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*A  
Second Chance  
at Love*

*Series*

A Chance  
Encounter

PAMELA WRIGHT

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*A Second Chance At Love*  
**A Chance Encounter**

PAMELA WRIGHT



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# Chapter One

As Vanessa lay on the sofa, watching a home video of her tenth wedding anniversary, there came a knock at the door. *Not today*, she thought to herself. This was her moment of solitude. Her moment to do whatever she felt, and no one was going to stand in the way. She turned the volume down on the television hoping the knocking would go away, but it grew louder. Agitated, she glanced over at the clock. For the past two months, her mother made it a point to come over every Sunday after church to check on her and the house.

“I know you’re in there,” Alice chimed while knocking with every word. Alice Pryor was a strong-willed woman, and she knew how to get her way. She was not leaving until Vanessa opened the door.

Peeking over the sofa, Vanessa watched as her mother went frantically from one window to the next, pressing her face into the glass. Vanessa slouched back down into the cushion of the sofa. She loved her mother very much, but if there were ever a day she did not want to be bothered, today was that day.

“Open up!” Alice demanded.

Realizing her mother wasn’t going to leave, she fixed her face and took a deep breath before answering the door.

“Mom, come in,” she said with a smile. “How long have you been out there?”

Her mother hurried passed, giving the house a quick glance. Studying her daughter’s expression, Alice did not buy into her feigned innocence. “You’re not fooling me. I know you heard me knocking.”

“Mom, I was in the bathroom,” Vanessa tried to explain, but from the squint of her mother’s eye, she knew it was best to quit while she was ahead.

“You know you shouldn’t lie to your mother,” Alice exclaimed, then slowly walked to the den, and opened the curtains. The house was dark and smelled of last week. After grabbing a can of air freshener, she sprayed it into the air. She looked at Vanessa and was disgusted by what she saw. Her daughter looked like

she hadn't bathed in days. Her once well-groomed, thick, beautiful curly hair now stood matted on Vanessa's head making her look like a beastly creature of the wild. Sleep coated her eyes, and her lids were puffy. It was the middle of the day, and Vanessa had on an oversized t-shirt and sweat pants belonging to her husband, Joe. Alice shook her head in shame.

"What, Mom?" Vanessa begged while brushing her curls back with one hand.

"I haven't said anything."

"No, you haven't spoken any words, but you've said plenty."

"You're in a mood today. Why?" Alice asked.

*Oh, here we go*, Vanessa thought, watching her mother scan around the room. "I'm waiting on you," she said with a wide, condescending smile.

"Waiting on me for what?" Alice asked, placing her purse on the coffee table before sitting on the sofa.

"Aren't you going to say anything about the way the house looks?"

"What do you want me to say?" Alice asked, brushing crumbs from the sofa.

"Oh, I don't know. Why don't you tell me how messy the house is, and that I need to clean up?" Vanessa said, kicking over a pile of newspapers that were in the middle of the floor as she joined her mother on the sofa.

"I don't have to tell you something you already know," Alice said reclining back against the sofa. "Why aren't you dressed?"

"For what?"

"I called yesterday. I told you I was taking you out for dinner."

While resting her head on the back of the sofa Vanessa closed her eyes. "Mom, I'm not in the mood for going out."

"You're never in the mood for doing anything, and you look awful. When was the last time you changed clothes?"

"I change clothes every day. Are you saying that I stink?" Vanessa sat up defiantly.

"I'm not saying that. Why are you trying to pick a fight?"

Vanessa took a deep breath and exhaled. "I love you, Mom. I know you mean well, but..."

"What are these boxes doing here?" Alice interrupted.

"I decided to box up some of the kid's things, and put them in storage."

"Can I help? I'm not doing anything," Alice said.

"I got it. I wasn't planning on doing it today anyway."

"Since we're not going to go out for dinner, let's straighten up a little."

While picking the trash up from the table, Alice noticed a realtor's business card. She picked it up and turned toward Vanessa. "What's this?" she asked, continuing to clean up the mess.

