

## THE BETAZOID EXPERIENCE: From [IMZADI](#) by [Peter David](#)

By Daniel D. Ziegler

*Even though we pretend to believe that the human body is a most magnificent creation of the divine, what we really believe, and live according to, is the false belief that if certain parts of it were exposed in public, society would crumble. This is one of the most oppressive beliefs that we carry because keeping ourselves covered “properly”--to cover our learned shame and embarrassment--requires an enormous amount of energy that could be directed to much more meaningful endeavors. But we have been doing it for so long, we feel it is normal and we have long forgotten how repressive that is, and what it feels like to be free.*

*There are those of us, however, who know better because we have experienced something else. We have been in situations where social nudity is accepted and we have learned that it works just fine and it is indeed a freeing experience. Occasionally free thinkers come along and express these ideas on the screen or in books and when they do, I take solace in their work, for I am encouraged that, in relating to it, that part of us is still alive.*

*Such a writer is [Peter David](#) with his book [IMZADI](#) based on the television series Star Trek: The Next Generation. Fans of that series are no doubt familiar with the special feelings that Commander William T. Riker and Counselor Deanna Troi have for each other, although many may not know of the origin of those feelings. In his novel, Peter David develops the story of how they met on Deanna’s home planet Betazed. In one situation Riker finds himself confronted with a new situation in which he experiences a different way of looking at the body.*

*The part of the story that I excerpt below begins as young Lieutenant Riker, having just arrived on the planet Betazed, is doing some work for the Federation. He is in the embassy office of the Federation speaking with Ambassador Roper and his grown daughter Wendy—whom he finds attractive. In the conversation, Roper mentions that he and his daughter are to attend a Betazed wedding in the evening but that he doesn’t want to attend. Riker seizes the moment. d.d.z.*

From [IMZADI](#) by [Peter David](#), POCKET BOOKS, a division of Simon and Schuster Inc., New York, NY, 1992, pp. 95-105.

“Look, sir, if it’s too much of an inconvenience for you, I have a simple solution,” said Riker. “I’ll go.”

Roper looked up. “You?”

“If,” said Riker, and he turned smilingly to Wendy, “it wouldn’t bother you to have me as your escort instead of your father.”

She looked him up and down in an even more appraising manner than before, and Riker couldn't understand why she was grinning so widely. "That sounds great."

"You really wouldn't mind, Lieutenant Riker?" said Roper. "You'd be doing me a tremendous service—clearing up some free time for me to attend to other matters, and sparing me yet another one of those ceremonies."

"I don't see what the problem would be," said Riker. "I'm glad to pitch in and help wherever I can."

"That's settle, then," said Wendy cheerfully.

"Good," said Roper, slapping his ample belly. "I must admit, I think that you'll present a much more dignified presence for the Federation than I usually do."

Riker smiled politely, not completely understanding what Roper meant.

But later, he would.

## CHAPTER 13

The wedding chapel was small and sedate, a one-story building shaped like a trapezoid.

It was a crisp, cool evening, and Riker in full dress uniform had called on Wendy at her home to pick her up. He saw that she had indeed decided on the low-cut green dress, and he felt somewhat appreciative of that. The cleavage that it revealed was most attractive, and she had a long and slender neck that was nicely accentuated as well.

She smiled at him and said, "Very chic, Lieutenant."

"I want to make a good first impression on all concerned. And please, call me Will."

"Try and stop me." She inclined her head slightly. "The chapel's less than a kilometer away, and it's a lovely night. Feel like walking?"

"That sounds charming." He proffer his elbow and she took it.

They headed down the street, keeping up a pleasant and enjoyable string of chitchat between them. Riker found out that Wendy was a sociologist; that her mother had passed away some years previously; that she preferred new age music.

Riker feigned being wounded. “I *must* introduce you to the joys of real music. This new age stuff is just noise.”

“So what’s real music, then?”

He grinned. “Dixieland, Swing. The big-band era.”

“Big band?” she said, sounding puzzled. “You mean they’re excessively tall?”

“I’ll explain it later.” He said, for he had spotted the chapel just up ahead.

He saw a number of Betazoids filing in through the doors, smiling and greeting one another. It was his first opportunity to see a large number of them together, and he was struck by the feeling that something seemed a bit wrong. Then he immediately realized what it was.

There was hardly any talking.

People would nod, smile to each other, tilt their heads as if they were listening intently to one another. But except for the occasional stray word of exclamation, or some random laughter here and there, not a word was spoken.

“They’re communicating telepathically, aren’t they?” said Riker in realization as they approached.

“Of course.”

“Then this is liable to be a fairly dull ceremony. Everyone standing around thinking things to each other and we can’t hear them.”

