

Blue

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by [jamaharon](#)

Summary

The thing about Imzadi is that when your partner is stupid enough to drink an unknown alien liquor and get high out of his mind...
...you get high out of *your* mind, too.

It was more like a drug than an alcohol. Riker was just glad he'd gotten away from the alien bar, and double-glad he wasn't wearing his Starfleet uniform. Few others from the ship had been there. It was a place for poker and pool — or the local equivalents, which Riker had picked up quickly and enthusiastically before losing his wits to what they simply called Blue. He clutched a bottle of Blue in his right hand as he wove back to the hotel, half-smiling, cheeks aching. Every now and then, an amazed laugh spilled over his lips, wild and free.

He couldn't help it. Everything was beautiful. More beautiful than normal. Streetlights stretched into dazzling golden halos all around him. Near-invisible heatbugs flew through the air, leaving trails of color behind them that Riker hadn't been able to see an hour before. The tile mosaic on the streets seemed to breathe beneath Riker's feet, slowly flexing and curling in on itself like a magnificent, impossibly large snake, and even the shadows of the trees were so ink-dark and graceful that Riker stopped and stared at them in wonder.

That was how Troi found him. He heard her giggling first; then, still staring at the trees, he felt her hand on his chest. She brushed down his arm to the bottle of Blue and plucked it from his pliant hand.

"Oh, Will," she said, still laughing. "What have you gotten yourself into?"

He laughed along with her helplessly. "It's good," he said, voice earnest. "You should try it. Only it's probably breaking seventeen different regulations."

"No doubt." She studied the label — or tried to — and collapsed into a fit of giggles. "Oh, damn it, Will."

"What?" he asked, smiling like a loon. He leaned into her unconsciously, bonelessly, and she struggled to hold him up, laughing even harder.

"Damn it," she said again through breathless chuckles. "I-I can feel it, too. *Imzadi*. We..."

"*Oh*." His drunkenness had bled through to her. And that was so funny that for a moment they just clung to each other in the street, with the mosaic breathing underneath them and the lights blooming overhead, laughing so hard they could barely stay standing. Riker squeezed his eyes shut and saw impossible complex patterns of light and color forming in the darkness, so beautiful they made his breath hitch. He reached blindly for Troi's hand, her fingers so small and delicate, and pressed her knuckles to his lips.

"I wish you could *see* this," he murmured. "Feeling it is one thing. But seeing it..."

Troi's laughter faded. They weren't clinging to each other anymore, but they hadn't moved away. They'd just transitioned into a hug: stomach to stomach and cheek to cheek, touching everywhere they could. The air was so cold, and both of them were so warm. Their breathing synchronized; he wrapped one arm around her waist to hold her closer.

"I can see it," Troi whispered.

Her voice alone made the pattern change. The colors cycled over to something softer, gentler. Something that entered Riker's veins like cool, refreshing water and left him so relaxed he might have sunk to the ground right there, holding Troi in his arms, watching the stars. It

was tempting. He wouldn't care that the mosaic was hard or that it hurt his back. Nothing could hurt him now. He wanted to hold her, to watch the sky flex and ignite overhead.

"Say that again," Riker murmured, his voice sleepy.

"I can see it," Troi obliged. And then she laughed and buried her face in his chest. "I *can* see it," she said. "Those patterns. I can see them through you. It's beautiful, Will."

It *was*. Beautiful, warm, and sparkling. The kind of crisp, prickling ice-cold heat that came with an early morning snow. It was like silver ice over the lakes in Alaska. It was like snowflowers atop the mountains of Betazed, hardy and resilient, their petals soft as velvet even in the harshest winters. It was *blue* in all its shades, cold and warm, complex and intricate and impossible to decode. And at the same time so familiar, like he'd seen it a million times before.

"It's you," Riker said.

He held her a little tighter.

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