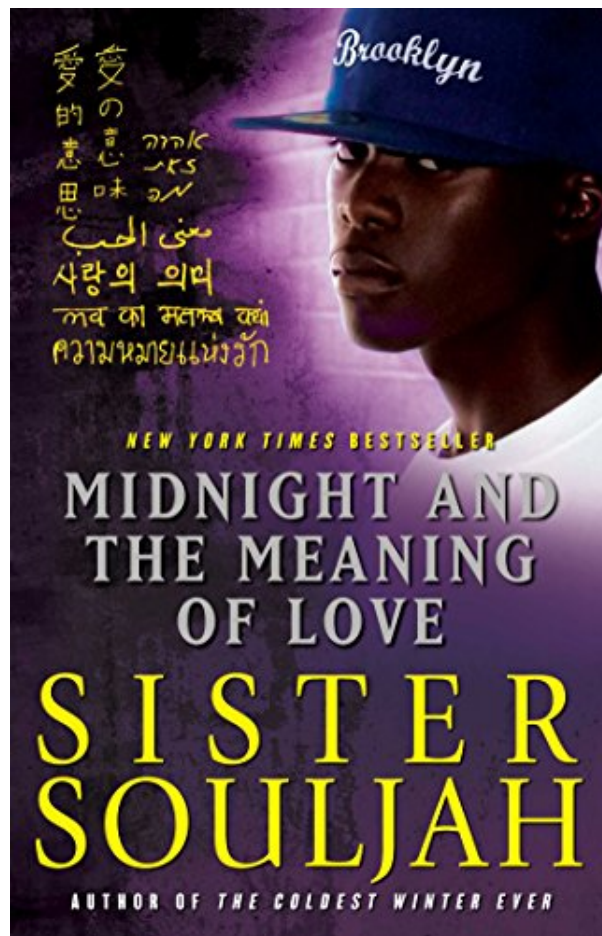
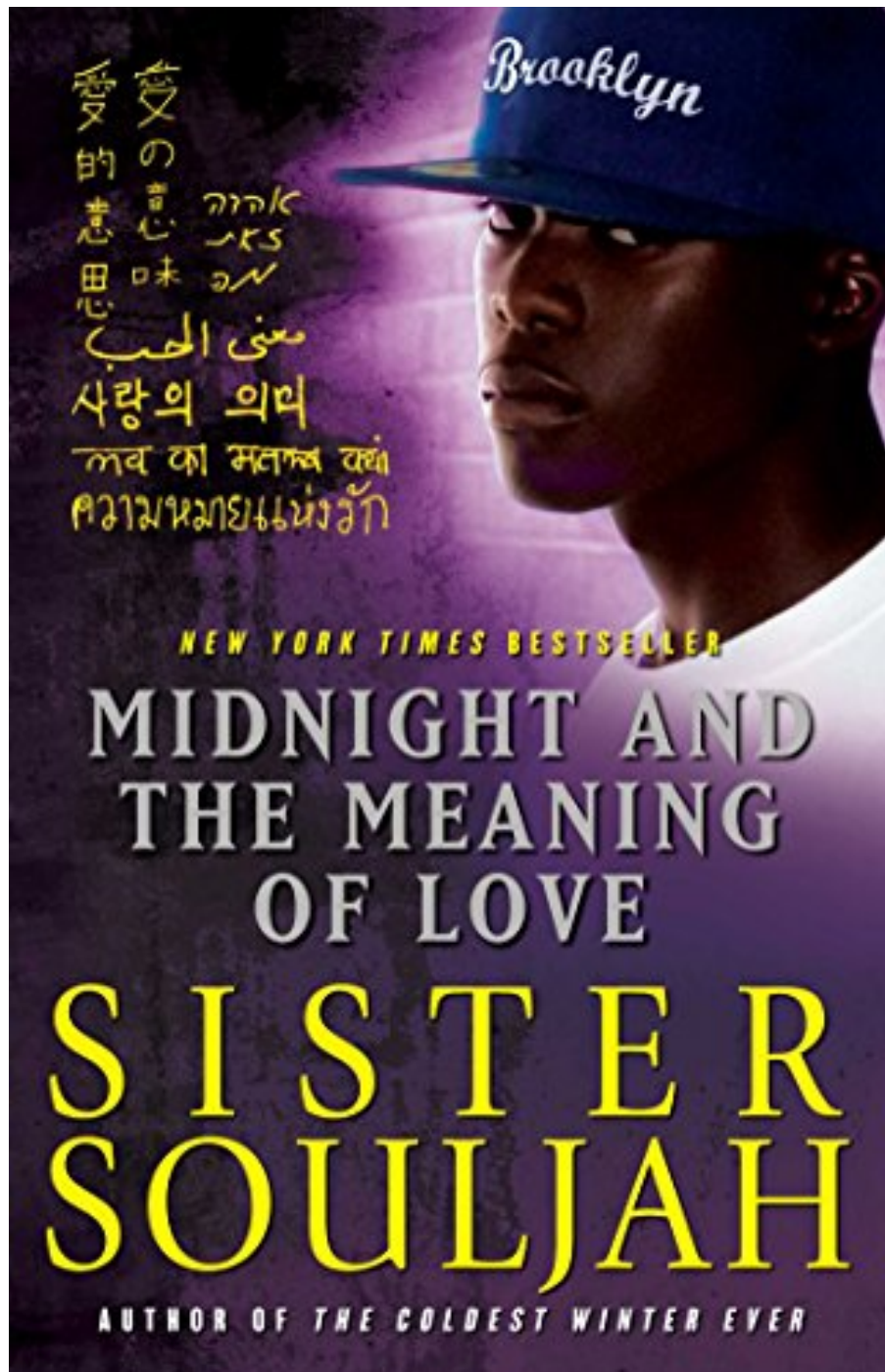