“Oh”—Wendy waved off the concern and laughed—“that won’t happen. Weddings are always done out loud, in consideration of any offworlders who might be in the audience.”

“That’s a relief.” He thought about it a moment. “Will I be able to communicate with any of them? Mentally, I mean? I’ve never met a Betazoid...I’m not sure what’s involved.”

“You won’t be able to, no. Oh, they’ll be able to pick up on what’s going through your mind easily enough. But for you to be able to send and receive projections, well...it’s a technique. It’s something that you have to learn, involving mental discipline and learning how to clear your mind. Unless, of course, you’re dealing with a really strong telepath.”

He looked surprised. “You mean they’re not all equally adept?”

“Of course not. Are all humans equally intelligent? Equally athletic? Equally eloquent? No. All Betazoids are telepathic to some degree. Most can read minds without too much difficulty. But only a small percentage are really so powerful, so...formidable,” she said, for want of a better word, “and they’re the ones you have to watch out for. They’re the toughest.”

“Toughest?”

“To know how to act around. They’re so casual about their abilities, it’s hard to feel like anyplace inside you is...I don’t know...safe.”

“I’ll watch out for that.”

They entered the chapel. The air inside was cool and fresh. They entered a large room where everyone seemed to be milling about, just conversing...or whatever one would call it...with each other.

Riker looked slowly around the room. It was fairly plain, although inscriptions written in Betazoid lined parts of the wall. What was also odd were the recesses all along the side, and dangling from the recesses were what appeared to be clothes hangers of some sort. On the floor were a series of small boxes. Riker idly tapped one with his toe and the hollow sound confirmed that it was empty.

Hangers and empty boxes. Probably for days when the weather was inclement and people brought coats and such.

At the far end of the room was a set of ornate doors, closed. Riker presumed that the actual ceremony would be through there, but they probably weren’t ready yet.

Several of the Betazoids seemed to pick up on Riker’s presence. They looked in his direction, smiled and nodded. It was as if to say, *We know you’re here. Welcome.* And then they went back to their own communications.

Riker had once been to a world where none of the occupants had standard auditory or verbal equipment. They communicated entirely through hand movements. Riker had been to a party there, and the silence was positively eerie. The only sound that had broken the quiet was the slap of skin on skin as their hands would come together to form certain words.

This wasn’t quite as bad as that...but still, it was rather disconcerting.

“A little difficult to deal with, isn’t it,” said a voice from behind him.

Riker turned and saw a thin but pleasant-looking Betazoid smiling at him. “Pardon?” asked Riker.

The Betazoid gestured. “All this. The quiet communion. You’re from earth are you not?”

Riker realized the man knew the answer to the question already, but was doing Riker the courtesy of allowing him to answer it.

“That’s right. Lt. William Riker.”

“Gart Xerx, your host.”

“Ah, congratulations, Mr. Xerx.”

“Gart will do.” Xerx nodded at Riker’s companion. “Good to see you again, Wendy.”

“You too, Gart. I’m very happy for you and Chandra.”

“Thank you Wendy.” Xerx indicated the closed doors with a nod of his head and said, “They should be ready to start in just a moment or two. Chandra’s quite nervous, of course. She wants everything about here appearance to be perfect.”

“I know how it is,” Riker said. “The bride wants to make sure the dress looks just right.”

Gart Xerx smiled politely. “Well...that might be true in *your* culture, Lieutenant. We don’t have that problem, actually.”

“Then you’re very fortunate,” said Riker.

The edges of Xerx’s mouth turned upward slightly. “You don’t know, do you.” It wasn’t a question.

“Know what?”

At that moment the doors at the far end opened. They moved very slowly and ponderously, and Riker watched them, interested to catch a glimpse of the wedding sanctuary within.

It was dazzling, filled from ceiling to floor with flowers, all exotic and tropical. It seemed as if a small jungle had been grown inside the sanctuary specifically for the purpose of the marriage. Riker caught a whiff of moist air—obviously the climate was carefully maintained in order to preserve the flowers to their maximum advantage.

He turned back to Xert to compliment him on the arrangement and was astounded to see Xerx had removed his shirt, revealing a bare chest that was amazingly smooth.

“Excuse me...what are you doing?” asked Riker, trying to keep the astonishment out of his voice. He turned to Wendy to see her reaction.

What he saw was Wendy’s low-cut dress even lower than it was before...namely on the floor. She was stepping out of it, and Riker was seeing a lot more of her cleavage than had been displayed previously...to be specific, all of it that there was to see.

His now-nude escort looked up at him with innocent doe eyes. “What are you waiting for, Will? Musical accompaniment?”

She laughed lightly, turned, and headed toward the hanger, her dimpled backside swaying cheerfully back and forth. And now Riker saw, to his utter shock, that all of the guests were stripping off their clothes and placing them on the hangers provided.

