

Difference of Opinion

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Difference of Opinion

by [guesswhattimeitis](#)

Summary

Commander Shepard has been acting out of line, and it's her XO's job to reign in her behavior. While Miranda Lawson starts with reprimanding the erratic Shepard, she soon finds she catches more flies with honey. This has unintended results.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

“What the hell is wrong with you?”

Miranda felt her blood nearly boiling, face flush and throat already hoarse. Shepard didn't take kindly to having her decisions questioned, and she hadn't been on the Normandy long but Miranda wasn't about to have a shouting match in the common areas. Taking Shepard aside for a one-on-one conversation about her recent behavior, Miranda's hands were sweaty and her stomach taut. No one seemed to question *The Commander* but it was Miranda's job to keep an eye on her. The Illusive Man himself had been quite clear he trusted no one else to do it properly. However, Shepard's recent self-destructive behavior had Miranda clenching her jaw and balling her fists, nervous worrying habits she could never quite shake. The drinking, dalliances, and even reckless behavior in combat went against Shepard's psychological evaluation. Something had to be done. And yelling in her face was how Miranda decided to start the discussion, for better or worse.

“I'm doing my damn job! You brought me back to be a weapon, and that's just what I'm going to be! Don't ask me to be something else now!” Jumping in front of bullets and sleeping with crime bosses and councilors wasn't what Cerberus had brought Shepard back for, that was for sure. On top of that, Shepard's L5 biotic amp wasn't meant for prolonged bouts, not the way Shepard used it. She could rip a bulkhead in two but throwing herself into dozens of mercenaries was just going to get her killed. Miranda's hands nearly tingled as she dug her fingernails into the palms of her hands.

“I did not spend two fucking years of my life putting you back together for you to rip yourself apart!” It wasn't really fair to bring that up. Miranda had *chosen* to spend those two years as she had. The long nights, the endless hours, the grueling repetition of it all had suited her just fine, a project she put her soul into completing. Two years of pouring over someone else's life and Miranda wouldn't have it any other way. But that wouldn't get a rise out of Shepard. No, she had to get Shepard mad. Guilt tripping her was just the start of getting to the bottom of this erratic behavior.

“You *do not* get to treat me like your damn father treated you! I *refuse* to owe you for what you *did* to me! You didn't heel when *he* called and I won't either!” Tears threatened to form in her eyes but Miranda blinked them away. She wouldn't give ground that easily, but Shepard had struck where it hurt. Less than a month of working together and she had already zeroed in on her insecurity. Talking about that monster had been something Miranda had begun to avoid but clearly not well enough. Stern talks and disapproving looks lived in the back of her mind, of course they made their way out every once in a while. What was worse about what Shepard said, of course, was that she was *right*.

“At least I knew not to throw away the opportunities given to me! And we need you!” What else could she say? In the end it had to be Shepard. The least she could do was try to understand what was at stake. If they were right, if the reports all added up to the horrible truth they had been searching for, there was a very real threat looming on the horizon. Worse, it was drawing closer every day. But what did they know? Shepard's hands slammed against Miranda's desk, flesh on metal, with a dull thud.

“You know that’s not true! You could have given anyone a gun and a ship and pointed them in the right direction! I was *dead!* Hell, *you* could have done it, shave the sides of your head and bleach the rest blonde, I bet no one would *fucking* notice for all they paid attention to me!” Shepard snarled, lips twisting on the last word. Sure, the Council was troublesome and unyielding, as was the Alliance brass, but there were plenty of people that cared. The funerary service on the Citadel had been galactic news. A mother crying for her lost child in her Alliance dress blues, a commendation from the whole Council, a moment of silence observed across Citadel space. It was not for nothing, but of course Shepard wasn’t alive to see it. Her glassy dead eyes couldn’t see the way others took up arms in her name, fought injustice the way she had, fought the good fight even when it was hopeless. Miranda did not inspire such devotion, her words did not provoke such a reaction as Shepard’s did.

Even now that she was alive, Shepard couldn’t see it.

