

*The following is an exclusive excerpt from JASMINE ABSOLUTE, the debut novel by Briana Scott and Carl H. Thompson, available now on Amazon.com, both in print and for Kindle devices and apps.*

*In chapter 5 of the novel, Jasmine Griffin is enjoying her weekly “Game Night” with her friends, her brother Sean and his wife, and Jasmine’s boyfriend, Kahlil. It also serves as Jasmine’s “origin story.”*

*This excerpt © 2012 Briana Scott and Carl H. Thompson*

## **5**

***Tuesday, Sept. 14, 9:17 p.m.***

“Hit repeat, Jazz. We need to hear that again!”

My mother passed away from AIDS when I was eight. She had lived a hard life, growing up in one of the poorest, most crime-ridden areas in Brooklyn. She had apparently kept to herself a lot when she was young, because her parents didn’t want her out in the street fooling around and falling in with a bad crowd. And she didn’t, for the most part.

Until she started getting interested in boys.

Some of the guys that my mom hung out with as a teenager were the worst of the worst. The ones who weren’t lazy were either slick-talkers with no real plan for getting ahead, or they were outright thugs. The same challenges women face today with the men out there.

My mother had my brother, Sean, when she was nineteen. It caused a big problem in her family. They were all devout, church-going Christians, and back then, showing up as a pregnant teenager on Sunday morning was like having the mark of Satan upon you.

Soon, though, with my grandmother’s help, she was able to raise Sean. It wasn’t easy, though. Sean still remembers eating a lot of butter sandwiches and drinking a lot of sugared-up Kool-Aid when he was a little toddler. My mother never saw Sean’s dad again after Sean was born. Nobody knows whether he’s in jail, or dead, or a millionaire on Park Avenue.

Sean was four years and two months old when I was born, and four years after that, my little brother, Nathaniel, came along. Everybody called him “Little Nate.” Surprisingly, Nathaniel and I had the same father, Nathaniel, Sr. He was probably the only long-term relationship that my mother ever had, even though they both fooled around between my birth and Little Nate’s. It was the first time my mother had really been in love with a man, after a string of relationships with abusive or trifling men. I even heard that, when she thought that she might marry Nathaniel, only to find out he was hooking up with some other woman, my mother tried to kill herself in the bathroom, by slicing her wrists with a broken Witch Hazel bottle.

My grandmother convinced my mom to move down to Atlanta, to clear her head after the breakup with Nathaniel, and to give us kids, especially Little Nate, a better place to grow up. Unfortunately, my mom still had some growing up to do. She soon got tied up in drugs, and started shooting heroin. It didn’t take long for her to get AIDS from an infected needle, and when she died, it wasn’t pretty. I can still remember how sunken-in her eyes were the last time I saw

her. She was only thirty-one years old. After she died, my grandmother moved down here to raise us.

One of the good things that my mother, and all of my family, passed on to me was an appreciation for what people call “old school” music: R&B and Funk music from the seventies and eighties. That’s all my mom used to play when we grew up, and all my grandmother played when she took care of us. So nowadays, it’s funny to listen to Kahlil, who’s thirty-five—seven years older than I am—when he talks about groups like Graham Central Station and Cameo and Bootsy’s Rubber Band and Parliament, because I can be right there with him, naming off songs and albums. Hell, most of these groups had already peaked by the time I came out of my mom’s belly.

*That’s the Way of the World* by Earth, Wind and Fire was always one of my favorite albums when I was little. My mom used to bounce me on her knee as she looked in my eyes and sung the title song. I hadn’t heard that album in years, until last year, when Kahlil bought me the CD for my birthday. It was the most thoughtful thing he had ever done for me. You can bet there was some skippadoo-ing that night. Yes, indeed.

I don’t remember exactly how Game Night got started, but I think it was Kahlil looking for an excuse to hang out with his buddies and talk trash about women, and drink. When he and I got together, I complained about it being just a loud party for the fellas, so he let me bring in some of my friends, too. When I got the condo, we had a big housewarming party, and we’ve been meeting here ever since, on Tuesday nights. Over time, it’s ended up being more of a get-together for my friends than for Kahlil’s, but he doesn’t mind. He says that most of his friends were just looking for a place to get drunk anyway. At my place on Tuesdays, we’re all family.

