



Midnight and the Meaning of Love (The Midnight Series)

By Sister Souljah

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Sister Souljah, the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Coldest Winter Ever* and *Midnight*, delivers her most compelling and enlightening story yet. With *Midnight and The Meaning of Love*, Souljah brings to her millions of fans an adventure about young, deep love, the ways in which people across the world express their love, and the lengths that they will go to have it.

Powerful and sensual, Midnight is an intelligent, fierce fighter and Ninjutsu-trained ninja warrior. He attracts attention wherever he goes but remains unmoved by it and focuses on protecting his mother and sister and regaining his family's fortunes. When Midnight, a devout Muslim, takes sixteen-year-old Akemi from Japan as his wife, they look forward to building a life together, but their tumultuous teenage marriage is interrupted when Akemi is kidnapped and taken back to Japan by her own father, even though the marriage was consummated and well underway.

"There's not one drop of inferiority in my blood," Midnight says as he first secures his mother, Umma, and sister, Naja, before setting off on a global journey to reclaim his wife. Midnight must travel across three countries and numerous cultures in his attempt to defeat his opponent. Along this magnificent journey he meets people who change him forever, even as he changes them. He encounters temptations he never would have imagined and takes risks that many a lesser man would say no to, all for the women he loves and is sworn to protect.

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Midnight and the Meaning of Love (The Midnight Series) By Sister Souljah Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #29280 in Books
- Brand: Washington Square Press
- Published on: 2011-10-04
- Released on: 2011-10-04
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.25" h x 1.60" w x 5.31" l, 1.11 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 624 pages



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Editorial Review

About the Author

Sister Souljah is best known for her work as a political activist and educator of underclass urban youth. A graduate of Rutgers University, she is a beloved personality in her own community. She lives in New York with her husband and son.

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Chapter 1

Word to Mother

Warmhearted and young, armed and dangerous, I was moving my guns and weapons out of my Brooklyn apartment to one of my most reliable stash spots. As heavy as they were, my thoughts were heavier and even more deadly. I was trying to move murder off my mind.

Kidnapping is a bullshit English word. It doesn't convey the insult that the offense carries, when a man invades another man's home, fucks with his family or his wife, *la kadam Allah* (God forbid), and steals her away.

The man whose wife is gone stands there try'na push the puzzle pieces together of where his wife is exactly and what happened exactly. His blood begins to boil, thicken, curdle, and even starts to choke him. That's why for me, kidnapping and murder go hand in hand.

In my case, my young wife Akemi's kidnapper is her own father, her closest blood relation, a man who she loves and honors. For me to kill him would be to lose her even if I win her back. And I refuse to lose.

Ekhtetaf is our word for kidnapping. My Umma pushed it out from her pretty lips. She pulled it from her soul and gave it the true feeling that it carried for us—the hurt, shame, violation, and insult. For half a day it was all that she said after I relayed to her that Akemi was gone. My new wife had been taken against her will back to Japan without a chance to express herself to us, her new family, face to face.

For me to see my mother Umma's Sudanese eyes filled with tears tripled my trauma. I had dedicated my young life to keeping the water out of my mother's eyes and returning a measure of joy to her heart that life had somehow stolen. But Sunday night, when our home phone finally rang, and Umma answered only to hear the silence of Akemi's voice and the gasp in Akemi's breathing and the restraint in Akemi's crying, Umma's tears did fall.

There was a furious rainstorm that same Sunday. Everything was soaked, the afternoon sky had blackened and then bled at sunset. So did Umma's eyes switch from sunlight to sadness to rain and eventually redness.

Through the evening thunder I sat still trying to simmer. They say there is a beast within every man, and I was taming my beast with music. My earplugs were siphoning the sounds of Art of Noise, a soothing song called "Moments of Love."

My sister Naja held her head low. She was responding to our mother Umma's feelings. Like the eight-year-old that she is, she did not grasp the seriousness of Akemi's disappearance and believed more than Umma

and I that Akemi would be coming through the door at any moment.

* * *

Much later that same Sunday night, family day for us, my Umma placed a purple candle in a maroon dish and onto her bedroom floor. She struck a black-tipped match and it blazed up blue. The subtle scent of lavender released into her air. There in the darkness, I sat on her floor, leaning against the wall, and listened to her melodic African voice in the expressive Arabic language, as she told me for the first time ever the story, or should I say saga, of my father's fight to take *her* as his first bride, true love, and true heart. I knew then that the darkness in her room was intentional. She wanted to shield the sea of her emotions since there was no love more intense than the mutual love between her and my father. She also wanted to subdue my fury.

She wanted me to concentrate instead on the red and then orange and then blue flame and listen intently for the meaning of her words and the moral of her story so that I would know why I must not fail to bring Akemi back home and why I had to seize victory, the same as my father did.