"Oh, that's the card from Janice. She's a realtor who's selling my house."

"What?" Alice asked as she studied the card before turning her attention back to Vanessa.

“I told you last week I was putting the house up for sale.”

“You told me you were thinking about putting the house up for sale. I didn’t know you had already made the decision.”

“Here we go!” Vanessa murmured as she stood, rolling her eyes to the ceiling.

“I know you don’t want to hear this, but I’m going to say it anyway. You’re making a big mistake by selling this place,” Alice said raising her hands looking around the room. “This is the house you and Joe made a home for your family. This is your dream home.” Walking around, looking at the photos on the mantel, Alice smiled. “I remember when you and Joe found this house. You were so excited. The two of you were like babies with new toys.”

A smile crept over Vanessa’s face. She remembered how much fun they’d had picking out the paint colors, choosing the window frames, and even tearing down the back porch and rebuilding it. A soft laugh escaped her lips. “Remember that barbecue when I tripped on the edge of the pool, and fell in with the cake?”

“I remember that,” Alice said with a giggle.

Vanessa picked up her wedding photo off the shelf. She gently ran her fingers across Joe’s face before placing it back among the other photos. “There are memories of my family everywhere, and it’s driving me crazy,” she said, closing her eyes with tears rolling down her cheeks. Looking over at the kitchen table, she could see Joe reading the morning paper. With a glance out the window, she could see the kids riding their bikes, and running through the sprinkler. The tears began to sting Vanessa’s face, and she dropped her head. Her mother touched her shoulder interrupting her trance. “I’m lost, Mom. I’m tired of living alone. I’m tired of being alone. I feel like I’m going insane.”

“Baby, you’re not going insane. You’re grieving over a huge loss that would cripple most people. What you’re feeling is normal.”

“Nothing about my life is normal. Normal is having my family here with me. Normal is enjoying the life that I worked so hard for. Normal is celebrating holidays and birthdays with my family. Normal is growing old and gray with the man I love,” Vanessa said angrily with tears flowing down her cheeks. “Loving Joe for the rest of my life is not the problem it’s him not being able to love me back.”

“You’ve lost a lot…”

“You’ve lost a lot! You’ve lost a lot!” She screamed, mocking her mother. “I’m so tired of everyone saying that. I know what I’ve lost. I’m not crazy.”

“I know you’re not crazy. I’m just saying, with everything you’ve lost, do you want to lose your house as well.”

“Mom, at this point it doesn’t matter. In a couple of months, it will be three years since the accident, and I’m at a standstill. I’m looking forward to death.”

“You don’t mean that,” her mother said sternly.

“Yes Ma’am, I do. Don’t you see?” Vanessa asked, turning to face her mother. “It’s over for me.”

“It’s not over. I don’t ever want to hear you talk like that. There’s nothing that the God I serve can’t fix, even a broken spirit.” Looking at Vanessa, tears started to roll down her cheeks, and her heart started to break. She could see the agony that her baby girl was going through, and there was nothing she could do to ease the pain. Alice yearned for the times when Vanessa was happy and excited about life.

Vanessa walked over to the sofa. Her mother followed her. For a moment, she just stared at Vanessa. She placed her arm around her shoulders. “You know, I went to church today. I prayed for you. I asked God to make His presence known in your life. I asked Him to ease your pain and to bring you joy, to put peace in your heart.”

“I don’t want peace, Mom. I want death.”

She knew by the look of pain on Vanessa’s face that she meant it. Her heart pounded against her chest, and her breath became shallow. Certainly, Vanessa wouldn’t try to kill herself. The doctor assured her that people usually don’t try to kill themselves after their first attempts. But that didn’t ease the panic that rose inside her.

