went to the storage facility. He drove the truck out and she backed the van in. She locked the unit, hopped into the truck, and off they went.

The plan was to take a circuitous route to a lakeside cabin in Tennessee that Manard had reserved under a fake name, using the cellphone Toby had given him. They wanted to stay off interstates and big highways. First they headed north, then east toward the Great Smoky Mountains. Manard was talking so fast, Toby could barely keep up. He kept giggling.

“Look, Toby! I’m driving! It’s been 10 years and I can still drive!”

He was eating the snacks he’d asked her to buy, little chocolate donuts and Twizzlers. She sort of expected there to be a moment when they’d stop and maybe kiss for the first time. But he told her they needed to drive. They needed to get away.

A few hours later they stopped at a rest stop. They came out of their respective bathrooms at the same time. That’s when he leaned down and kissed her. In front of the rest-stop bathrooms. It was the first time she’d kissed a man other than her husband. It was what everything had been building toward. It was a moment of pure elation.

She doesn’t remember how long it lasted, but she remembers that the next thing he did was ask her to give him her cellphone so he could throw it in a lake.

As he drove, Toby navigated with a road map. It would have been a 10-hour drive if they’d taken the most direct route, but because they stuck to back roads, the trip lasted nearly 24 hours. After not sleeping the night before the escape, and not sleeping during the drive—and after such an emotional, nerve-racking experience—Toby was exhausted. So much so that, as they got close to the cabin and she opened her laptop to find the directions she’d downloaded, she couldn’t remember what she’d named the file.

“This isn’t a game, Toby,” she recalls Manard saying. “What did you name it?”

She suggested that they pull over at a diner and ask for directions.

“He just went ballistic,” Toby says. He started screaming, driving erratically, hitting the steering wheel. “He said, ‘I don’t even know why I brought you, anyway. I should just throw you out of this truck right now and just keep on going. I don’t need you!’ ”

She’d never seen him act like this. It dawned on her that she didn’t have her phone. She’d given him

all her cash. She didn’t even know where she was. She started crying.

Then, as quickly as his anger came, he was calm again. He told her he’d pull into the diner and she could ask for directions. She was confused, uneasy. But he was back to normal.

When they finally got to the cabin, they—well, they did exactly what you’d expect two lovers on the run to do. “It wasn’t awkward,” she says, looking back. “That was probably the best part of our relationship, honestly.” Then they fell asleep in each other’s arms.

When Toby woke up, it took her a second to remember where she was and what they’d done. She’d brought a mandolin, and Manard played her “Brown Eyed Girl.” He bought her a box of chocolates (using her cash) and they spent hours in the cabin, holding each other and talking. It was the best Valentine’s Day she’d ever had.

Manard was, she says, very romantic. He’d fill the tub with bubbles, light candles around the room, then tell her to take a bath and relax. Every day, when she got dressed, he complimented her. “Wow,” he’d say. “That outfit looks so nice!” When she cooked dinner, he would tell her how great it was, how she was the best cook in the world, how he’d never had fried chicken that good.

They’d planned to lay low for a few weeks, but Manard wanted to go out. There were so many things he wanted to see, so many foods he hadn’t had in 10 years. So nearly every day, they went somewhere and did something.

She’d wanted to take some of her dogs with them, but he’d told her they couldn’t, and she missed having a pet. One day they went to a pet store. He said he wanted to buy her a parakeet. She liked a tiny yellow one she saw, but he said he was getting her a blue one instead.

“I’m buying this parakeet, not you,” she remembers him saying. “Don’t think you can tell me what to do. I’m not your fucking husband.”

She left the store and waited by the truck. He gave her the blue parakeet and told her he wanted to name it Lynyrd, after Lynyrd Skynyrd, because the band sang the song “Free Bird”—and that’s what he was, a free bird.

She said she didn’t like that name.

“You’re not naming this bird,” he told her. “I’m naming it. Its name is Lynyrd.”

She stuck her finger in the cage, and the bird bit her.

On their fourth or fifth day, they went to Nashville and saw the movie *Walk the Line*, about Johnny Cash's pursuit of and eventual marriage to then-married June Carter.

"John just loved it," Toby says. "He loved Johnny Cash; he loved all the songs and the music in it. And he'd say, 'That movie's about us. I never thought I could have you, and look what I've got.'"

They went to a guitar store, where Manard went down the row, trying out guitar after guitar. He asked to play one in a glass case, priced at \$10,000. She says he was "in heaven," and she loved watching him play.

That day for lunch they went to a McDonald's drive-through. She had her computer with her, and opened it up while they were in line. McDonald's had Wi Fi, and when her browser loaded, she saw a headline that said something like "Dog Lady Implicated in Escape."

She screamed.

"You said that they'd think you manipulated me!" She pointed at her screen. "Look at this! I'm in trouble!"

He slammed the laptop shut. This, he told her, was why they hadn't turned on the TV in the cabin.

He told her they weren't going to get caught. And if they did, the authorities would blame him. It's not like she would end up in prison or anything. This calmed her, but she wasn't hungry anymore.