Monday, May 5th, 1986

At daybreak, when the moon became the sun, Umma's story was completed. She lay gently on the floor still dressed in her fuschia *thobe*. Her hair spread across her arm as she slipped into sleep. Our lives and even our day were both upside down now. I lifted her and placed her onto her bed. I put out the flame that danced on the plate in the middle of mostly melted wax.

Umma was supposed to be preparing for work, but her most important job, which took all night, was finally finished. She wanted to transfer my father's strength and intelligence and brave heart to me, her son. She wanted me to know that I must not be halted by my deep love for her, my mother. She had told me, "You have guarded my life and built our family business. I love you more than you could ever imagine. In my prayers, I thank Allah every day for creating your soul and giving you life. I thank Allah for choosing to send you through my body. But now, '*You must follow the trail of your seed.*' "

Chapter 2

So in Love

Naja overslept. When I went into her room to wake her for school I found her sleeping in her same clothes from yesterday and clutching a doll. The scene was strange. At night she usually wore her pajamas and her robe and woke up wearing them as well. She didn't play with dolls, wasn't the type, was more into puzzles and pets. As I approached her bed, I saw the doll had the same hair as my wife, long, black, and thick. *That hair is real*, I thought to myself, and reached for the doll. I maneuvered it out of Naja's hands and flipped it around. It was a tan-skinned doll with Japanese eyes drawn on with a heavy permanent black Sharpie marker. The material was sewn and held together with a rough and amateurish stitch.

Naja woke up and said with a sleepy slur and stutter, "I finally made something by myself." She turned sideways in her bed, propping her head up with her hand, and said now with confidence, "It's Akemi. Can't you tell?"

I smiled the way a man with troubles on his mind might smile to protect a child's innocent view of the world. I could've easily got tight with my little sister because she had gone into my room and removed the ponytail of hair that Akemi had chopped off of her own head one day in frustration with her Japanese family.

“It looks like her. You did a good job,” I told Naja.

“Do you really think it looks like your wife or are you just saying that to be nice?” Naja asked.

“I’m saying it to be nice. Now get up, you’re running late for school today.”

* * *

Akemi’s expensive collection of high heels was lined up against the wall in our bedroom. Her hand-painted Nikes and other kicks with colorful laces were spread out too. Her luggage and clothing, every dress and each skirt a memory of something sweet, were all there. Her black eyeliner pencil that outlined her already dark and beautiful eyes was left out on the desktop. The perfume elixir that Umma made for Akemi, but truly for my pleasure, was there also. The crystal bottle top was tilted to the right from the last use. Her yoga mat was rolled up and lying in the corner. She had left her diary out for all to see. She knew we could not read one word of the Japanese kanji that began on the last page and ended on the first. Yet she had colorful drawings in there as well. Just then I recalled her fingers gliding down the page with a colored pencil in one hand and a chunk of charcoal in the other.

Everywhere in our bedroom there were signs that this was a woman, a wife who lived here beside me, her husband, and definitely intended to stay. We are teenagers, Akemi and I, but we are both sure of our bond. Furthermore, we took that bold and irreversible step into marriage and our two hearts became one.

She had left her designer life and luxurious apartment behind and moved into the Brooklyn projects to be beside and beneath me. So in love, even in the chaos of this hood, and the glare of the ambulances and scream of sirens, she could only see me. Each day her love became more sweeter, her smile even brighter.

After hearing Umma’s story, I understood now that in the Sudan, my home country, the kidnapping of females is unusual but has happened, especially when two men were battling over the same woman. A Sudanese man will fight hard and by any means necessary to earn the right and advantage over the next man to marry the bride of his choice and make her his own.

Yet our men never battle over a woman after the marriage has already taken place, been witnessed, acknowledged, and agreed on. We never battle to win a woman after her husband has gone into her. And I had gone into my wife Akemi over and over and in so many ways that the thought alone made my heart begin to race and my entire body began to sweat like summer, but in the spring season.

I looked at my bedsheets that I had never thought about before. Umma had selected those sheets knowing that a man wouldn’t mind but a woman would. She dressed up my bed one day while I was out. Umma wanted Akemi to feel good and welcomed. I had to admit that those Egyptian cotton sheets were soft and comfortable. Only Akemi’s skin was softer.

Eateda is the word from back home that describes for us a bigger offense.

My mind switched to that thought. *Eateda* happens when a kidnapper steals a woman against her will, then rapes her. I promised myself that in my blood relation beef with my wife’s father, this was not that type of problem. Yet I also knew that when a man is not beside his woman, protecting, loving, providing, and influencing her all the time, *eateda* is always possible by any man who is allowed to be in the same room with her, if that man is living low.

* * *

My sensei taught me the technique of breathing a certain way to lower the blood pressure and calm the mind and settle the heart. It was not a technique meant to prevent a murder. A man has to think but not too much. Thinking to an extreme can paralyze a man's actions and turn him into a passive coward. What Sensei taught me was a technique meant mainly to calm a warrior to prepare him to make the sharpest, wisest, most effective strike against his target. So I was using it as I stepped swiftl...

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