“I know you feel that you want to die, but you really don’t. It’s just the pain talking. You just need prayer. The day is going to come when what you’re experiencing now is going to be a distant memory. You’re going to have a life full of love,” Alice said as she rocked Vanessa back and forth. “I know better than anyone what you’ve lost. Everything that was taken from you, God will give back to you. If you just hang in there, the reward at the end of this journey is going to be amazing. God is going to work it out for you; just wait on Him. God makes no mistakes, and He has a reason for everything that He does, whether we see it or not.”

“Mom, don’t,” Vanessa said, pulling away from her mother’s embrace.

“Don’t what?”

“Don’t give me your ‘God is good’ speech. I don’t want to hear it,” she said, exhausted. Vanessa started to pace the floor.

“Vanessa,” Alice called tenderly.

“Mom, you have the faith. Good for you. You should be faithful and sing His praise. He hasn’t taken anything from you.”

Her mother jumped up and stood in Vanessa’s path preventing her from pacing.

“Hasn’t taken anything from me”? How can you say that? You are my child, and I love you. When you hurt, I hurt, and so does anyone that loves you. Those were my grandbabies. I loved them very much. I was there for each of their births, and Joe was like a son to me.”

“It’s not the same, Mom.”

“And I lost a child that day. I lost you, Vanessa. You haven’t been the same since their deaths, and no one is blaming you. You’ve had a lot to deal with. You’re in pain, and I get that, but you’re not the only one in pain. So don’t stand there and tell me I haven’t lost anything. Everyone who loves you and your family has lost something. But your loss is unimaginable in comparison to ours. No matter how much we hurt, God can heal us if we allow Him. He’s merciful. He’s...”

“He’s a joke,” Vanessa said with laughter in her voice. “He’s not merciful. If He’s so merciful, why didn’t He allow me to die with my family? Why would he condemn me to live the rest of my life alone? Where is the mercy in that? To rip a mother’s children and the man she chose to spend her life with from her. Where is the mercy in that?”

“I don’t have the answers, Baby, and I don’t know why He does what He does. I do know that it’s not for us to question the will of God.”

“The will of God? That’s funny, Mom, I have a will too. I *will* not serve a God that will plague my life with so much sorrow and hardship. *That’s* my will. I will not serve a God that has no mercy. How’s that for his will, Mom? Let yourself out. I will not talk about this any longer.”

“I’m not finish talking to you.”

“You are if you’re going to talk about the will of God, yes Ma’am, you are,” Vanessa said as she stood, taking a tissue from the box of Kleenex that was on the coffee table and wiped her eyes. She tied her robe closed and walked up the stairs.

Alice couldn’t believe what she had just heard. The woman who had once loved God had nothing but contempt for him now. Picking up her purse, she glanced at the TV. She instantly recognized the DVD that was playing. It was Vanessa and Joe’s tenth wedding anniversary.

*That explains it.* Alice thought to herself. Vanessa was only reacting from the grief brought on from the video. She looked towards the stairs, making sure Vanessa had disappeared. She said a silent prayer for Vanessa then left, taking the DVD with her.

## Chapter Two

When Alice returned home, her husband, Eddie, was in the driveway fixing his car. He heard her car door slam, and poked his head from under the hood to see his wife walking toward him. “I see you couldn’t get her out of the house,” he said as he winked at her.

“Not a chance, Eddie. I can’t get through to her no matter what I say. She’s so stubborn. Where did she get that from?”

“I have no idea,” Eddie said, raising his eyebrows. He chuckled as he returned to working on his car.

Alice caught the shot of sarcasm and walked closer to him. “What are you saying?” She said, leaning over his shoulder.

Alice gave him a look he was all too familiar with. It was that look she gave indicating your next words had better be chosen carefully. He stood and looked her in the eyes. “Alice, she’s exactly like you. You are the stubbornness woman I’ve ever met, and all our girls are just like you,” he said, for a quick save, but Alice didn’t back down.

“I think you’re enjoying this,” Alice said, glaring at her husband, who had just folded back under the hood of the car.

“No, Baby,” Eddie said, with a smirk. “You got me all wrong.”