**MIDNIGHT AND THE MEANING OF LOVE  
(THE MIDNIGHT SERIES BOOK 2) BY  
SISTER SOULJAH**



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“A thrilling adventure....delivers on all promises. Souljah...has done it again.” --Ebony

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

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# **MIDNIGHT AND THE MEANING OF LOVE (THE MIDNIGHT SERIES BOOK 2) BY SISTER SOULJAH PDF**

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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Unknown

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The Meaning of Love? Just one in many unanswered questions...

By DorianDonP

\*\*\*\*\*Spoilers, Spoilers, Spoilers, Spoilers\*\*\*\*\*

My review will contain spoilers so please skip down to the **BOTTOM LINE** to avoid them.

I tried to like this book. I really did. I enjoyed "Midnight: A Gangsters Love Story" enough to pre-order this book and read it within a week of receiving it. Let's just say what set up for an intriguing premise was destroyed at least 150 pages before the book was even finished.

Midnight And The Meaning of Love picks up right where A Gangsters Love Story left off. Akemi, the 16

year old wife of Midnight has been kidnapped by her Japanese father, and of course the young Sudanese Ninja vows to do whatever it takes to get her back. The book has three sections, with about 16-20 chapters each. The first section takes place in Brooklyn, the second in Japan, and the third in Korea.

The Brooklyn section is more or less filled with preparation for Midnight to go to Japan and take back his bride. While he organizes his plan though, he also takes time to play basketball with his friends, meet Santiago (Winters father from *Coldest Winter Ever*), train with his sensi, lust after Bangs, and move his family (his 7 year old sister and his non-english speaking mother) from their apartment in Brooklyn. It's a slow but necessary read and for the most part really helps to paint the mindset of Midnight before making his journey across the globe.

The second section kicks off once Midnight boards a plane to Japan where he meets several teenage girls; one of them a half black-half Korean ninja named Chiasa that Midnight hires to be his tour guide and translator. She impresses him with her knowledge of fighting and her quick intelligence and this lays the foundation for the love triangle that takes place later in the story. Sister Souljah goes into great lengths to explain every single detail of Japan through the eyes of Midnight, which includes brief introductions into history, language, fashion, and culture. Midnight also finds out more about Akemi's father and mother which helps him form a strategy for safely finding and retrieving his wife. Built like an odyssey with many trials and obstacles, Midnight encounters many people along the way that could be friend or foe, but ultimately finds a way to get his wife back. The reunion doesn't last as a new set of circumstances emerge which forces him to travel to Korea.

