

in the
MEANTIME . . .

finding yourself

and the love

that you want

IYANLA VANZANT

SIMON & SCHUSTER



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this book is dedicated in love and with love to

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and to my husband, IFAYEMI ADEYEMI BANDELE, who helped me realize that the meantime does pay off!

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INTRODUCTION

what do you do in the meantime? Somewhere in the back of your mind you know the day will eventually come when the relationship you are in will become all that you want. Or all that you want in a relationship will one day show up. The question remains, however, what do you do in the meantime? There's a funny thing about love. It will find you in the most unusual circumstances, at the most unlikely times. Love will come upon you, throw its arms around you, and transform your entire existence. Unfortunately, most of us won't recognize the experience or understand the impact when it's happening. It's like being in therapy. You keep talking, searching, questioning what's going on with you and in you while being totally ignorant of the fact that you are being blessed. Perhaps it's because love rarely shows up in the places that we expect it to or looks the way we expect it to look.

He was my love counselor. Tall, slim, very quiet, almost shy. I was short, stout, and quite, shall I say, boisterous. I was forever doing, saying, or experiencing things that attracted attention to me—usually negative attention. He was seventeen. I was thirteen. He was a group leader at summer camp, and I was a summer worker who had not gotten paid. An administrative foul-up deleted my name from the payroll roster. He was assigned the task of making sure I got paid.

It seemed that no one knew what was going on, except him. As far as I was concerned, he knew everything. He walked me through a process that took two weeks to unravel. As we went from office to office, supervisor to supervisor, he was patient, always amenable. I was angry with a lot to say. He was comforting, and did I really need comforting! My love counselor constantly reassured me that it would all work out just fine. I believed him because it gave me the opportunity to be in his presence. That belief and his persistence finally paid off. I was issued three Summer Youth Corps paychecks for forty-five dollars each. It was a thrilling moment for me. It was

an accomplishment for him. He was just doing his job. I was just being in love. He had twenty-five other youth workers to think about. I could think about nothing else but him. Now that I had my paychecks, I realized there was one small problem I would now need to resolve. This young man, with whom I was madly in love, was dating one of my best friends. It was the beginning of my *meantime*.

I spent thirty years of my life being in love with this man. I call him a counselor because he helped me search, question, and heal myself. He taught me many lessons about life and love. When we met, other people had me convinced that what I felt was not love. They said it was infatuation. Because they were older and, I thought, wiser than me, I believed them. I thought it best to ignore what I felt. I moved through that phase of my life believing that I knew nothing about love—after all, I was just a child. I concluded that we would never, could never be together. He was too old for me. I moved on with my life feeling hurt and being angry about what I had been told and what I believed I had lost. In the end, I concluded that I was not *good enough* to be loved by him or anyone. In this moving, believing, conclusion-drawing process, I also made some decisions.

I decided I would never be hurt by love again. Although I wasn't quite sure what it was about love that had hurt me, I knew I never wanted to experience it the way I had when I was thirteen years old. I also decided that no man would do to me what my father had done to my mother. What he had done was none of my business, but I made it my business by watching, judging, and trying to figure out what no one seemed able to come right out and tell me. Who knows the truth about love, loving, or relationships? Was I really wrong about what I felt, what I saw, what I believed, and what I concluded from the relationship models I had seen? Good questions! But, in the *meantime*, I had to figure out the answers.

At age sixteen, I really thought I had found love. Instead, I got pregnant and was left alone to raise a child. At nineteen, I just *knew* I had found love, so I married it. Wrong again! At twenty-one, love called me up on the telephone, took me out on three dates, and moved in. That was when my *meantime* got real ugly. In the process, I got very, very clear. I became clear that all the things I thought about love had nothing to do with it. I realized that I couldn't recognize love because I had never actually seen it. Oh, I had a picture in my mind of what it should look like, but that picture had been cracked a long