And after the day I’d had, I needed this Tuesday night more than any other.

As soon as *That’s the Way of the World* finished playing in the CD player, Kahlil asked me to hit repeat to start it again. This would be the third time I had heard it in twenty-four hours. We were listening to it last night while we talked about careers, then we started playing it when everybody started showing up, and now he was asking for it again. Man, I grew up on the thing, and I didn’t want to hear it again. There’s only so many times you can stand “Yearnin’ Learnin’.”

But like the good girlfriend I am, I got it cranked up one more time. Once again, the sound of that famous guitar-and-bass line that opens “Shining Star” came pumping through the speakers, just before the whole band kicked in, led by a big, long “blam” from the horns. Immediately, Kahlil started snapping his fingers and grooving to the music. “Ah, yeah,” he yells, like it’s the first time he’s heard the song today.

Kahlil was sitting at a card table—the Official Jasmine Griffin Game Night Card Table, as I like to call it, thank you—across from Sean and his gorgeous wife, Tiffany. I still don’t know how Sean landed somebody like Tiffany. My brother’s OK, and OK-looking, I guess, but not Tiffany-catching. She’s five foot-nine. He’s five-eight. She’s so intelligent it scares me. Sean’s not dumb at all, but he won’t be showing up on *Jeopardy* any time soon. She’s about a year away from finishing a law degree at Georgia State. My brother is a male nurse. You do the math.

Tara was there at the table, too, with her husband, Chip “screw-your-head-off-like-a-soda” Cooper. It was always embarrassing to hear Kahlil try to talk football with someone who actually played the game instead of sitting on the couch on Sunday eating wings in front of the TV. He’d try to start a conversation with Chip about rules that don’t even exist in football.

Classic armchair quarterback stuff. I sometimes look at Kahlil when he's trying to "man up" with Chip, and I'm thinking, *Dude, stop. Just stop. I love you anyway, but you've got to stop.*

Kim was busy looking over my CD collection, trying in vain to find something new that I had bought. It was mostly old school, with just a few new ones. I did have the new Dave Matthews Band album, and—Lord help me—Justin Bieber's CD. Kim had a good time showing the CD off to everybody, making a point to make sure that they all had a chance to laugh at my horrible taste in music. I don't care what anybody says, that boy's songs get in your head. Anyway, she's got a long way to go before she lives down that Air Supply CD in her collection.

As it turned out, tonight wasn't so much a game night as it was a night to chill. There was a Monopoly board on the table, but that game had lasted only thirty minutes, because Tiffany had already bought up most of the properties by then. We all decided it was a good night to just hang out, anyway. Most of us had had a rough day.

Meeka and I shuttled back and forth between the kitchen and living room, serving up pizza and beer and soda and pretzels and fruit for everybody. Nearly an hour had gone by before we could both stop and spend a few minutes visiting in the kitchen. Meeka had been on assignment for two weeks, so this was the first chance that we'd had to chat. I got right down to business about that text that she'd left me that morning.

"So," I said, trying to pretend that I didn't have a mischievous, gossip-hungry smile on my face. "What's going on with one of the sorority sisters?" Meeka and I had both been members of Tau Kappa Nu sorority at Freeman College. We were a pretty close group, so if there was trouble with any one of the sisters, it was big news.

"OK, I'm really not supposed to be telling you this," she said quietly. "I mean, I'm *really* not supposed to be telling you this, because it's an ongoing investigation and I could get fired."

"Will you just cut to the chase, please?" I pleaded anxiously.

"OK. You remember Donna Aderhold, right?"

"Yeah. Don't tell me she's a prostitute." Donna was the loosest of all the girls in the sorority, even though she tried to hide it. She was a good friend, and a one of the nicest people you could ever meet, but her one weakness was that she was just a tramp. We used to joke that when she was around, there wasn't a dry dick in the house.

"No. Surprisingly, no," Meeka said, chuckling. She knew as well as I did how likely that was. "It's her son. Remember Kelvin?"