”I wish you would have left me dead, it was a hell of a lot easier!” Miranda winced as if struck. She had been the one to ask the question, two years prior, if coming back would be something Shepard would want. Watching videos, reading reports, talking to the survivors, none of it helped. There wasn’t a way to ask Shepard what she wanted, but in the end they had decided that it was worth the risk, considering what they risked by letting her go. Cerberus would take that risk, consequences be damned. The looks on the faces of those that survived Shepard had made the decision clear to Miranda, selfish or not, the forlorn and distant looks of her loved ones had pushed her to believing it was right. But Miranda wasn’t heartless no matter what anyone said. Shepard’s stony face despite her screaming reminded her of her own face, screaming into a mirror that would not answer her.

“You don’t mean that.” Miranda’s voice was quiet now, strained. Her eyes were wet still, as she turned to the window to avoid Shepard’s piercing gaze.

“Yes, I fucking do! Why the *hell* am I alive again? Why would you do this?” Shepard was shouting, but there were tears too. Her voice had volume without force, questioning without conviction. It was like hearing a recording of a fight, hollow somehow, running against the limits of the media it was recorded on. She was terrifying to behold, the edges and the cracks of the powerful woman beginning to show. If there were any words to say to mend her, Miranda would say them, anything was better than watching her fall to pieces, bit by bit.

“Why? I put my own blood, sweat, and tears into bringing you back and you can’t even see the opportunity you have?” In a sense, Shepard had been given a gift. Miranda had no illusions she had handed Shepard a poisoned chalice with this second chance at life, but what choice did she really have?

“*Fuck* opportunity! You bring me back from the *fucking* grave and then decide you can tell me what to do?” Shepard’s face was flushed, and she had abandoned any pretense of this being a conversation and not a shouting match. Her words were full of malice, dripping with venom despite her throat sounding dry and adding a rasp to her husky voice. Chest heaving, she paced with a manic step, her eyes shifting back and forth. Miranda didn’t like the vision of an impatient predator stalking her quarters, but strove forward regardless.

“You got a second chance, maybe the first real second chance like this *ever* and you can’t see it for what it is? Of all the ungrateful—” Miranda didn’t finish her thought. It was wrong, and

she knew it as the word left her mouth. At that last word she clamped her mouth shut, facing completely away from Shepard. She shook her head as Shepard yelled it back at her.

“*Ungrateful?* What do I have to be grateful for?” Shepard looked aghast as Miranda turned back to her. Inhaling deeply through her nose, Miranda spoke with a shaky tone, her voice betraying uncertainty.

“Oh I don’t know, being alive for starters—” Shepard did not take that well, and did not seem to notice the tears that had begun to stream down Miranda’s face. She didn’t notice the way the crew looked at her with mounting worry. She hadn’t noticed much at all lately.

“You brought *me* back but I lost *everything* else! My friends look at me like I’m a ghost, or worse like a *stranger* ! I lost *two fucking years* and everyone else mourned me and moved on!” Shepard threw her arms wide open as she made her point. Before Miranda could interject, Shepard continued.

“I didn’t even get to mourn *myself*!” She choked the last word out. Her voice had cracked, the *invincible* Commander Shepard finally letting loose a pain she had been holding in her chest. A weight had been lifted off her shoulders, but she hadn’t fully let it go yet, the pained expression on her face a mix of despair and regret. It dragged her down and threatened to drown her then and there. They were both quiet for a moment. Miranda finally filled the void, stepping closer to Shepard as she spoke.

“I wouldn’t have done it if there was anyone else. But it had to be you.” It was almost a whisper.

“Why?” Shepard didn’t even try to make it a question, she just screamed it. Lacking power and conviction, she substituted volume. Miranda steeled herself, squaring her shoulders and taking another step forward.