Gart, who was naked and holding his clothes draped over one arm, looked at Riker sympathetically. “I’m very sorry, Lieutenant. They should have told you. Perhaps Mark Roper was concerned that, if you knew, you wouldn’t be interested in attending.”

Riker’s mouth was working, but at first he couldn’t get any words to come out. Finally he managed to stammer. “Is this...*standard*?”

“Oh, yes,” said Gart calmly. “At a Betazed wedding, the bride, groom, wedding party, and guests all attend nude.”

“*Why?*”

“To symbolize that, physically and spiritually, there is nothing to hide. That all are sharing in complete cooperation in the spirit of harmony and unity.”

Riker had a feeling that all the blood had drained from his face. “Well...” He cleared his throat, unsure of what he should do. Starfleet protocol required cooperation with local mores and customs wherever possible, so long as no violation of the Prime Directive was involved. There was nothing in the Prime Directive about getting naked in front of over one hundred strangers, so he was clear on that score. But even so...

“Lieutenant,” said Gart, trying not to show as much amusement as he was clearly experiencing. “If you don’t go naked, I assure you, no one will think any less of you. We believe in not asking more of an individual than he is capable of giving.

This is a time of celebration, not embarrassment. Attend the wedding in whatever manner you will feel the most comfortable.”

“I don’t want to insult anyone...,” said Riker uncertainly.

“Nor will any one take offense. Now, if you’ll excuse me...I have guests to attend to.” Gart walled to the hangers, leaving Riker alone in the middle of a room of stripping people.

Wendy walked back up to Riker and looked at him reprovngly. She placed her hands on her hips in a fashion that was probably chosen to look especially provocative. “What’s this, Will” Having trouble? Here...I’ll help.” She reached up to the fastenings on his uniform.

He grabbed her wrists, though not particularly hard. Through a tight smile he said, “You could have told me before hand, you know.”

“What?” She looked shocked. “And miss this opportunity to see your expression?”

“You’ve seen it. How did it rate?”

“ I think you’d look at a firing squad of Klingons with less trepidation that you’re looking at a bunch of naked people.”

“At least with a firing squad, I’d have a bit of warning.”

“Oh, Will.” Now she was grinning widely. “Come on. You have nothing to be ashamed of.” Then she paused and raised an eyebrow thoughtfully. “Do you?”

“No!” said Riker a bit too loudly, so he repeated, “No.” but more softly this time.

“Well then...?”

“Well, to be honest...” He put his fingers to his forehead, trying to figure the best way to put it. “I’ve never been in a position where I’m trying to maintain my dignity and status as a Starfleet officer without the benefit of a uniform...or anything else.”

“Then don’t worry about your position. Worry about joining in the celebration. Look...if you don’t want to strip, then don’t. Come in anyway.”

“Okay. Fine. Thanks for understanding.”

He went into the chapel, and the full fragrance of the flowers wafted through the air. It was as if he’d stepped out from the city and straight into the jungle.

Wendy guided him to an aisle seat about halfway down. He looked around.

Naked people to the right of him, and to the left. In front of him and behind.

Everyone seemed utterly casual, even oblivious to their nudity. No one was tense or embarrassed. In fact, they seemed even more relaxed than they had been outside. Even men and women who, by the standard of the human ideal, would have been far better served wearing clothes (if not pup tents) weren't the least bit bothered by their nudity.

He felt as if everyone was looking at him. Riker knew they weren't, of course...but he felt that way.

Turning to Wendy, he said, "Excuse me...be right back," and he got up and walked out before she could ask him where he was going.

She sat there, staring at his empty chair, nodding and smiling to the other people, and wondering where in hell Riker had gone off too. Then she heard him say, "Thanks for saving my seat."

She looked up and grinned, "So you've decide to join the party after all."

He sat down next to her, not precisely sure how to place his bare legs. He wound up just sitting with them flat, his hands on his thighs. He noted for the first time that the seats were nicely cushioned, for which he was grateful. Cold metal would not have been especially appreciated right about then.

Wendy leaned over and said softly into his ear, "You were right, by the way... you have nothing to be ashamed of."

He liked the tone of her voice as she said it...it had a certain degree of promise to it. "Thank you. You're very kind."

She sat back and said, "I'm not sure why you were so nervous. I mean, what did you think was going to happen? Women were going to point and laugh?"

"I don't know. It's just a different situation for me, that's all. I thought people might say things that made me feel self-conscious."

"Oh, don't be silly. Like what?"

An older Betazoid woman was being guided toward the front by Gart Xerx. Riker assumed that it was probably his mother, or perhaps a great aunt. She stopped and looked at Riker, and frowned. "You human men are very hairy. Why is that?"