"Ooh, yeah. He's gotta be, what, eighteen by now?" Donna had given birth to Kelvin when she was a senior in high school. Even that didn't stop her from sleeping around when she got into the sorority.

"Seventeen," Meeka corrected. She reached over to a platter of celery and dip that had been picked over out in the living room, and started munching on it. "OK. Kelvin is involved in some deep, deep shit. Donna was having trouble out of him, so she moved him up to Detroit to stay with Donna's brother for a while. And do you know, that man got Kelvin involved in some kind of housing scheme."

"What?" I felt my eyebrows shoot toward the ceiling.

"Yes, honey. I don't know how it all happened, but Donna's brother, Wesley, apparently got mixed up with these guys who are calling themselves 'sovereign citizens.' They're claiming that the laws of America don't apply to them, and so they have the right to draw up deeds to houses that don't belong to them."

"OK, wait, wait, wait," I said, waving my hand. Meeka sometimes spoke a little too fast, without giving enough detail. "You can't just take somebody's house if they own it."

“Well, most of the owners are trying to sell these houses, and these ‘sovereign’ guys come along and draw up deeds for the houses and claim them. Nothing they say the government can do about it.”

“That’s crazy.”

“Yeah, but that’s not even all of it,” Meeka said. She put down the glass of pomegranate juice that she was sipping from and leaned in close, as if there were other people in the room that she was trying to exclude. “The sovereign guys are also tied into something else. And the more we look into it, and the more the cops look into it, the more we find out. Girl, this is big.”

There was a seriousness in her eyes that I had only seen one other time: it was three years ago, when she told me that she had breast cancer. Thankfully, she beat it, and went on to get the reporting job, but somewhere in my head I must’ve made a mental note that whenever I see that look, something very scary is going on. I felt my face matching hers, and my mouth eventually dropped open.

“Yeah,” she continued, responding to my expression. “I don’t know if it’s drugs, I don’t know if it’s guns, or some kind of terrorist thing or something, I...I just don’t know.”

My brain shut down for half a second. This was just too much information for me to process: *I’m just little Jasmine Griffin from Atlanta, by way of Brooklyn—the poor part of Brooklyn. I’m just trying to build a nice little life with my nice job and boyfriend and all that. Now I find out that my best friend is investigating international criminals?* “So what now?” I asked her, hoping that she would tell me that she turned it all over to someone else, and we could go back into the living room and get another Monopoly game going.

“Well, originally the report was just going to be on the ‘sovereign citizens,’ and we were going to let it go, but after all the other stuff came out, the news director wants us to keep going.” The “us” she was referring to was the other investigators on her team. The news department at her station, WATZ, often has the investigative reporters work together on big stories. “So we won’t actually air anything until we have all the information, and get with the police to see how far this goes. So, it could take months and months before we’re done and it actually airs. But it’s big.”

I couldn’t be angry at her. Working in news was a dream of hers for a while, and after beating the cancer, she was determined to go for it. Even though she knew as she was telling me that this was a dangerous story, I could see that, somewhere deep down, she was really happy with what she was doing with her life. After cancer, you couldn’t ask for a better result.

“All right,” I finally said, sighing and trying to smile. “You better be careful, though. I don’t want to have to end up calling Bill Clinton to come get your ass, like he did Lisa Ling’s sister.” We had both watched an Oprah Winfrey episode a few weeks earlier, about a cable news reporter named Laura Ling, who had been captured in North Korea, and was negotiated out by former President Clinton.

“Yes ma’am,” Meeka laughed. She gave me a big hug, and I knew that it was to thank me for supporting her. “I’ll be careful. Keep your cell phone on, though, just in case,” she joked.

Just then, as if in response, I heard a big roar of laughter coming from the living room. I went out and peeked around the corner. No, they weren’t laughing at Meeka’s joke.

They were laughing at Sean, Chip and Kahlil.