“Because you’re the *goddamn* best there is! Do you think I would have done it for anyone less?” Miranda huffed, her voice rising in volume to match Shepard’s. “We knew— *I* knew! —that if you were even *half* the woman everyone said you were, you were our only shot at this!” It wasn’t something she admitted lightly. There were real reasons, concrete reasons to bring Shepard back, backed by science and study and observation. But Miranda didn’t need the numbers, she had done the research, she had put in the hours. She had caught herself smiling numerous times looking at the footage of Shepard, found herself rooting for her when she already knew the outcome. A dead woman inspired her, made her think maybe they could win despite the odds. Shepard was the only woman that could accomplish what she had accomplished. It had to be her.

“Well, I hope you anticipated some *resistance* because I didn’t want this! I still don’t want this!” She was spitting in the face of two long, hard years of work. But Miranda refused to hold it against her. After all, she was *dead* that whole time. Everyone had lived their lives for those years and she had woken up as if no time had passed since she had died. One moment she was gasping for breath, the next she was waking up to alarms and a frantic voice telling her she was in danger. It wasn’t fair to hold her words against her now. She didn’t ask for this, and the circumstances had been less than ideal.

“Shepard.” It came out callous and terse. Miranda’s tears hadn’t dried yet but they had abated for the moment. “You weren’t even awake yet and you blew my expectations out of the water. You *weren’t* half the woman everyone said you were; you were more than *double* that woman by even the most generous accounts.” Miranda’s voice was hard, but softened as she continued. “Reading the reports about you, seeing the vids, hearing the interviews, seeing the way people *looked* when they talked about you, all of it. I knew before we even thawed you out it was the right choice.” She had known the first time she had seen Shepard’s eyes, glassy and cold, but she couldn’t bring herself to admit that. Now wasn’t the time to talk about blind faith.

“Well you made a fucking mistake!” Shepard shoved her finger into Miranda’s face with a grimace. She had lost most of her volume but she was still spitting acid with each syllable.

“I don’t make mistakes! Not like this. You inspire loyalty! And trust! Not to mention cooperation, and hell, even heroics, like some big damn hero! You were, as I told the Illusive Man, a bloody icon. You had my loyalty before you got your sorry ass up off that bunk back when we woke you, and you’ve got it now!” Shepard considered her words, her face falling along with her pointed finger. It wasn’t a clear or direct look, but a pained and regretful one. Miranda shook her head lightly as she continued her point.

“I don’t settle for anything but the best, Shepard. And every sleepless night, every migraine, every time I had to start over because something wasn’t right, was worth it, and if you want to throw that away because life isn’t *fucking fair*—” Miranda was cut off midsentence, even as she found her voice rising of its own accord.

As Shepard’s mouth pressed greedily, passionately against hers, her hands tangled in Miranda’s silky hair.

Miranda’s whole body froze. Her thought processes seized up and her shoulders tensed. Her accusatory tone and reprimanding words were replaced with a hunger she didn’t know she had been holding back, a low growl rising in her throat as she relaxed into the kiss. Shepard showed her she felt the same hunger, judging by how she pressed her body flat against Miranda’s, and roughly pushed her backwards against her desk. To her credit, Miranda didn’t waste a moment, bringing a hand up to the nape of Shepard’s neck and running her fingers roughly through her hair. Miranda dug into her scalp with her nails, and Shepard’s increased vigor brought a smile to her lips.

As Shepard pressed Miranda back to sit on the edge of her desk, she wormed a hand between their bodies. Shepard’s rough and calloused fingers traced the seam of Miranda’s shirt, and she quickly found the hidden zipper under the collar, yanking it slowly downwards. Her mouth left Miranda’s, and she pressed her lips against the side of Miranda’s now exposed neck. Miranda let out a noise that she would usually describe as undignified, but it didn’t even register in her mind that she made it. Before she even knew what she was doing, Miranda found her hands slipping down Shepard’s sides, eventually finding purchase on Shepard’s belt. The tips of her fingers had slipped underneath her waistband, and her thumbs worked over the buckle. But Miranda hesitated, and finally her brain caught up with her body. Torturously she forced herself out of her lustful stupor.

Liara left her days ago. She's clearly emotionally compromised. She's not thinking clearly. I'm her executive officer. I report to Cerberus. We shouldn't do this. We can't do this.

This isn't right.

