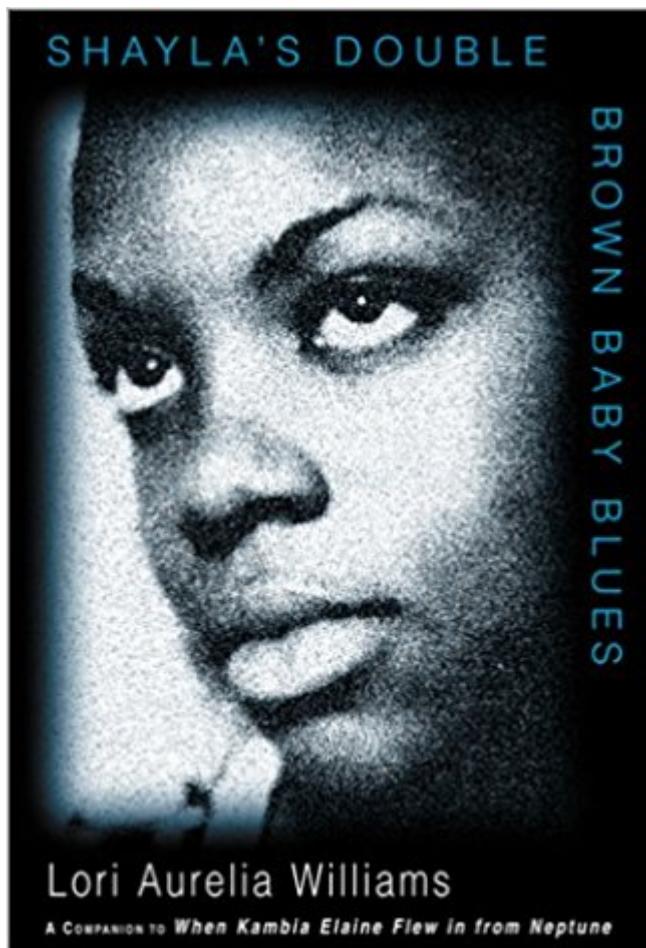


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# Shayla's Double Brown Baby Blues



## **Synopsis**

"That's the way I felt, like something had eaten parts of me, the best parts. There would be no journal entry when I got back to the house this time. Like Grandma said, I just didn't have the words." Shayla feels that she's been replaced now that her father's new wife has given birth to a baby -- born on Shayla's own birthday. As upset as she is, though, she can't confide in her best friend, Kambia Elaine, because she doesn't want to diminish Kambia's happiness at finally being part of a loving family. Yet Kambia's life is not without difficulties of its own: Someone has been sending her evil messages and packages that threaten her well-being. Neither can Shayla confide in her new friend, Lemm, because she discovers that he has his own troubles -- although she can't imagine the tragedies from his past that he's still keeping secret. As she did in *When Kambia Elaine Flew in from Neptune*, Lori Aurelia Williams (whom Publishers Weekly has called "a writer to watch") has written an emotionally charged novel of unconditional love, told sensitively in luminous prose.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Thirteen-year-old Shayla has never thought much of her estranged father, the silver-tongued Mr. Anderson Fox. And she thinks even less of the new baby girl he has fathered named Gift ("I don't think that she's a present.") Jealous and angry that "once again Mr. Anderson Fox has tracked sadness into our house on the sole of his shiny leather shoe," Shayla tries to take her mind off her baby blues by spending more time with her best friend Kambia Elaine and flirting with Lemm, the cute new boy in the 'hood. But she soon discovers that each of them are nursing their own troubles.

Kambia is receiving awful anonymous reminders of her former abusive home that cause her mind to "run away from her like folks do from Casper the Friendly Ghost," and Lemm is struggling with a terrible family secret that he tries to cover up with alcohol and fast talk. As she strives to help them both, Shayla painfully learns that friendship has its limits and that the maturity she longs for comes with a price. Lori Aurelia Williams has more tightly focused this sophomore follow-up to her critically acclaimed, yet somewhat rambling first novel, *When Kambia Elaine Flew In from Neptune*. With Shayla's *Double Brown Baby Blues*, Williams sticks closer to the plot, while continuing to write Shayla's first-person voice in the signature lyrical style that made *Kambia Elaine* so unforgettable. To borrow a quote from the vivid wordsmith Williams herself, this poignant sequel is like "thinking you had eaten the last cherry Jolly Rancher out of the bag and then opening it and finding two more." (Ages 12 to 18) --Jennifer Hubert

Williams picks up where she left off in her stunning debut novel (*When Kambia Elaine Flew in From Neptune*), chronicling the complicated summer of 13-year-old Shayla. The smart, sensitive narrator is still trying to help Kambia recover from years of abuse but, as the story opens, Shayla's mostly absent father and his wife give birth to a new baby girl--on Shayla's birthday. When she befriends Lemm, a new classmate with an alcohol problem, the heroine must grapple with even more complicated feelings and again decide, as she did with Kambia, what it means to be a true friend. There are more subplots than in the previous novel (e.g., Kambia begins receiving mysterious packages containing painful fragments from her past; Lemm's family history grows complicated) and more characters to keep track of here (a cameo appearance by Shayla's ex-girlfriends and their new beaux), and so much tragedy that the story almost becomes surreal. Some readers may have difficulty keeping up (especially those who did not read the first book), but Shayla's strong sense of self and the poetic language she uses to pinpoint her feelings will keep readers enraptured. The chapters sometimes begin with the pieces written by Shayla, an aspiring writer; through them, and through the similes she pens in her journal ("Regret is flowing through me like dirty bathwater"), readers see her working through her problems. While the courtroom drama involving Lemm at the conclusion feels a little trite, Williams does not present easy answers. Readers will feel the undercurrent of authenticity in her characters and situations throughout the novel. Ages 12-up.