Knowing Eddie would make light of the situation, she turned to walk away. This was serious, and if he wasn’t going to take it as such, she wasn’t going to continue to stand there and entertain him. “You *are* enjoying this,” she said as she began stomping away.

Eddie quickly raised up from the car apologizing for his sarcasm and gestured for his wife to come near. Alice stopped and began considering giving the conversation another shot. She accepted his embrace letting out a long sigh. “What happened?” Eddie asked.

“It’s just more of the same. I was trying to talk to her about God, and the conversation was over.” Alice pushed aggressively out of his embrace. The thought of Vanessa’s rude behavior earlier upset her. “She’s selling the house,” she said with frustration.

“When did she decide this?”

“She mentioned a couple of weeks ago that was thinking about selling the house. I didn’t give it much thought. I mean, this was her home she’s talking about. She just dismissed the whole conversation.”

“Maybe she has to sell the house,” Eddie said, gathering up his tools.

“No, she hasn’t,” Alice shot back. Her daughter wouldn’t do any such thing if she had anything to do with it.

“How do you know, Alice? You may be assuming the worst.”

“There are boxes everywhere, and when I asked her about them, she said she was packing up because the house is on the market,” Alice explained.

Eddie knew his baby girl, and if she was selling the house she had good reason too. He just need to figure out a way to get his wife to see that Vanessa is an adult and needs to be treated as one. “Vanessa is smart. I’m sure she has her reason for what she’s doing.”

“She usually is smart, and she has made tons of smart decisions, but this isn’t one of them. In the past three years, her decision-making skills has tarnished.”

Eddie came around and leaned against the front door of the car. He used a rag to wipe the grease off of his hands. “Did she tell you why she wanted to sell the house?”

“She says it’s too painful to stay there with the memories of Joe and the kids.”

“Alice, it’s really not that surprising that she wants to sell the house. She and Joe raised a family in that house. It has to be hard on her waking up in that house every day with the memories of her family everywhere she looks,” Eddie said beginning his first attempt to change his wife’s mind about their daughter’s decision.

“So you’re saying that it’s okay for her to sell her house.”

“Did you hear me say that?” he asked. Alice was putting words in his mouth, and it frustrated him. He walked back to the front of the car and began taking off his twill coveralls.

“She can’t sell her house,” Alice whined.

“Alice, the decision is hers. There’s nothing you can do,” Eddie said sternly.

“I’m not going to let her make such a bad decision.”

Eddie closed the hood of the car. He stood there for a minute, staring at his wife before walking over to her. He grabbed her hands lifting them to his mouth and kissing them. He led her to the backyard, where they sat in an old wooden swing. He placed his arm around her shoulders as she laid her head on his chest.

“Eddie, I’m just waiting for God to show up and show out. You should see her, baby. The house is a mess. There are dirty dishes all over the place, and newspapers sprawled all over the floor. I swear she looks like she hasn’t bathed in days. Her hair was all matted together, and she wears Joe’s old sweats.”

“Our baby girl is hurting in ways that you and I can’t begin to understand,” Eddie said, softly, caressing his wife’s shoulder. “Maybe selling the house is something that is going to get her on that path. There are a lot of things that we can help her with, but this isn’t one of them. This is a journey Vanessa will have to take by herself.”

As much as Alice knew her husband was right, she hated to admit it. She wanted her daughter to go back to the joyful woman she used to be. She just didn’t know how to make that happen. “You’re absolutely right. I just hate seeing her in such turmoil. Three years is a long time to be miserable,” Alice said.

“The only thing that you and I can do for her now is pray. Pray that God gives her the strength to make it through, and to find her way out of the darkness.”

“I don’t think that’s going to happen on its own,” Alice said.

“Why do you say that?”

Alice reached into her purse and pulled out the DVD.

“What’s that?” he asked.

“It was in the DVD player.”

“You stole it?” He asked as he looked around to see if anyone heard him. He felt like an accessory to a crime, the crime of stealing.