With herculean will, Miranda roughly pulled her hands back, and placed them firmly on Shepard's shoulders. Willing her biotics down even as her emotions summoned them to her fingertips, she shoved Shepard backwards hard enough to put several feet between them. Surprise, disappointment, pain, even betrayal played across her face. Too late Miranda realized she had once again taken something from Shepard. What had she done, letting Shepard get this close, entertaining the idea for even a moment? She had lost so much already, and Miranda knew this was another removal, even if it was necessary. *Damned if I do and damned if I don't*, she thought. She broke eye contact and looked anywhere but at the woman in front of her.

"Get out of my quarters, Commander." Shepard opened her mouth several times, trying to find words that wouldn't come. She was a good woman, a kind woman, someone Miranda could see fondly in her mind's eye when she was in control of herself. But she wasn't. This had to stop.

"*Get out.*" Miranda said it with finality. *This is for her own good.* Shepard set her face into something like a scowl, before turning and marching straight out the door. *Shit, that could have gone better.* Miranda adjusted her clothes, yanking the zipper of her shirt up and standing up. She followed Shepard out of her quarters, calling out to her halfway on her way to the elevator.

"Shepard wait—" She didn't get a chance. Shepard spun on her, middle finger up and a snarl on her lips.

"Not another word! This conversation is over Lawson!" Miranda realized they weren't alone, some crewman sitting in the mess and some members of Shepard's team making conversation near the doors to the medbay. She didn't say anything. Shooting her one last glare, Shepard turned back to the elevator and stomped off. Not waiting to be asked about the confrontation, Miranda wheeled on her heel and walked right back into her quarters before sealing and locking the door.

Don't cry. Don't cry. Don't cry. Damn it. A hot, undeserved tear rolled down her cheek, as she bent over her desk trying to compose herself. *What the hell was all that?* Shepard had been dead, unresponsive, a *bloody experiment* just a week or three ago. She was everything Miranda could have hoped for, but now that she was awake? Now that she was real? Shepard was a force of nature and Miranda wasn't sure that was a good thing anymore. Of course it was, she knew deep down. Even in the midst of her doubts Miranda knew that was part of what made Shepard into who she was. It was part of that vital spark she had seen, that they all saw. It made things complicated, and uncomfortable, but it was necessary. And Miranda was going to have to get used to it, and find a way to not let it become a problem.

"Edi, where is Commander Shepard right now?" She wasn't going to chase after her, but that didn't mean she couldn't check up on the hothead.

“Commander Shepard has just entered the cargo hold. It appears she is going to use the exercise equipment,” Edi said, her synthetic voice not betraying any emotional weight to the statement. *Well that’s one way to get rid of this frustration.* Miranda inwardly felt relief, she worried that Shepard was going to head back to her quarters and have a meltdown. Not that tearing another punching bag in two wasn’t going to be a meltdown but at least she was letting it out in a way that didn’t have Edi reporting “anomalous emotional outbursts” again. Still, as she felt her own breath returning to normal, Miranda wasn’t sure what the next course of action should be. Confronting Shepard would have to wait, if that was even the right choice at all. Clearly confronting her could have...unexpected consequences. It felt too impersonal to send her an apology via private message, they were on the same ship and they were adults. Whatever she was going to do about it, it could wait. Shepard wasn’t going to be in a mood to talk for at least the rest of the day, so she had time to think.

And maybe take a long cold shower to maybe get the feeling of Shepard’s fingers off her scalp.

It would be three days before they talked again. On a ship the size of the Normandy it was hard to avoid someone, but not impossible. Staying out of the CIC and away from the mess hall had kept Miranda clear of Shepard, who was clearly steering clear of her too. As much as it hurt, the separation was the only proper way to go about it. At least, judging by the glares Shepard had sent her the few times they had crossed paths. By the time Shepard had cooled down, she clearly was going to pretend it didn’t happen. She regarded Miranda professionally, though not coldly. They had a job to do, and for all their little ‘disagreement’ had done to distance them, Shepard clearly still valued Miranda’s input and contributions. As they waited near the shuttle for their third companion before a mission, Shepard stated as much.