Midnight and his hired mercenary teenage comrade Chiasa travel to Korea to finally complete the mission of getting Akemi, and alleviate the other set of issues they have encountered on the way. This is also the setting where Midnight and Chiasa fall in love, and Midnight goes through a *Mission Impossible*-like courtship to win her hand and take her as his second wife.

This is the premise of the book. 14 year old Midnight (Souljah rarely mentions his age in the book. Likely to not remind the reader how young he is) travels to Japan to find his 16 year old wife that was kidnapped by her father and returns a few weeks later with two wives. If this isn't the most ridiculous plot ever...

The first book, though reaching on so many levels, was decent enough of a read to me. Obviously Midnight is bred differently from most boys so I gave SS the benefit of the doubt when it came to his "love story" with Akemi as well as his character arch in the first novel. But with this book, I was hoping it would take that next step and explain how 14 year old Midnight, who married a woman he couldn't communicate properly with, had turned into a drug dealer without a wife anywhere in sight during *Coldest Winter Ever*.

I re-read a portion of *Coldest Winter Ever* in preparation for this book. Specifically, I read the letters between Midnight and Souljah. In those letters, Midnight was CLEARLY trying to date Souljah. Also, at the end of the book he was married - Souljah never stated who he was married to - but one would assume it was with Akemi, before this book added a second wife.

The end of "Meaning of Love" has Midnight married to two teenage women, who are both pregnant with his children (Akemi pregnant with twins) which means that Midnight was not only a married man, but a father during *Coldest Winter ever*. That is, of course, unless his wives never had the children (miscarriage, or death being the only real solutions since their faith and happiness wouldn't allow for abortion). Souljah never explains this loose end although the very last page of "Meaning of Love" does end on sort of a cliffhanger, suggesting that Midnight is in prison. Will she write a third novel to finally connect the dots between 14 year old Midnight, and the Midnight we all grew to love during *Coldest Winter Ever*? I doubt it, and even if she

did, after reading over 1,000 pages of these two books I don't even care anymore.

I never cared for a sequel to *Coldest Winter Ever*, it ended perfectly where it was. But when Souljah announced a prequel for *Midnight*, I got excited because I thought it would help explain the mysterious character. These past two books have, in a way, but they created more questions than answers which is a problem. If you go into these books looking for Souljah to help bridge the stories then you will be very disappointed.

But honestly, the two star rating doesn't come from Souljah being purposely ambiguous. It came from the complete ridiculousness of the plot as it progressed. The more I read, the more Souljah digressed from realism and logic. Sure, to read the first book you had to suspend your disbelief. But this book was so unrealistic, hypocritical, and drowned in minutiae that it became flat out laughable the more I read. Let's just look at some of the issues here that completely destroyed the story.

Midnight is a hypocrite. He speaks about his over-protection of his younger sister and how the men of his faith will select a husband for her, but yet he seems appalled by the fact that Akemi's father doesn't approve of her marriage. He at no point ever thinks that a father had a right to be completely against the idea of his 16 year old daughter marrying some 14 year old kid from another country that doesn't even speak the same language. Yet he is in complete support of arranged marriages carried by the men of his faith. I'm sure Midnight would kill the first 14 year old that tried to talk to his sister when she was 16.

To further expound on how much a hypocrite he is, just look at his actions. He constantly spoke of how women were led by their emotions. He'd refer to them as emotional creatures, while suggesting he was a logical one (he mentions it so often it almost seems like an insult to women). Yet, he falls in love with a woman in 2 or 3 days while he is SUPPOSE to be looking for his wife. And in a weeks time, he was marrying her. He literally married two different girls in a month. One of them not speaking his language and the other one he had known for a week, if that. The pacing in this story is poor so you don't get a good sense of time.