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I was a little disappointed in this book. Not nearly as good as *When Kambia Elaine Flew in From Neptune*, which I absolutely loved.

Shayla Fox's life seems to take turn after turn for the worse. First, her estranged father left her mother for good. Then he remarried a woman Shayla does not like in the least. But worst of all, he has a new daughter named Gift --- a daughter born on Shayla's birthday! Shayla feels as if she has nothing of her own any more, not even a special day. Her grandmother, her sister, and her mother all try to help Shayla. Grandma Augustine is a wisecracking wise woman. Although Shayla feels like her drama is unbearable, Grandma Augustine constantly reminds her to be thankful that she is alive and whole and smart. Grandma Augustine knows that Shayla can be melodramatic and so she gently tells her grandchild that her life, like most people's, will be filled with a little rain, but it's up to Shayla to make sure her sorrows don't turn into a big, overwhelming storm. A girl who does have a stormy life is Shayla's best friend Kambia. (Their friendship was detailed in author Williams's first book, *WHEN KAMBIA ELAINE FLEW IN FROM NEPTUNE* by Lori Williams.) As this second novel opens, Kambia's life has only gotten more complicated. A year prior, Kambia was found wandering, alone and amnesiac. Adopted by the Dreyfuses, Kambia is caught in a search for her identity as well as having to find a place for herself in the world. Shayla must help Kambia heal, even as anonymous notes and packages start to plague her friend and bring her to the edge of sanity. In another subplot, Shayla befriends Lemm, the new boy at school who's lost most of his family in a tragic accident. Lemm struggles, feeling as alone and hopeless as Kambia and Shayla. Lemm also has severe problems with substance abuse, and even as Shayla tries to gain some control in her life, she finds she wants to help Lemm with his issues. Most of the time Shayla feels as if she's caught up in a world full of problems whirling about her, just waiting to reach out and snatch her. *SHAYLA'S DOUBLE BROWN BABY BLUES* presents a harsh picture of contemporary life in the African American community. The families are strained nearly to the breaking point but held together by a web of women. These women show their strengths and vulnerabilities while keeping life going, despite upheavals, dangerous events, and secrets from the past. Women like Grandma Augustine carry with them the promise of a brighter future, even when that promise seems to be withheld by violence and uncertainty; they never allow hope to become totally eaten away. By sharing her enduring strength with her granddaughter, Augustine demonstrates that it is possible to bear the shocks of life and, in time, overcome them. This isn't the kind of book you can say you enjoyed; "enjoy" simply isn't the right word. But it does tell a powerful story in tight well-crafted prose that lingers in the mind and in the soul long after the story has ended. Lori Aurelia Williams's characters are so solid, they seem as if they've been hewn out of rock instead of the airy stuff of imagination. It's the kind of book that makes you want to hold your own family just a little nearer, just

a little dearer. See for yourself. --- Reviewed by Cassia Van Arsdale

Shayla is young, black, and feels that now that her father's new wife has given birth to a baby (born on Shayla's own birthday!) that she has been replaced in her father's affections. Shayla can't even confide in her best friend, Kambia Elaine, because of not wanting to diminish Kambia's own happiness at finally being part of a loving family in her own right. Nor can Shayla confide in a new friend, Lemm, when she discovers that he has his own troubles and tragedies that he is trying to keep secret. Lori Williams' *Shayla's Double* is a superbly written, emotionally articulate novel of unconditional love, human heartbreak, and family relationships. Highly recommended for young listeners 10 through 18, this 10 hour, 30 minute Listening Library unabridged production is flawlessly produced and aptly narrated by heather Alicia Simms.

In this sequel to *When Kambia Elaine Flew in from Neptune*, Shayla's father has a baby daughter with his new wife. The baby is born on Shayla's birthday and has Shayla's eyes. As Shayla is learning to accept the new baby, Gift, she is also dealing with Kambia, who is getting threatening messages from someone while she is trying to recover from what happened before. Also in the midst of everything, Shayla meets a boy named Lemm. Lemm is a gentlemen who does a lot of sweet talking, and really likes Shayla, but he has real problems too. This is a great book, and anyone who liked the first book will really like this one too.

The author did something most authors tend not to do well, she penned a companion book that was a near perfect sequel to the original. From character development to plot, this story took a very strong first novel to the next level with the second. Almost every character grew in in *Shayla's Double Brown Baby Blues*, and grew in more ways than maturity in years. Shayla and Kambia come back and play out a very strong story, the new a new character (Lem) adds breadth and the renewed character in the father (Mr. Anderson Fox) adds so much more depth. Language and tone are vivid and bright and a delight for all readers young and old. This is a must read and a must have!

Many young adult books cannot be compared to the technique and writing style of Lori Aurelia Williams. In her sequel, *Shayla's Double Brown Baby Blues*, Williams gives her characters conflicts in which many readers are able to relate to, or can understand based on human emotions. Williams heroine, Shayla, is a bright beautiful young lady who has a strong sense of self and faces many

problems to determine her self worth. I would recommend this book to any and everyone, especially young adults, because it's a coming of age book and many young people can relate to Shayla's problems.

this was a great book, just as good as Lori Aurelia Williams's first book. It focuses on friendship and growing up. shayla must deal with some really difficult issues. her father has a new baby that she fears will take her place and someone begins sending Kambia packages that remind her of her childhood, sending her into her own little world for hours at a time. i can't wait to see what else williams writes.

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