Xerx rolled his eyes in mild mortification. Wendy put her hand over her mouth to cover her grin.

But Riker, nonplussed, merely said, “Traction.”

Wendy emitted a quick burst of laughter, which she just as quickly stifled. Xerx was grinning openly. The old woman looked at Riker through narrow eyes and then allowed herself to be led away.

“*Traction?*” whispered Wendy.

“I had to say something.”

“Well, what you said was wonderful. You see? And you were worried that you wouldn’t be able to maintain your dignity while naked. You handled that in a very dignified manner.”

“Thank you.”

Wendy appeared to be sizing him up for a moment, and then she coyly fingered a strand of her chest hair.

Riker crossed his legs.

At the moment, the ceremony started...a moment marked by the sound of a very loud gong.

The lieutenant focused his attention toward the front of the wedding sanctuary.

The wedding party was entering, and yes, they were all naked as well. From one side of the sanctuary entered the groom, in the lead, followed by his mother.

To Riker’s surprise, the mother was pulling on his arm, trying to stop him. He ignored her, taking one implacable step after the other, toward the middle of the room. Into his path stepped a man whom Riker assumed to be his father. The father raised a hand, putting his palm up, signaling the groom to stop. The groom took his father by the forearm and shoved him aside...not roughly, and in fact, Riker saw that the groom was taking care not to make the action too violent, for fear of actually causing the older man to stumble.

“Symbolic, I take it,” Riker said in a low voice to Wendy, She nodded confirmation.

The groom stopped in front of a clergyman (presumably), who stood dead center of the room with a long scroll between his hands. They looked off to the right, and now the parents of the bride entered—the bride’s mother sobbing loudly onto the

shoulder of Gart Xerx. Too loudly—clearly more symbolism, but Riker thought the mother might be playing it up just a bit too much even for something that was supposed to be representational.

And the bride walked in. The bride...

Walked...

Riker blinked in a way people do when they're not entirely sure they're seeing what their eyes are telling them they're seeing.

She was gorgeous.

Her eyes were the most luminous he had ever seen. She held her pointed chin in an almost aristocratic manner, and her dark hair hung in thick ringlets around her head. Her neck was slender, and her figure...well, as they said in old detective novels, her body was the kind of curves that, if you were a car, make you want to hug the road.

Thoughts of what he would like to do with that body ran rampant through his imaginings, but he had to tell himself that, for crying out loud, she was taken. She was the bride. She was about to get married. She—

She stepped aside and gestured to a young woman who was seated in the front row.

"I summon you to the place of marriage," she said. Her voice was low and musical and had an exotic accent that Riker had never heard before. It sounded vaguely like a combination of three Middle European intonations, and yet a bit different.

The young woman rose. She had blond hair, tied back in a white band. She took the hand of the woman who had "summoned" her and stepped up to the side of the groom. They took each other's hands and turned to face the clergyman...

And that was when, belatedly, it hit Riker. The brunette wasn't the bride. She was some sort of equivalent of the maid of honor.

Unbidden, uncensored, thoughts about getting to know the maid of honor on a variety of levels stampeded back through his mind. His eyes drank her in hungrily as she stood with her back to him. The sumptuous lines of her lips, the elegant arch of her spine, and the way her shoulder blades played against the skin...and the way the light shined off that skin...the richness of her smile...

Her smile.

Her back was to him but he could see her smile...

Because she turned her head.

And she was looking at him.

Right at him.

*At him.* And smiling.

*Oh, my God,* he thought, *she knows what I'm thinking. She knows what I'd...*

Wendy looked at him and saw that his face had gone several shades of red.

"Will...are you okay?"

"I'm fine, His voice was thick and hoarse. It didn't even sound remotely like his.

"Just fine."

"You sure? You're sweating."

"It's hot in here. That's all. Just hot."

She was still smiling at him, for what seemed to Riker to be an eternity. Her bosom (*God, her bosom*) shook slightly in what he took to be (correctly) silent laughter. And then, mercifully, she turned away from him and put her attention back on the ceremony.

Riker didn't hear a word of the rest of the proceedings. He had his own proceedings in mind. The only question was how best to proceed with the proceedings.

*For those interested in the story, there is clothed reception in a reception hall after the ceremony where Riker learns the name of the brunette, Deanna Troi. They do not actually meet, however until the following day.*

*Describing the casual attitude of the Betazoids toward the nude body through the wedding scene, the author captures what many of us feel is a healthier attitude toward our bodies than what most people have. Perhaps through this reading we can all come a little closer to REALLY believing that our bodies are the magnificent creations that we often profess them to be, and perhaps we can learn to like ourselves more. d.d.z.*

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