Soulja tries to clean this up by expounding on how Chiasa and Midnights souls were connected and how Midnight picked up on her true intentions, but there is no amount of intuition and observation in this world that could make his decision to take both of these women as wives seem logical instead of emotional. He was more emotional than any of these women he constantly referred to as being led by emotion.

His advice to a friend on women is that he should ask himself would he kill for her before pursuing her; in the first few minutes of meeting her. Hmm. Is this not an overly emotional question Midnight asks himself when deciphering if he likes a woman enough to pursue her? Why was he willing to kill for Bangs, even though he didn't pursue her?

In addition to Midnights hypocrisy and judgements, which became annoying quick (If you're American, you will be offended. Just accept it), the reader has to deal with Souljah's writing, which also quickly becomes an issue. It's not that her prose is bad. Some of her descriptions are beautiful and many of the metaphors and dialog are quote-worthy, but there is no way there is enough content in this book for it to span 600 pages. The book should be around 450, but it is filled with about 150 pages of filler. Mostly, descriptions of clothes or rooms or scenery. I understand that this is Soujah's way of painting the setting, but she lazily does this by showering the book with pages and pages of excess detail about what Akemi is wearing or what Chiasa is wearing or what he is wearing.

Honestly, Midnight in this book talks or thinks about fashion about as much as he talks or thinks about his

faith. It's as if when Souljah writes about what someone is wearing, she reverts back to writing from Winters point of view from Coldest Winter Ever. Midnight turns into Winter when it comes to explaining what someone is wearing. It's tedious to read because it happens far too often and really halts the action. I had to consciously force myself to not skip past the walls of description when I felt them coming. And what is the point of including pictures in the book if you're still going to write every detail? Including pictures already is hit or miss because it can take away from the reader being able to interpret the book how their mind see's fit (would having pictures of Winter be helpful or detrimental to your enjoyment of Coldest Winter Ever?), but details on top of pictures just seems like overkill.

It's not just that, but in general Souljah seems out of her element writing about other cultures. She did well with the Muslim faith (although towards the end of the book it bordered on evangelicalism), and even though it's easy to tell she researched passionately and wanted to teach culture in this book, you never share her enthusiasm while reading. At least I didn't. The way she had Midnight learning a new word or describing a new place became much too formulaic and dry for me to care much about it. Parts of the book were painfully, PAINFULLY, boring because of this.

Unfortunately, even the action was pretty boring. I found myself WANTING to skip the sex scenes and didn't feel much tension during scenes that were suppose to be suspenseful. The problem with the suspense in this book is Souljah destroyed any sense of vulnerability in the first section of the story. Midnight defeats his sensi at the dojo with ease at the beginning of the story.

The man that is suppose to be far beyond skill and wisdom, Midnight defeats and sort of shrugs it off. It's that "whatever" attitude from Midnight that makes it impossible for the reader to ever feel any doubt when it comes to him being in trouble. He's pretty much perfect. He always knows what to do. Never panics. Never makes a mistake. Never sleeps. And when he is caught off guard, it's something simple and cute, like some girls sticking something on his leg while he is sleeping. If the guy never is fearful of his own life when he is in a battle, why should the reader ever fear for it? What's the point of a battle when there is no danger?

Most journeys present challenges that seem insurmountable. There is intense training, multiple battles, and defeats that end in lessons. From Star Wars to Kill Bill to The Matrix to Remember The Titans. There are setbacks and character developments that help complete the coming of age story.

Midnight never gets defeated in the story. Every challenge, he takes down swiftly and easily. Maybe if I was reading about Superman (my least favorite super hero) then this would be acceptable, but when the sensi says "you are not ready" yet Midnight still defeats all of his opponents easily, then it's really bad storytelling. Even the wisdom that Chiasa says to Midnight about trust, which you think will mean something, doesn't mean anything.