The three of them were in the middle of the floor, trying to do their best Jacksons imitation, while “Things I Do for You” played in the background. Kahlil was playing Jackie, or maybe Marlon. Chip was playing air guitar. I guess he was supposed to be a very light-skinned Tito. And Sean, of course, was playing Michael. Sean was always imitating Michael Jackson

when we were growing up. He was Sean's idol. I think the Destiny album might have been the first album Sean ever owned. I have to admit, whenever he did Michael, he had the whole thing down—the spinning, the crotch-grabbing, the quick neck snaps, the pointing, the lower lip tucked under the teeth to try to look fierce. Kim and Tara were screaming fans, begging “Michael” to come down off the stage.

The big laugh had come when Sean spun himself into a table and knocked over a lamp. When I came out he was still holding it. The shade had fallen off and the bulb was lying right in the palm of his hand. And it was on. Served him right.

“Hey boy!” I yelled. He jumped, both because I yelled, and because he'd just noticed that the lamp was burning the fool out of him. He threw it back up on the table. Everybody laughed again. “What in the world are y'all doing?”

“We're the Jacksons, baby,” Kahlil explained, humming and trying to shake his little no-rhythm-having shoulders to demonstrate the groove they were in.

“Well, which one of you is Tito?” Sean and Kahlil pointed to Chip, who was looking like he wanted no part of it anymore. I looked at him. “Tito, you better tell your boy that Janet's gonna come out here and bust a cap in his behind if he breaks her lamp.”

“He's good, he's good,” Chip said, playing along. He turned to Sean. “Michael, you're too excitable, man. That's what I keep telling you.”

“No...no, Tito,” Sean said, in the highest Michael Jackson voice I've ever heard. We all died laughing. “I've had it. I'm going off to make a solo album. Y'all are gonna be sorry when *Off The Wall* comes out. Sorry, I tell you!” Then he moonwalked toward the door. We were about to split our sides with laughter.

I looked over at the clock on the end table. “Kahlil, it's nine forty-five,” I said. He knew exactly what I meant.

David wasn't there yet.

We were both trying to act cool about it, but I could see the disappointment hiding on Kahlil's face. I was a little let down, too, but I decided not to give up on David yet. In the few meetings that I'd had with him, he was never the most punctual guy, but he didn't seem like the kind of person who would just stand you up without calling.

Another ten minutes went by, which is an awfully long time when you're just waiting on somebody to show up. The pizza was all gone, or cold, and we were all engaging in “home stretch conversation,” the discussions that come when you're all tired, and there are long pauses as you struggle to come up with final topics to discuss before calling it a night.

I was able to spend a few minutes with Tara and Kim, though, catching up on the events of the day, which I had been lucky enough to forget about up until then.

“So, are we going to look for something else?” Kim asked.

“I don't know,” I said. “I guess I don't have a whole lot of options if they get rid of me. I want to get the nonprofit started up—the one that I was telling you about?—but that's just it, it's nonprofit. It needs money put into it, but I won't see much coming out of it except satisfaction.”

“Well, the nonprofit will come,” Tara said. “But right now, I would focus on looking for something else if I were you. From what Ryan said, it sounds like we're on a sinking ship.” Fortunately for Tara, she's *not* me. Thanks to Chip, she'll probably never have to worry about money again. I didn't tell her about the Drake-Shipley account, but we haven't even started on the campaign yet. It could just as easily fall apart in negotiations as save anybody's job.

Lo and behold, at exactly 10:08 p.m., my doorbell rings. Kahlil is closest, and opens the door. Behind it are a couple of huge tickets. They seemed to glow, like they were sent from heaven.

David Price peeked out from behind the tickets. “I bet you never thought you would see these, did you?” Kahlil grabbed the Mayor’s Gala tickets, and David pranced into the living room, followed by his wife, Rudine.

David had a style that was a throwback to the seventies, almost—small afro, bushy moustache, leather jacket. Whenever I saw him, he looked like he had just escaped from an episode of *Sanford and Son*.

Rudine was from Jamaica, and had a pretty thick accent. It was hard to understand what the heck she was saying half the time. “Hello, Jasmeeeee,” she said. “I brut you some more of dat juck shickkin you like.” She handed me a large serving bowl covered by a towel. A delicious, spicy aroma came out from under the towel and hit my nose. I felt like floating on air. I had forgotten how good her jerk chicken was the last time she had visited.

“Where’s Malik?” Tara asked. David and Rudine had a three-month old son.