“I didn’t really *steal* it. I *borrowed* it,” Alice said with a sly smile. Eddie looked at her with disbelief. “Alright, I stole it,” Alice confessed. “But I did it for her own good.”

“What is it?” Eddie asked, taking it from his wife examining it.

“It’s her tenth wedding anniversary dinner. How is she going to find her way out of the darkness when she keeps living in the past?”

“Alice,” Eddie said, giving a look of disapproval.

“I know. I know. I’ll take it back tomorrow. Have you had dinner yet?” Alice said, changing the subject.

He kissed her on the forehead. “Not yet. After I had changed out of my church clothes, I started working on the car.”

“Why don’t I go in and fix us something?” Alice stood to stretch.

Eddie stared at his beautiful wife and instantly got the notion to treat her to a romantic night out. “Why don’t I just take you out to dinner?”

“That would be wonderful, but I have the ladies from the church coming over. What are you going to do while we’re all here?” Alice asked her husband.

“Don’t worry about me. I’ll find something to get into.”

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Later that evening, after supper, Eddie, went to Leon’s, the local sports bar. He was watching a football game when a gentleman sat down at the bar next to him.

“Good evening, Sir,” the man said as he reached out to shake Eddie’s hand.

Eddie smiled when he recognized who the man was. “Shawn. How are you doing soldier?” He asked accepting his hand.

“I’m fine, Sir,” Shawn said, inviting himself to the seat next to Eddie.

“When did you get back?”

“Yesterday, Sir. Can I buy you another?” He said, reaching into his pocket retrieving his wallet. Shawn ordered them a drink, and they moved to a table. “I want to talk to you about Vanessa. I don’t know if you’re aware or not, but she’s upset with me about not being able to make it to the funeral,” Shawn said.

“I knew she was upset. I figured you and she had worked it out.”

“I wish,” Shawn said. “As a matter of fact, she refuses to talk to me. I’ve called her numerous times. I’ve texted her and emailed her. She has renounced all form of communication with me.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. I know how close you two were at one time. I’m afraid there’s nothing I can do to help you out. She’s not really listening to anyone these days,” Eddie said as he tipped the waiter, who had now brought their drinks.

“No, Sir. That’s not what I wanted to talk to you about. I was wondering if she’s seeing anyone.”

Eddie reared back in his seat and stared at the young man. He, Joe, and Vanessa were all best friends. Why would he be interested in his Baby Girl? “I don’t think she’s ready for a relationship.”

“That’s not what I meant, Sir. I was trying to ask if she’s seeing a doctor or a counselor. Someone who can help her get a handle on what happened.”

“I’m not sure,” Eddie said, with relief. “I know she saw Dr. Corbin not too long ago, but she hasn’t mentioned him in a while.”

“How’s she doing?” Shawn asked, concerned.

“She’s dealing with it. Some days are better than others. You know. Joe and those kids were her life. It hit her hard when she lost them.”

“I can imagine it did. I would love to see her, but I’m afraid my presence would do more harm than good at this point.”

“I think you should try anyway. What harm can it cause? Besides, she needs to know your reason for not being there.” Eddie said, taking a long sip of his beer.

“You know your daughter. She can be as stubborn as a mule at times. I tried explaining to her that I was unreachable and by the time I found out about the funeral it was too late. I don’t think she will ever forgive me. I can’t say that I blame her. I hate myself for not being there.”

“You have to forgive yourself, son. She can’t forgive you if you don’t forgive you. I know how the military works. When you’re on special military OPPs, and they tell you to go; you go with no questions asked.” Eddie took another sip of his beer. “I don’t think Vanessa hates you. She has to vent; blame someone for what happened. You’re her target for now. We’ve all went through it with her. Just hang in there, Son. She’ll come around.”

“Thank you, Sir.”

“What are you doing with yourself?” Eddie asked.

“I recently got engaged.”

“Congratulations! To who?” Eddie said, ecstatically.

“Sabrina Jerkins.”