Midnight becomes a boring character the more Souljah makes him perfect and refuses to let him take a loss. Every woman wants him. Every guy is either intimidated or defeated by him. And even his mother accepts everything he does. She never chastises him (she praises him bringing home two wives instead of one) and submits to his full authority and leadership as if he is her husband. Do I have to remind you that he is 14?

One of the reasons I was excited to read these prequels was because of the letters Midnight wrote to Souljah. It revealed that Midnight could be defeated, and could be broken, and could doubt himself, and show some of the basic characteristics that make us human. This book, sadly, doesn't emphasis any of this. He's just a perfect Muslim that has perfect sex (making virgins experience orgasms, for instance...even though they are VIRGINS and he is supposedly huge) and can defeat the U.S. Army without breaking a sweat.

That last sentence is not a joke. Midnight manages to defeat a special unit in the U.S. military in some strange courtship which leads to him marrying Chiasa. I laughed out loud during this chapter and it was precisely the chapter where I gave up on trying to take the book seriously. I didn't care anymore after this. I continued reading, but I seriously didn't care anymore. I've read Souljah speak on Midnight and it seems like he is an ideal for her. An ideal of what a man should be. Maybe even her perfect fantasy for a man. Tall, good at basketball, dark, handsome, protective, religious, family oriented, martial artist, fashion guru, with a big penis. Yet somehow, she turned him down in Coldest Winter ever when it looked like he was looking for wife number 3. Ok so she turned him down for dealing drugs. I accept that. That was actually interesting. I just wonder why she didn't carry those conversations over to this story.

For as much as this book talks about love (and Souljah takes a lot of page space talking about love), this book sadly lacks a true heart. Teenagers falling in love should not feel this perfect and obstacle free. Akemi and Chiasa accept each other so easily, and the way Souljah explains it away is that it's because they aren't American. Trust me, as you read the explanations given for why Chiasa and Akemi accept sharing a 14 year old husband (a diary), you'll be wondering just like I am what exactly is the message in this story. What is the meaning of love? Sacrifice? Submissiveness? Allah? The plot isn't satisfying enough to give you any real conclusive feeling about the authors thoughts. Except that non-American women are the only women that could possibly not be jealous over their 14 year old husband having sex with them days apart.

All we have in this story are perfectly understanding teenagers that love unconditionally (unless of course, the women are promiscuous. That's all Midnight ever seems to care about as a condition), cry tears of joy during sex, and willingly leave their families, countries, culture, and understanding of life to be with someone they've barely known. Should I even mention that Midnight is now responsible for his mother, his sister, two 16 year old wives, and three children that are on the way and he doesn't even have a Drivers License? MTV would cash in on a reality show like this.

It's a shame though, because the book was not without some great premises and chapters. Reading about Akemi's mother was deeply satisfying and engaging. It made me like Akemi more. Reading about Midnights thoughts on women and his faults was also very satisfying. I loved when he had doubt in his thoughts. Since there was NO true conflict in the story (since he always easily defeated his enemies without threat or consequence) then the only real suspense came from his inner battles. Hearing him be afraid to love Bangs was interesting and honest and human. Seeing him struggle with his faith was interesting and honest and human. Seeing him become frustrated with circumstances out of his control was interesting and honest and human.

It's too bad Souljah never realized that the journey in Midnights mind (which already crossed multiple cultures and boundaries) was far more dynamic and interesting than the journey across the world for a love that never really made sense in the first place. Why didn't Souljah show more mind struggles? The battles of the mind that was a theme in the early part of the book? Does 14 year old Midnight not masturbate while struggling to stay away from lust? Does he not question how he will provide for so many people? Does he not ever question if his "protection" of women is sexism and self satisfying instead of pure? Does he not struggle some days more than others with fasting? Or is each and every day really just a walk in the park? Where are these thoughts? Even Jesus struggled with himself.