“Oh, he’s at my mudder’s house,” Rudine said. Hell, at this hour they should have just brought the kid with them and let him sleep on the couch. “That’s why we were late. And because David got home from work so late.” She glared at her husband. The rest of us took a step back. We all knew what it was like to show up angry at a party.

David seemed unfazed. He got up close to Kahlil. “I stopped off to get you a little present, baby.” He pulled what looked like a small sandwich bag out of his pocket and pushed it at Kahlil, secretly, though everyone saw it. It looked like it contained some small, cut up bits of grass.

Weed. Marijuana. Hemp. Reefer. The Stuff.

“Oh, OK, then. Let’s get the party started,” Kahlil said, smiling. “We’re gonna go out and get some fresh air,” he told everybody. He and David started heading for the balcony.

“Yeah, ‘fresh air.’ OK,” I said, trying to laugh it off, while showing that I really wasn’t cool with it.

I’m not sure exactly when Kahlil started smoking weed. I was surprised to find out about it when we were still having Game Night at his place. David was the one who brought it over then, too.

David seems like a really good guy who is loyal, and fun and smart, but I’m also sure that there are things about that man that I don’t want to know.

As I watched them go out on the balcony, I could feel everybody’s disapproval behind me. Kahlil was like the drunk uncle of the family: love the person, but there’s a problem.

Meeka was the person who broke the uncomfortable silence. “You’d better tell him not to get too high out there. It’s already after ten o’clock. He’ll be walking into the school tomorrow”—she did her best pothead imitation—“‘What’s up, li’l brotha? You got any snacks in that lunchbox? I got the munchies like a mutha, boy.’” We all started laughing.

Kahlil is the principal at Estes Elementary School, just outside of downtown. That’s one thing that I struggle with: he’s an educator, dealing with kids every day. And here he is, at ten o’clock on a school night, getting high with one of his buddies.

I don’t know. Maybe I’m taking it too seriously. My family never got into drugs, or even much alcohol, especially after dealing with my mom’s problems. But, I finally decided, Kahlil is a grown man, and being a principal is a tough job. Everybody has something that they use to

unwind a little bit. As long as he doesn't try to get me into that crap, I leave him alone. Maybe this is what Kahlil needs right now to cope.

Or, maybe I'm enabling him.

"Shoot, the way some of these young guys are today, he'd probably fit right in," Sean said. "Not just the kids, either. All of our young black men—excuse me, Kim and Tara and Chip, but—all of these young black guys today, I'm scared of them, man. Well, not scared *of* them, but scared *for* them."

"I'm not gonna make any corrections to that," Meeka said. "I'm scared *of* them. I saw this one guy the other day hanging out of the car window, had his rap music just blaring, daring anybody to say anything. And he was just looking around, like this." She craned her neck around, narrowing her eyes like a spy. "You know, like he was just looking for a victim. These guys trip me out."

"The thing is—if the Caucasian contingent can get in on this," Chip said. We chuckled. It did feel a little like we were having a family meeting with the next-door neighbors present. Awkward. But he and Tara and Kim rolled with it. Hell, I considered Kim an honorary soul sister anyway. "Folks that are our age, we had our share of wild times growing up, but when it came down to it, we knew the value of life, and family, and home, and doing the right thing. Some of these guys today, they don't care about that stuff. They want the fast money, the bling bling, and the spinning rims—"

"And they don't have any sense of the deeper things that it takes to get there," Sean piped in.

"Exactly," Chip said. "I used to see it all the time. We'd get these young guys that would come out to training camp to watch us practice, and we'd try to tell them about discipline, and nutrition and hard work and learning your play book, but nobody wanted to hear about that. They wanted to know how much money, and how many girls and did I hook up with any cheerleaders."

"You didn't, right?" Tara asked, only half-joking.

"No," Chip said immediately. "Not after you, anyway." Everybody hooted and laughed. "My point is, we've lost something with a lot of the younger guys these days. They don't have any substance in their lives."

"What about the guys with the sagging pants," Meeka said, clearly irritated. "The guys can't even walk, they've got them so low. Fool, nobody's gonna give you a damn job if you can't even keep your pants up!"