Eddie sat there for a moment trying to remember who Sabrina Jerkins was. Then it came to him. Sabrina was Allison and his good friend Bert’s daughter. “Yes, I remember her. She was at the funeral. You two have been together for years.”

“It’s been four years off and on. We decided that it’s time to make it official. Well, *she* decided that it’s time.”

Eddie chuckled. “They always know before we do.”

“Sir, you’ve always been like a father to me, and since I don’t have my own father around anymore, I want to ask you a question. Were you absolutely sure that you wanted to marry Mrs. Alice when you propose to her?” Shawn asked.

Eddie took a long drink of his beer. He remembered going through the very same thing when he proposed to Alice. The doubt. The uncertainty. “No. I was scared and confused. The only thing I knew for sure was I loved her. I wasn’t sure I could spend the rest of my life with one woman. The thought scared me to death, but the thought of not being with her scared me even more.”

“That’s how I feel about Sabrina, but I’m afraid that we don’t have what it takes to make it work,” Shawn confessed. With their on again off again relationship, how could their relationship thrive.

“Every man that contemplates marriage has an ounce of doubt. Marriage is hard. Don’t let anyone tell you differently. You’re promising God, family, and friends that you’re going to stay with this woman forever.”

“Is it worth it?” Shawn asked, still unconvinced he could be the perfect man for Sabrina.

“Yes, it’s worth it. A good woman is a strong woman. She has your back no matter what. She’s hard on you but lifts you up at the same time. The only advice I can give you is if you’re not ready to be faithful to her, to give her your heart and body, don’t get married.”

“Don’t?” Shawn said confused.

“If you’re not willing to be all you can for her, *don’t* marry her. If you’re not ready to share your bed with only her, *don’t* marry her. You will save her so much heartache and misery.”

Shawn looked towards the door and noticed his guests had arrived. “Thank you, Sir, for talking with me. My guest have arrived.” Shawn left to greet his guest.

After a few more drinks, Eddie started home. He thought about the suggestion Shawn made about Vanessa seeing a Counselor and decided to go by her house instead.

## Chapter Three

Vanessa was sitting in the porch swing, when Eddie pulled into the driveway. He greeted her with a smile and joined her. “Good evening, Baby Girl.”

“Hi, Daddy. What are you doing here?”

“I came to check on you,” Eddie said, giving her a kiss on the temple.

“I’m fine, Daddy. Did Mom put you up to this?”

“I don’t need to be put up to check on my daughter.”

“She told you about the house. Didn’t she?” Vanessa asked.

“Yes, she did,” Eddie said. “She’s pretty upset you’re selling it.”

“I know, Daddy. I wish she would try to understand why I made the decision to sell the house.”

“Vanessa, this is your house. Do with it whatever you please. It’s not your mother’s decision nor mine. I didn’t come over here to talk to you about the house. I came over to make sure you’re ok.”

She held her father’s hand. “So you approve of me selling the house?”

“You don’t need my approval to sell your house. I understand why you want to do it. There are fifteen years of history here; of loving and not so loving memories. That’s hard to deal with. You’ve always made the right decision, even when everyone around you thought otherwise. I know you’ll do what you think is best. The decision is yours, and we’re going to respect it.”

“I’m glad you’re on my side, Daddy.”

“Always, Pumpkin.”

The two of them sat in the swing silently. Vanessa sniffled. “Tell Mom I want it back.”

Her father chuckled and rubbed his hand down his face to wipe the sweat away. “She’s going to bring it back tomorrow.”

“Why would she take it?”

“She didn’t want you lying around watching it and becoming depressed,” Eddie said.

“It doesn’t depress me to watch the DVD. It brings back memories from that night,” Vanessa said laughing. “We almost didn’t make it to our own anniversary party.”

“I didn’t know that.”