It's also too bad that Souljah never gave a real purpose for Bangs, who was the only character in the story that could make me (and Midnight) smile. When she told Midnight that she loved him, it seemed real. Not real in a sense that it was true, but because it seemed in place with what teenagers feel. I hate that I never felt a realness about the love triangle between Midnight and his two wives. But I did FEEL the intention, honesty, and humanity in Bangs words to him. She was a great character, if only because anytime she came

around, we finally got to see some dissonance in Midnight, where he doubted himself and his thoughts. She did more as an antagonist than anyone else, including Akemi's father.

For all of the criticisms I had about this book it could have been a great read. Had she shaved about 100 pages of detail and instead used that page space to finish the story of what happened when Midnight got back to Brooklyn, how he got involved with Santiago, and what happened to his wives and children, and gave more purpose for Bangs then I could have at least justified my purchase of this book. Instead, she left story intentionally unanswered (or for another 20 dollars later down the line).

It's not as if she addressed the unanswered questions and just gave us an ambiguous ending where it could be interpreted multiple ways (that would have been fine). She simply didn't even acknowledge the unanswered questions. Maybe she didn't try to connect the dots because there were too many plot holes and inconsistencies to try and explain away. Still, I would have appreciated her trying. Knowing who was the wife Midnight had with him at the end of the Coldest Winter would have gone a long way to saving the last half of this book.

Bottom Line: "Midnight And The Meaning of Love" is an honest attempt at telling a Romeo and Juliet Hood Odyssey that spans multiple continents but it fails to capture the heart of the readers while trying to reveal the heart of Midnight. It's easy to see that Sister Souljah cares about her story and her characters, but her idea of a 14 year old Muslim man in love fails to translate into a believable human being; especially one that was as vivid and engaging as the Midnight was in Coldest Winter Ever. Midnight didn't say much in Coldest Winter which had us very intrigued to see his thoughts in the prequels, but his thoughts about fashion and chivalry and love and life don't ever seem to match the man that was presented in Coldest Winter Ever. True, he went through a dramatic perspective shift after becoming incarcerated, losing his mother, and his "manhood", but Souljah never touches on that in this book. Instead, all we see is a Superman version of Midnight. Souljah teases the reader by making the main character Midnight and even throwing in a chapter with Santiago in this book, but the characters never even seem like the same characters from CWE. They seem like gimmicks to get the reader, reading a completely separate story with nothing to do with the former. That's cool, if that's the story she wants to tell. But why then say it is a prequel? Prequels are suppose to help support the sequel and show why a person was the way they were. This book doesn't do that. It actually disconnects the two stories.

For all it's build up and page length, you can't help but feel like this book is incomplete.

63 of 67 people found the following review helpful.

FRUSTRATED and prematurely disappointed

By Kenya G

SPOILER ALERT!!

I have been waiting for this book to come out ever since I finished reading Midnight: A Gangster Love Story. This is not a FULL review only because I haven't read the whole thing. I've been anticipating this book because A Gangster Love story ended with Akemi being "kidnapped" by her Father and took back to Japan. Before I get into my dislikes of the book so far, let me just say that Sister Souljah really disappointed me with all the women characters being fair skinned (light skinned, mulatto etc...) with long flowing hair. I was proud of Midnight being a strong BLACK young man, but why couldn't his mother be a beautiful dark-skinned Sudanese woman? Are there not any dark-skinned Sudanese women that she could have gotten inspiration from? The photographs in Midnight and the meaning of love are beautiful, I was just hoping to see something out of the ordinary.

With that being said I feel that the book is really dragging in the beginning. Overall Midnight does a lot of



talking and thinking. I appreciate that but there was not much action so far. To be honest I did flip through the end of the book and saw that he took Chiasa as his second wife and apparently he got both of the pregnant. In the last chapter of the book Midnight says, "I gifted her two daughter-in-law and three babies in their womb."

In the book Coldest Winter Ever Midnight was grown (around 25 I think) and he wrote to Sistah Souljah that his mom died and his sister Naja almost got molested. He went to jail for shooting the man that almost did that. And at the end of that book he was married to one woman and adopted Winter's sisters.