"Oh, speaking of that, what about the dudes walking around with the freaking towels!" Sean said. "Man, if I see one more doggone dude walking around with a towel around his neck, trying to look like, 'Man, I'm so tired,' like he just played forty-eight minutes with Kobe or something. And the towel's *clean*, too. Not a drop of sweat or dirt on it. They just went in their mom's linen closet and pulled out a towel. 'Oh, this'll make me look all like I've been working hard, so I can get some girls.' Yeah, you'd better work hard on getting your head in a book! It's ridiculous. We've got to do something."

"Well, Jasmine, that's why we need your community center, girl," Kim said. "Give 'em some place to go."

"Yeah, I'm working on it. Hopefully, now that I'm going to the Mayor's Gala," I said. I let that sink in for a moment. I couldn't contain the smile on my face, and I let out a squeal. "Maybe it'll happen."

“Yeah,” Sean said, “Jazz and me know more than most people what happens if you don’t give kids something positive to do.”

He was right. We *definitely* know what happens.

Kahlil and David came back in from their little smoke break, smelling like a Rastafarian’s van, and giggling like fifth-graders. After the discussion we had all just had, things were feeling uncomfortable.

“Well, I need to head out,” Meeka said, then looked at Kahlil. “And you’ve gotta have time to come down off this before you handle some kids in the morning.”

“I won’t have to handle the little bastards for long, though. Once I go to the Gala, it’s all over with, and not a minute too soon, boy.”

“You don’t lak workin’ wi’ dee kids?” Rudine asked.

“Hell, no. It was a good starting point, and I liked it at first, but it’s just a bunch of board meetings and teachers complaining and kids running all over the place. I’m moving on up, like George Jefferson now.” He put his arm around my shoulder. I forced a smile. Meeka’s eyes met mine, and I quickly looked away. “I’m gonna get rich, the mayor’s gonna get rich. Or richer, I should say. We’re gonna have a house, and our own little rugrats to worry about before long. Bigger and better, baby. That’s where it’s at. You can’t let grass grow under your feet.”

Everybody said their goodbyes and hugged. Kahlil, of course, stayed behind. After the door was closed, Kahlil took out the Gala tickets and flashed a huge grin. I couldn’t help but return it.

“We’re gonna meet the mayor! We’re gonna meet the mayor!” I chanted.

Kahlil joined in with me. We skipped around in a circle, arm in arm, like square dancers. If Kahlil hadn’t been high, he wouldn’t have been caught dead doing this.

“We’re gonna meet the mayor! We’re gonna meet the mayor!” we kept chanting. When we were both sick of ourselves, and dizzy, we stopped. We both leaned against the door with our shoulders, across from each other, and stared into each other’s eyes. All right, Kahlil’s eyes were a little less open than mine were, but anyway...

“This is it, baby,” he panted. We were both out of breath. “This is where it all starts.”

“I can’t believe it,” I said. “There’s still no guarantee that he’ll talk to us, but this is closer than we’ve ever gotten. It’s up to us to see if we can make it happen. Baby, do you know how long I’ve been waiting for this?”

“Yep,” he said. “I’m gonna have to figure out what to call my club.”

“And the community center,” I added.

“Yep,” he responded. We both looked at each other for a moment. He opened his mouth, as if he was going to say something more about the community center, but he said, “Do you mind getting everything cleaned up? I’m gonna go ahead and hit the bed. Unless you got something else you wanna do.” His voice trailed off, hoping I would pick up on the suggestion.

But my mind lingered on his short response to my excitement. ‘*Yep*’?

I waved the thought away. “I guess we do have something to celebrate,” I said. “You go get ready, and I’ll put the stuff away.”

He sashayed off, picking up the “we’re gonna meet the mayor” chant before he disappeared into the bedroom.

As I cleaned up the dishes and wrapped the leftovers, I tried to come up with my own names for the center. I knew there was probably a million in one chance that we’d even get close to the mayor, let alone talk to him about our projects. But it couldn’t hurt to engage in a little fantasy.



I thought back to what Sean had said earlier, that he and I knew what it was like when kids have nothing to do. That was for sure.