One evening, Manard said he'd make her a fire in the fireplace back at the cabin and they could sleep next to the glowing flames. "Wouldn't that be romantic?" he said.

But by the time they got back to the area, it was late and there was no place to buy firewood.

"He got so mad," Toby says. "Like the whole world was against him having a fire that night."

Snow was falling, and as they drove along the winding mountain roads, Manard jerked the wheel back and forth, causing the truck to slide and fishtail.

"I can't believe we can't find any fucking firewood," she remembers him saying. "I'm just going to drive this truck off of a cliff."

As the dark mountain sky skidded past and they teetered near cliffs, Toby wondered for the first time how she was going to get out of all this.

On their 12th day, they woke up, put on wigs,

and drove a few hours to Chattanooga. Manard had never been to an IMAX theater, and a mall there had one. He'd wanted to see a documentary about sharks. But when they got to the theater, they realized that Chattanooga is in a different time zone, and the shark movie had already started. They went to see a movie about lions instead.

At the concession stand, they noticed a woman buying snacks for a group of kids, and Manard offered to help her carry the food into the theater. When he sat down, he wondered aloud what the woman would think if she knew an escaped convict was carrying snacks for her kids. Toby loved Manard, but by now she was constantly trying to gauge his mood. She was relieved that he liked the lion movie.

Afterward, they went to a barbecue restaurant—and he got upset when he stained his white shirt. Then he wanted to see the snake exhibit at the zoo. But by the time they found the zoo, it was closed. "Then he was mad because he couldn't see this big snake exhibit," Toby says.

They went to Sears so he could buy a GPS—he blamed her for not being able to find the zoo. She went to use the restroom, and when she came out, he had disappeared. She looked around the store, but couldn't find him anywhere. She began to panic. She was all alone. No phone. No money. Then he jumped out from behind a display and scared her.

"He thought it was so funny," she says. "I didn't think it was funny at all."

Leaving the mall, they walked by two U.S. marshals without realizing it.

It was getting dark as they cruised down the interstate. Toby was staring out the window, thinking about the mess she'd gotten herself into, when she saw an incredibly bright light in the distance. So bright that it looked like daylight. She thought there must be construction ahead.

As they got closer, she saw traffic backed up along the service road and a sideways police car blocking the ramp.

"Toby," Manard said. "This is for us."

She turned to look at him.

"What's for us?"

Before he could respond, she understood. Through the windshield, she could see what looked like 50 police cars. She remembers thinking, *Who do they think we are that they need 50 police cars?*

“What do you want me to do, baby?” Manard asked.

“Well,” she said. “If they turn on their lights and tell you to pull over, you have to pull over. That’s the law!”

He told her he would. But then a police car came from behind and swerved in front of them, and Manard got angry.

“They’re trying to kill us,” she remembers him saying.

He told her he’d drive until they ran out of gas, then he floored it. She looked at the gas gauge and saw that they had three-quarters of a tank. He was weaving around other cars, driving on the shoulder. Toby watched 18-wheelers fly by, inches from her face.

At one point, Manard pulled off the highway and drove across the median, dodging pine trees and bushes and shrubs as the truck bounced along. They popped back out on the other side of the highway, now headed in the opposite direction.

Though they were going more than 100 miles an hour, Toby felt like the world was moving in slow motion. And she couldn’t hear a thing. Not sirens. Not squealing tires. Not Manard. It was just cars and trees and flashing lights slowly passing by.

Manard was driving on the shoulder again, then through the grass alongside the highway. When he pulled back onto the pavement, the tires locked up and he lost control of the truck. They turned and sped straight toward a tree. As she saw the tree approaching, Toby prayed that God would let her die in the wreck.

“I wanted to be done,” she says.

Then they hit the tree.

Suddenly, she could hear again. Manard was asking her over and over, “Are you okay?” She had shards of glass in her hair and cuts on her head. She couldn’t get enough air to speak. Steam was pouring out of the hood of the truck.

Manard told her he didn’t want to leave her, but that if he didn’t get out of the truck, the police would start shooting. She remembers seeing him get out with his hands up. Then a man with what she recalls as “a black machine gun” started yelling at her to get out of the vehicle.

She tried to explain that her seat belt was stuck and that her door was caved in, but she couldn’t catch her breath to talk. She remembers the officer grabbing

her, pulling her out through the window, and throwing her on the ground. Then she had a gun to the back of her head as she was handcuffed.

When she looked up, she saw Manard coming around the back of the pickup truck, handcuffed and dragging several officers.

“Are you okay, baby?” he shouted through the chaos. “Are you okay?”

She said she was.

Despite Manard’s promises that she wouldn’t get in trouble, Toby was charged with aiding and abetting aggravated escape, taking contraband into a prison, and providing firearms to a felon. She was sentenced to 27 months. She later learned that authorities had tracked them to the cabin because Toby had used that address for the paperwork for the truck.

