

Word Count: 750 Words

### **“You Are My Reason”**

Imagine finding it at the bus stop. Rendering it a mere product of fate seemed fitting for a mind as despondent as that of Lisa Montgomery, who trudged each day in the same way through the drudgery deceptively known as life. She lacked the inspiration to live beyond mundanity; to live for a reason. With nothing but an ageing number to prove she was indeed living, she found herself grudgingly plodding up the hill towards the bus stop on Walmer Avenue, gathering the slightest resolve to go about her day.

Looking up from the gaze she held with a single crease in the smooth sidewalk, she maneuvered expertly around the puddle of soupy snow that laid before her. *Nice try, Universe.* With nowhere else to wander but the extremities of her mind, she recalled her grandfather's last words. Gerald Montgomery had always said: “Find your reason to live.” Lisa tried, but the world had collapsed following her grandfather's unexpected passing. Without the person who fostered her every move, frankly, she could never find her reason. Eventually, she stopped searching entirely.

Looking at her watch, she scurried across an empty street. *Dammit. Josie's going to kill me.* She had already been late to work twice this week. There was only one bus each morning that reached Knoxville, and Lisa could not miss it. Work was everything; rather, it was the only thing she had.

“Scuse me!” hollered a distant voice. “Are you familiar with Walmer Avenue?”

Lisa turned abruptly. The street was empty, save for an elderly man whose peppy yet laggard stroll mimicked the dire happenings of Lisa's life.

Reluctantly, Lisa began to speak. “You're walking on—”

“I know,” the man interrupted wryly, “I just don't know where the bus stop is.”

“I’m headed there, so I guess you could follow me…” said Lisa, her voice trailing off, hoping he would disregard her offer.

Lisa set about hurrying down the concrete path, her eyes fixed ahead. The man kept pace with her, his face overcome by a triumphant expression despite his coarse breaths.

“I’m Mr. Griffiths,” spoke the man, breaking the silence.

Lisa winced as her foot encountered an uneven slab of concrete. “Nice,” she retorted, contrasting Mr. Griffiths’ fervid demeanour. “I’m Lisa.”

“You seem awfully defeated. No wonder you’re headed up to Knoxville.”

Lisa snickered under her breath. “I’m going up there for a reason—for work.”

“That’s your reason? Boring.”

Somehow, Lisa felt as though this prodded deeper than rationalizing travel endeavours. “Do you have a better one?” she scoffed.

Mr. Griffiths shifted his gaze elsewhere.

The now-silent pair drew nearer to the blue-coloured pillars of the bus stop, glistening amidst the golden rays of morning sunshine. Mr. Griffiths uncovered a tattered brown wallet from the depths of his pocket, and reached out towards the ticket dispenser.

“Who’s that?” asked Lisa, pointing to the old family portrait held in his wallet, unusually desperate to pass the time.

A bittersweet expression crossed Mr. Griffiths’ face. “That—” his voice quivered. “That was my family.” He motioned for Lisa to sit down. She did so slowly, hesitantly receiving the frayed photograph into her open palm.

He took a deep breath. “For the longest time, I worked at a mill with my dearest friend, Gerry. Then, Gerry died. I was completely lost, so I abandoned those closest to me. But that’s

not what Gerry would've wanted. Not then, not now, not ever. I know that when we meet again, he'll ask: 'Charlie, what was your reason to live?'"

Lisa listened intently, her fingers trembling.

As the bus came into sight, Mr. Griffiths' eyes welled with tears. "I have to be able to live well enough to answer that in a manner Gerry would be proud of."

He chuckled dismally. "He had high standards."

Silence overcame them. He continued, "My family lives in Knoxville, and that's where he'd want me to start. That's my reason."

As the dulcet creaking of the bus grew louder, Mr. Griffiths stood up. "Coming?" he asked. Lisa shook her head.

"But your job? Isn't that your reason?" he asked. Lisa shook her head again.

"I'm sure my gra—" she breathed, "I'm sure Gerry would be proud of you."

Mr. Griffiths smiled faintly.

The doors shut, and Lisa watched as the bus sped away. A single tear trickled down her rosy cheek, plummeting towards the old family photograph she still clutched, unknowingly, close to her heart. *Grandpa Gerry, I finally found it. You are my inspiration. You are my reason.*