I really want to know what happened to Akemi, Chiasa and his children between that time. Did he divorce them before working for Santiago? Did they die? And if Midnight caught the man in a stairway with his sister did they move back to Brooklyn or did they even leave? Overall how did the VERY mature 14 old black male with strict self discipline, self control, and morals named Midnight become a 25 year old drug dealer working for Santiago? I need that holed to be filled! I guess these questions will never be answered unless Souljah writes another book. Until then I will be frustrated and I will continue to read Midnight and the Meaning of love and maybe I will be satisfied when I read the whole thing through but I highly doubt it. I truly feel as though Sistah Souljah's whole idea about Midnight was to write her perspective about how SHE sees black Americans and how she views non-Americans. With the negative portrayal she throws on black American and the way she speaks highly of other countries and their traditions, I really believe Sistah Souljah hate black Americans and also hates herself!

31 of 32 people found the following review helpful.

Sister Souljah just leave it alone

By aprtho

I am so disappointed with this book, to be honest I was disappointed with the last book in this series, but I thought she would really bring it this time around so i gave her another chance but she disappointed me again and I'm done, I'm so done you can stick a fork in me. Sister Souljah Ms. girl, just leave it alone just let the Midnight Saga end, it's like you keep trying to pull something from nowhere, and turn it into over 600 pages and call it a book. I've read every book in this saga and I remember every detail starting with the Coldest Winter Ever and it just doesn't add up. And why write a pointless chapter about Ricky Santiago and it's not relevant to anything, I got excited when I saw that chapter and you let me down. I am highly disappointed. Leave the Midnight saga alone, just stop. and you even mentioned the guy Lance that he killed in the Coldest Winter Ever and that's it, I see you trying to satisfy your reader's curious imagination and interest about the events that lead up to what happened in the Coldest Winter Ever, but your doing it half way. And he goes to Japan and comes back with a second wife and none of this was mentioned in The Coldest Winter Ever. Maybe you should pick up the book and read it before you write another disappointing part of this Midnight gangster meaning of love or whatever. And you know what to be honest with you this is not my Midnight from the Coldest Winter Ever, I wanted to marry the Midnight from the Coldest Winter Ever and bare his children, but this Midnight in these two books, this dude right here, I have nothing but contempt and down right disgust for because he thinks he's so much better than every aspect of America. Like he's so above it all, cause he's from the Sudan and he's just sitting on this high horse like nobody can touch me, because I'm not American and you remember that. He's the reason I wanted to read Midnight A Gangster Love Story because I was so mesmerized with him, but I am so turned off by his attitude about American women and everything in America, This extreme type of Egocentrism that he portrays is sickening. Who is he to say that his culture is so Superior, in his culture a 14 year old which is still a child in my eyes (and most people's) can have sex and get married. Now don't get me wrong I'm not disrespecting or putting down those customs, because that is really some people's way of life and that's what they believe, I'm just relating it all to this character in this book, Amercian women are trash and Asain women are just the best thing since sliced bread so good he had to have two of them. Two wives at age 14, but you know what this all goes back to Sister Souljah I think

that's her image of the "American Woman" like she's not American too, but that's an entirely different debate, The point is don't buy this book like I did, but I will be returning it tomorrow, Sister Souljah is not getting my hard earned money on a 600+ page book that killed all those trees for nothing. If she wants to write a book about Midnight start from the moment he killed Lance and your work way up and tell us every single detail and in between the line parts of what happened to him, how he felt about it, how he dealt with it, how he didn't deal with it, why he didn't deal with etc etc. Matter of fact just re write The Coldest Winter Ever from Midnight's point of view and tell us every thing he did in the meantime when he wasn't working for Santiaga. Please either start tonight on that re write or just "Leave it alone Sister Souljah LEAVE IT ALONE" .....

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# MIDNIGHT AND THE MEANING OF LOVE (THE MIDNIGHT SERIES BOOK 2) BY SISTER SOULJAH PDF

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“A thrilling adventure....delivers on all promises. Souljah...has done it again.” --Ebony

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 kadar 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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