“It turns out, I’m not a good criminal,” Toby says.

Her first endeavor into lawbreaking divided her family. For nearly two weeks, they’d feared the worst. Toby’s father, who had already been sick, died eight weeks after her arrest. Her mother and some of her siblings believed Toby’s felonious behavior and subsequent arrest hastened his death. But her mother loved her unconditionally, and came to visit her in prison almost every week. Toby stayed in contact with her two brothers, but she never reestablished a relationship with her four sisters. Their family had always been private. Having their lives exposed this way was embarrassing and painful. Her sons refused to speak to her. Her husband filed for divorce, and it was finalized the day before she went to prison.

In an email, Toby’s ex-husband, Pat Young, said he doesn’t remember many of the incidents Toby describes from their marriage, or remembers them differently. But he said he never tried to squash her dreams. Even though he wasn’t a fan of the dog program, for instance, he’d helped her convert the barn into a kennel. “She was very accustomed to doing what she wanted to do,” he said, adding that her crime created ripples of suffering for their family. “It affected me physically, mentally, and monetarily.” And it was especially hard on their sons, “who had to say, ‘Yeah, that’s my mom.’”

Young is remarried now; he and his wife like to play golf together. Of Toby, he said: “She is of no consequence to me.”

Toby knew the men’s prison in Lansing was violent. Women’s prison, she learned, wasn’t like that.

There were rivalries and gossip—“high-school drama on steroids,” she says—but prison is also where she formed the strongest friendships of her life. For the first time, she felt like the people around her would do anything to help her. And with no responsibilities, she had time to think about all the things she’d been avoiding her whole life.

Manard got 10 years added to his sentence. He wasn’t supposed to communicate with Toby, but he figured out where she was and wrote to other women there with notes to give to her. He sent her drawings and song lyrics and letters describing their love.

But the more she talked with her new friends in prison, and the more she reflected on everything that had led up to the escape, the more those letters from Manard began to seem a little immature. He would say things like “I’m your knight in shining armor and you’re trapped in this tower and I wish I could ride in on my horse and rescue you.”

“I got that and I thought, *This is so not realistic*,” she says. “I just decided I have to be done with this.” It was like she was slowly waking up from a dream.

When she got out, she moved in with her mother, but everyone in Kansas City knew what she had done, and she felt uncomfortable in public. She found a web-design job in Boston, and decided to move. But she returned to Kansas City several months later, on Christmas Eve 2008.

Toby’s younger son had been diagnosed with Hodgkin’s lymphoma. During most of the treatment, Toby gave her sons space. But as her younger son’s condition worsened, she decided to go to the hospital to see him.

“I can’t tell you why I did what I did,” Toby told him. “I haven’t figured it out yet myself. But I want you to know I’ve never stopped loving you.”

He looked at her and said he knew that.

She asked to give him a hug.

He said no.

She asked if she could come back and see him again.

He said no.

She came back anyway, two weeks later. He was in a coma. She touched his face and held his hand and told him he’d fought long enough, and that it was okay for him to go. Then she kissed him and left. He died soon after.

Six months later, in October 2009, Toby got

married again, in a simple courthouse ceremony. Her husband’s name is Chris, and he makes her feel safe and supported. He didn’t balk when he first learned her story. He even encouraged her to reach back out to John Manard. Toby and Manard started exchanging letters and talking on the phone. Toby sent him a Christmas basket. Then Toby and Chris went to visit him in prison.

“It was so good for all three of us,” she says.

Toby and Manard haven’t communicated in a few years now, and attempts to reach him for this story were unsuccessful. But in a letter he wrote to *The Kansas City Star* in 2018, he said he’d loved Toby. “Why did I stay with her once I was out if I was just manipulating? I NEVER manipulated her in the least!” he wrote. “I loved Toby with all that I was.”

These days, Toby is trying to help other women. She’s made workbooks to help women in prison process their feelings and circumstances, to break the destructive cycles that put them behind bars.

She’s also started telling her own story in public. She’s given just a handful of speeches, but each time she’s been met with a line of women coming up to her afterward, confessing their own secret desire to escape. Her story resonates, she says, because so many women wonder if they wouldn’t do the same thing. They feel pressure to smile and pretend their life is fine, even when trapped in a bad relationship or a bad job or any number of circumstances that seem beyond their control. Toby thinks these women are inspired by her not only because she had the guts to leave, but also because she tells her story without shame.

Toby is still a rule follower. She always wears her seat belt. She’s always on time. She says she “freaks out” if Chris turns the car around in someone else’s driveway. She certainly never wants to get arrested again. But she says she’s come to realize that some rules—like keeping a redeemable person locked up for life—aren’t just.

Sometimes she’s asked if she regrets what she did: leaving her family, helping a felon escape, living on the run for two weeks. She always says regrets are a waste of time.

“You can’t change the past,” she says. “I like the person I am today, and I wouldn’t be the person I am today if I hadn’t gone through all that.”

Would she do it over again?

She lets out a sweet, rueful laugh. “No way.” •