

# The Phantom Gramps

The Phantom Gramps began to manifest on the third morning on the seawall, casting a shadow over Sol's otherwise hopeful demeanor. As she climbed aboard for breakfast, the narrator couldn't help but notice the unusual gleam in her eyes, the hollow, faraway look she carried as if a second presence lingered behind her. This unsettling energy, which the narrator referred to as the "waiting child," filled the air around Sol, making her seem like a different person altogether. In an attempt to draw her back to reality, the narrator offered her food, but she barely touched the plate. Instead, their attention was soon caught by the arrival of an official vessel, prompting a conversation about a man named Griff whom they hoped to find. Sol's brief agreement to search for him seemed to wane as she described him in vague terms, mentioning his various roles as a mechanic, vendor, and part-time actor. The ambiguity surrounding Griff's existence raised suspicions, making the narrator wonder whether Griff was nothing more than a figment of Sol's imagination, crafted to help her escape from her troubled past with Richard.

Their search for Griff continued, taking them along the coast to a town called Ghent, where Sol insisted he was located. However, when they arrived at the designated spot, they found nothing but ruins and broken remnants of a forgotten place. No town existed there, only the remnants of a brick chimney and an abandoned breakwater, further deepening the mystery of Griff's supposed whereabouts. Undeterred, they pressed on to Baglow and Redfield, only to be met with more empty promises and no sign of Griff. It became clear to the narrator that Sol had likely conjured up the idea of Griff as a way to cope with her isolation, a beacon of hope created out of necessity rather than reality. The emotional toll of these false hopes began to show in Sol, making the narrator question how much of their journey was grounded in truth and how much was an attempt to escape a past that refused to let go.

As the days passed peacefully on the water, the bond between the narrator and Sol seemed to grow, though there were still moments of discomfort. They shared tranquil evenings fishing under the stars, but the fish Sol caught seemed unhealthy, adding an ominous undertone to their otherwise serene routine. Approaching Port Mineral, the narrator grew more concerned about Sol's future, hoping to find safety and respite among calmer, more stable neighbors. Their arrival at the harbor brought no immediate answers, but the narrator ventured ashore to explore, leaving Sol behind to continue fishing. When he returned, he found Sol still at her task, but just as the day felt to be slipping into another cycle of quiet monotony, a familiar voice broke the silence. It was Griff, standing on the shore with an overnight bag, both surprised and relieved to see Sol.

Their reunion was filled with bittersweet emotions, and Sol's face reflected a mixture of joy and resignation as she moved toward Griff. Griff, in turn, seemed to exhale a breath of relief upon seeing her, as though his own burdens had been lifted, yet his past was hinted at in his weary expression. Despite the seemingly positive reunion, there were lingering complexities about Griff's background that made the narrator wary, unsure of whether this man was truly the protector Sol believed him to be. Nevertheless, Sol asked Griff to join them on their journey to Canada, convinced that this was the beginning of something new. The narrator, though cautious, felt a sense of duty to extend kindness to Griff, wondering whether the new dynamic on board would shift the course of their journey. As they set sail toward Jolie, the warmth of the sun provided a sense of hope, filling the air with the possibility of new beginnings, even as the uncertainties of their past loomed in the distance.