

“REDEMPTION IS A HEARTBEAT AWAY.”

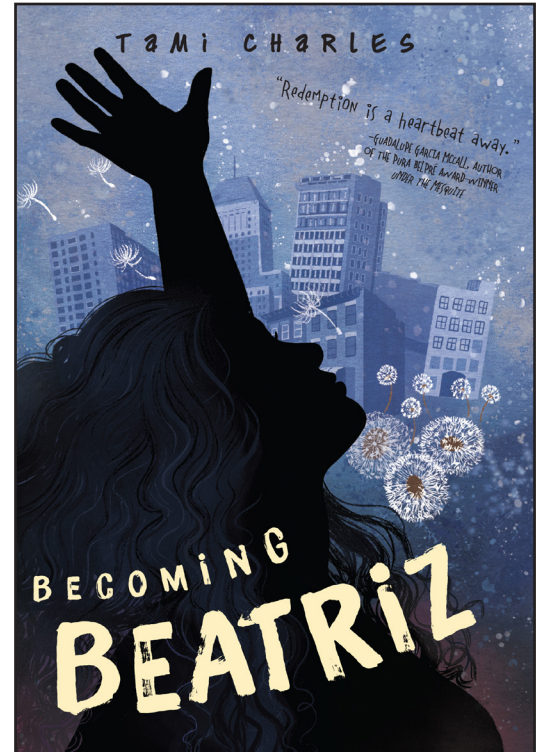
—Guadalupe Garcia McCall, author of the Pura Belpré Award winner *Under the Mesquite*

About the Book

It's Beatriz's quinceañera and she is ready to be treated like royalty. But when her brother, the leader of the Diablos, is gunned down by a rival gang, Beatriz will never be the same again. Her dreams of dancing, her hopes for fame, and her love of music died with Junito.

But when handsome brainiac Nasser asks her to join a dance competition with him—one that could land them both a role on Beatriz's favorite TV show, *Fame*—Beatriz starts to feel the music again. Nasser makes her feel alive.

Set in 1984, the music, the dancing, and the rhythm of the life of a Puerto Rican teenager in Newark, New Jersey, reveal a story of hope and perseverance. In this companion novel to the lauded *Like Vanessa*, Beatriz must learn what her dreams are made of, what she'll do to achieve them, and how to live the life she wants, rather than a life that someone else decided for her.



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About the Author



Tami Charles is a former elementary school teacher who now writes full-time. She is the author of *Like Vanessa*, *Definitely Daphne*, and the picture book *Freedom Soup*. She lives in Central New Jersey.

About Dreams and Secrets

- Compare Beatriz the dreamer to Beatriz the realist. What is different or similar between the two outlooks? Do you think dreams and reality can be the same thing?
- “Un secreto entre de dos, se quede entre los dos. Pero un secreto entre de tres, sabe todo el mundo.” “A secret between two can stay secret—but a secret between three, the whole world knows.” What do you think of this saying? Is it possible for more than two people to share a secret? Why or why not?
- Discuss Junito’s secret. Given the historic and cultural setting, what would happen if his secret was revealed?
- Beatriz is certainly attracted to Nasser, but what else does he represent to her?
- When truths begin to reveal themselves to Beatriz, her world shatters a little bit. But she still has dance. Would you call that an escape or a destination?

About Writing

- Throughout this book, faux newspaper articles are reproduced in the pages, giving a media perspective on the events of Beatriz’s life. What do you notice about the tone, format, and scope of these articles? How do they paint a different or similar portrait of Beatriz’s life compared to her own words?
- Which of Beatriz’s poems is your favorite? Why?
- Each flashback scene is formatted like a track in a music album (*Track Five: Dance of the Rumba, December 8, 1983*, for example). What does this say about the relationship between music, memory, and history?
- Writing is an important part of Mami’s healing process. What do you think of the difference between her poems and Beatriz’s poems? Is there anything about Mami’s writing that surprises you? Why or why not?

About los Diablos

- *Becoming Beatriz* opens with a violent episode. What do you think about how this sets the tone and pace of the story?
- Why does Beatriz refuse to tell the police about what happened with Junito and the Macoutes?
- The book opens with a quote, “Fama! Quiero vivir pa’ siempre,” which was Beatriz’s first tag as a gang member. What does this quote tell you about Beatriz?
- “Two feelings break out in a war—hate and loyalty. And honestly, I can’t shake either.” Discuss this phrase: What is Beatriz’s mindset when she thinks it? How does it resonate with your own life?

About Family and Growing Up

- Beatriz just turned fifteen. In many ways, however, she has to be grown up. Is this fair? Is she handling it well?
- How do Beatriz’s ideas about family change throughout the novel?
- Discuss Beatriz’s adult role models. Does she have strong relationships with them? Why does Beatriz resist connection with the adults in her life?
- Discuss Beatriz’s struggles: grief, anger, fear. But also: school, the gang, and dance. How does she juggle these? How does she live with them? How does she play one of these lives off the others?