Then I thought about Little Nate.

Ten years ago, when he was fifteen, Little Nate was hanging out with two friends after school at one of the friends' houses. They were sitting on the front porch.

A couple of boys came up to them. The kid who lived at the house knew the boys. He owed them some money for a video game that they had loaned him money for. And they were there to collect.

The boy who lived at the house had apparently been ducking and avoiding these guys for weeks, and the boys finally caught him at home and decided it was time to pay up.

Nate and the other friend tried to leave, but one of the "video game boys" apparently stopped Nate. "Where you going? You got any money?" They checked his pockets.

Nate didn't have any money. So one of the boys slit his throat.

The boy who lived at the house screamed. One of the video game boys took out a gun and shot him.

Then he walked over, and stood over Little Nate—who was lying on the pavement, already almost gone—and shot him in the head.

The third friend made it about two blocks away before they shot him, too.

Lord, what in the world is a fourteen year-old kid doing with a gun?

*We knew the value of life*, Chip had said. *These guys today, they don't care about that stuff.*

I've got to get that center going.

Somehow.

\*\*\*

That night, for the first time, sex with Kahlil seemed more like a chore. Don't get me wrong, it was good, but it wasn't *skippadoo* good. I kept thinking about the roller coaster ride that my Tuesday had been: a disastrous shoot with Daniel Lynch; a layoff announcement, followed by news that I could be the one who could save people's jobs; tickets to an event that might spin my life in a whole new direction; a best friend who is about to get deeper into who knows what kind of investigation.

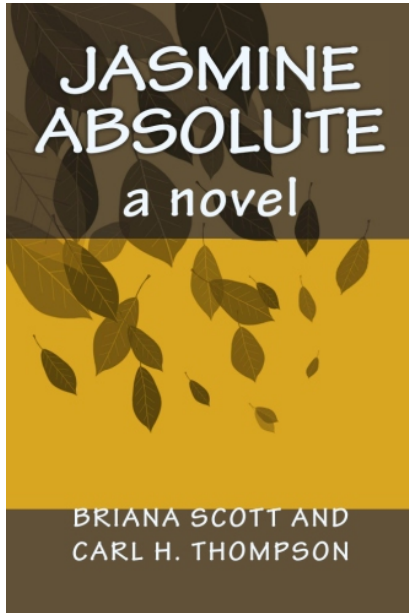
And then there was Little Nate. And Kahlil's smoking. And a nearly-busted lamp.

But in all of that thinking as I lay there, running my hands down Kahlil's muscular back and over his sexy bald head as he thrust deeply into me, one word stayed in my head, a word that, despite everything that I was feeling, pierced away at my gut. And I don't know why.

*Yep.*

Yep? What the devil did that mean?

*We hope you've enjoyed this exclusive first look at*



## *JASMINE ABSOLUTE*

*BY*

*BRIANA SCOTT AND CARL H.  
THOMPSON*

*AVAILABLE NOW ON AMAZON.COM*

*ORDER IN PAPERBACK:*

<http://amzn.to/zh0GoX>

*OR FOR KINDLE: <http://amzn.to/AANbuK>*

*JASMINE GRIFFIN BELIEVES SHE HAS IT ALL: A PROMISING ADVERTISING CAREER, A GREAT RELATIONSHIP, A SPACIOUS MIDTOWN ATLANTA CONDO, AND FANTASTIC FRIENDS. BUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A RELATIVE'S SUDDEN HEART ATTACK AND A FRIEND'S STUNNING BETRAYAL COST HER HER CAREER, AND PLUNGE HER INTO A WORLD OF LIES, DRUGS AND COMPROMISE? ONLY JASMINE CAN PULL HERSELF BACK FROM THE ABYSS—IF SHE HAS THE COURAGE TO FACE WHAT IT MEANS—AND TAKES—TO FIND HER TRUE SELF.*

*LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK!*

*FOLLOW ON TWITTER: @BRIANAANDCARL*

*FACEBOOK: [HTTP://ON.FB.ME/ZN3P02](http://on.fb.me/zN3P02)*

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.win2pdf.com>.  
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.  
This page will not be added after purchasing Win2PDF.