

Excerpt from *Griffin Six* by Tiffany Carby

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Sargent Manny Griffin has just returned home with injuries from war and his savior, military working dog, Sierra Six.

My mother's tight embrace made me flinch and my Pop saw the pain written all over my face.

"Dafne, the boy has injuries, don't tackle him like a football player," he said, shooing her off me as he came in for a half hug, much lighter than my mother.

"Oh honey, I'm so sorry, I just couldn't contain myself," she said as she was still wrapped around my other side.

"Well, hang on a minute, Ma," I un-stuck myself from my mother's embrace and went over to where Six was sitting. She hadn't moved a muscle, staying right where I told her, though from her training I knew she wouldn't move.

"Ma... Pop... this is Sierra Six, my new pup," I brought her closer. "She's still getting used to her new life as a family member instead of a working dog, so give her a little time to warm up." Pop kneeled down and held out his palm to her to see if she'd come to him.

Instinctively, she looked up at me for approval, which I nodded and she went to him, putting her paw in his hand.

"Huh, I didn't know she knew to do that," I said as Pop petted on her.

"She's quite the little lady," he said showing her some affection. He whispered to her as if the rest of us couldn't hear him, "And thank you, my sweet Sierra, for bringing my boy home to me."

Ma was back at my side, looking over my injuries, my leg brace, and my shoulder sling. She ran her smooth hands across my cheekbones, and I'd be lying if I didn't admit a tear fell as I felt the comfort of my mother's touch: a touch I hadn't felt in many years.

Pop couldn't get enough of Six, and if I didn't know any better, I'd say she had a little crush on him too. She kept nuzzling him with her snout, trying to get more and more pets.

"I like this girl, Manny," he kidded, "She might be the best girl you've ever brought home!"

"Pop, I'm pretty sure she's the only girl I've ever brought home!" Ma laughed and we all headed to the barracks room to collect my things. Pop held onto Six's leash and she stayed right by his side.

"You better not be spoiling her already," I said, calling back to them as Ma and I walked arm in arm. "She's like a guard dog, Pop, she's *ferocious!*" I couldn't help but chuckle at myself. She could be ferocious if the need presented itself. I had seen her in action a time or two. And I always knew it was her too. Most of the German Shepherds on base had a lot of blonde coloring mixed into their fur patterns. Six was almost solid black, with spice colors sprinkled around her ears and haunches. Her legs were pure muscle and hair there was the lightest color fur on her entire body. Not only was she smart, but she was indeed a beautiful dog.

"Don't you listen to him, sweet girl," Pop whispered to Six again, "Your grandma has a pretty diamond collar waiting for you in the truck and I've got all sorts of things picked out for you at the house, like a comfy new feather doggie bed and a pretty pink water bowl!"

"Dad!" I called out to him as we entered the building.

"What? It's only fair to let a man spoil his only granddaughter, Manny... isn't that right Sierra?" he reached down and petted behind her ears and she reared up into his hands as if she approved.

"Honey, your father is excited," Ma whispered to me and she and I went in to gather my things. I talked a soldier at the front desk into helping me load my pack into Pop's truck so we could get going faster. There was no lifting for me, for quite a while, and I was having trouble with the idea of not being able to do for myself.

My dad drove as Sierra Six and I made ourselves comfortable in the back. At first, she sat straight up as if she was a passenger, but after a little convincing, she laid down in the seat and put her head over on my leg. It wasn't long and we were both asleep. The kind of sleep you sleep when all the cares in the world are gone.

It had taken a long time, but Six and I both were safe and at peace. And I think we both felt it as we crashed into the extended cab pickup truck that was headed home.