“No one did. We had gotten into a huge argument. I mean the sparks were flying, and I said I wouldn’t share a glass of water with him. He could forget about the dinner,” Vanessa said between chuckles. “For the life of me, I can’t remember why we were fighting. About an hour before the party, I remember laying across the bed crying my eyes out. Joe entered the room and laid down beside me. He looked at me and said, ‘It hurts me to my soul when you’re unhappy, and the fact that I’m the reason you’re unhappy is more upsetting than you could ever know. No matter what I love you.’”

Eddie looked at her and smiled. His Baby Girl and Joe arguing. He couldn’t see it.

“I know it sounds sappy, Daddy, but those things are what I miss about Joe. He had a way of making me feel safe and loved. Even when he’s on the verge of having the life knocked out of him. I knew he loved me. When I look at the photo albums or watch videos of us, it doesn’t depress me,” Vanessa said staring into a daze. “It brings back good memories.”

“I can appreciate that,” Eddie said breaking her trance. “But at some point it will depress you. I don’t think your mother is trying to hinder you. She’s trying to help. She has a point, Baby.”

“She always does, Daddy.”

The silence was back once again, as the two of them sat in the swing looking into the night sky. Vanessa was observing how bright the sky was when her father interrupted her thoughts. “I had a nice visit with an old friend of yours earlier.”

“Who?” Vanessa asked narrowing her gaze at her father.

“Shawn. He asked about you. He said that he had been trying to get in contact with you, but you won’t speak to him.”

Vanessa didn’t say anything. Her expression quickly changed to malice. She began shaking her head.

“You could at least talk to him,” Eddie suggested.

“What can he say? He didn’t come to the funeral. He and Joe were like brothers,” Vanessa said with tears in her eyes.

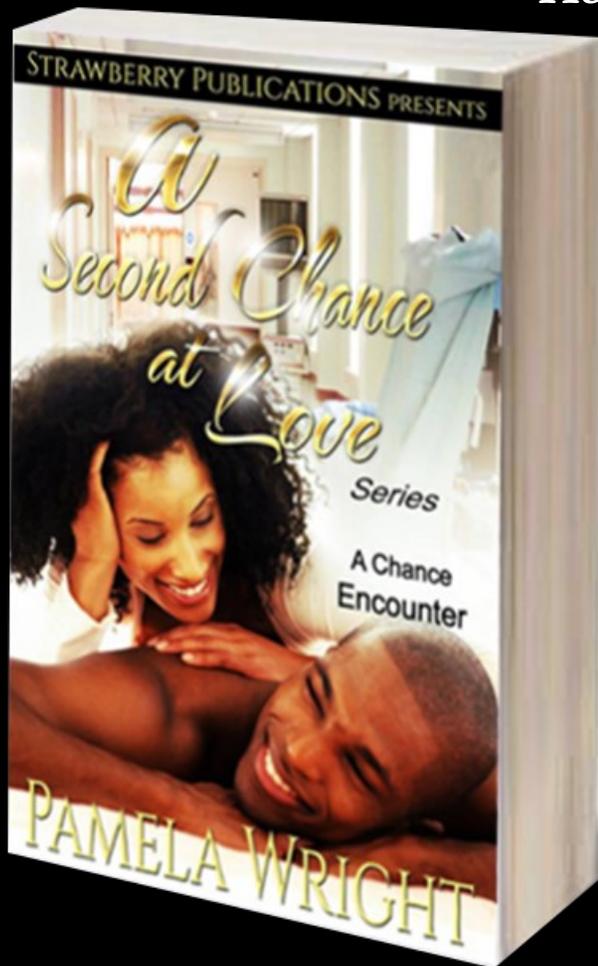
“Baby, you know how it is when you’re in the service. He’s on active duty. He had to go where they told him to go.”

“Did you come over here to plead his case?” Vanessa said in anger. Her father was supposed to be on her side. Now he was taking up for Shawn, the traitor.

“I thought I would mention it just to see where he stands.”

“I haven’t given Shawn a second thought. It’s over now. There’s no going back,” she looked at her father as he began rubbing his head. “Daddy, are you disappointed in me? I know, Mom is. I could tell by the way she looked at me this afternoon.”

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