“I’m glad to have you here Miranda. And I’m sorry about the other day, I was out of line. I’ll do better.” It was simple, and it was quiet. Shepard looked her in the eyes as she said it, sincere and level-headed. She even seemed to visibly relax, getting the words off her chest. Miranda knew Shepard was still troubled by a lot of things, but she had regained some sense of stability. It was refreshing to see.

“I’m glad to be here, Shepard. And I think we both were under a lot of stress. I’ll do better as well.” She didn’t want to address exactly what she was thinking about, and talking in generalities was a nice way to avoid the tender topic of what transpired between them. But it was enough to clear the air. As Jacob walked up to them, he eyed them both cautiously before noticing they weren’t at each other’s throats. A small victory.

The starboard observatory was all but empty, Miranda relaxing on one of the couches simply enjoying the view. It was nice to have a quiet moment here and there, to center herself now and again. She knew the quiet couldn't last forever, but the peace was worth it, however temporary.

It was even more temporary than she had assumed, as the door opened and Shepard stepped in. She was holding 2 coffee mugs, steam rising from each. With a grin and a nod, Shepard made her way around the couch, deposited one of the mugs in Miranda's hands, and then sat down without a word. It was a peace offering. Miranda wasn't clueless, she and Shepard hardly talked outside of missions or briefings, for her to seek her out with a warm cup of coffee (something that she was famously addicted to) could hardly be seen as a neutral action. But it was welcome, an offer of companionship and maybe an offer to make amends.

"So," Shepard finally spoke up, "do you mind if I join you?" It was sweet that she asked, or it would be if she hadn't already gotten comfortable. Shepard was just like that, though. She was friendly to a fault, selfless, a bit headstrong but always looking to make others feel better. Miranda had started to suspect that she was trying to make up for her own perceived faults or failings, but she wasn't going to try to read into it. She nodded at Shepard, before taking a cautious sip of her coffee. Although she didn't want to admit it, she was somewhat picky about how her coffee was made. Neurotic, maybe.

"This is good. Did you...use honey?" Miranda was surprised. It was a little dark for her tastes but she knew Shepard had likely brewed that jet black stuff for herself and tried to make the rest of it palatable for her.

"It was Kelly's suggestion. She said you liked honey in your coffee." Ah, there it was. Kelly *would* remember that kind of detail. They had parted on good enough terms but that didn't mean it wasn't a little strange that she would tell Shepard about something like that. Not that it was private just...personal.

"Well I appreciate it. Is there something wrong? Are you trying to butter me up? Does this week's expense report need some adjustment?" Miranda said it teasingly but it wasn't like Shepard to spend her free time with her. More often than not Shepard spent her time alone in her cabin, lifting weights, or occasionally talking with what few friends she had aboard. Miranda did not meet the qualifications for the last one. The guilty look on Shepard's face seemed to confirm her suspicious intentions, but she was surprised to be proven wrong.

"Actually, I might have asked Kelly for other advice too. You and I have been a bit hostile to one another and I wanted to make that right," she said, looking a bit sheepish, "and she suggested that since we only talk during missions we've probably started to associate adrenaline and stress with one another." Miranda looked at her blankly. *Was that what was going on?* It made a certain bit of sense, after all. Even disregarding their...difference of opinions in Miranda's quarters the previous week, they had been...argumentative. Well it wouldn't hurt to try something else.

"That makes sense to me. It would be a nice change of pace to talk without gunfire." Smiling, Miranda took another sip of the coffee. Still too dark, but it smelled a bit like Shepard and as conflicted as *that* thought left her she decided she liked it. Despite herself.

End Notes

I've had this (and over a dozen other works in this series) sitting in my drafts for a while, largely complete but unedited. This one finally feels ready, so I decided to get this uploaded right before N7 day 2021. While this is not the first work chronologically in the series, I thought it makes a good start. This fic takes place shortly after the start of ME2.

Tag notes: I didn't tag Jacob Taylor as a character because I mentioned him once in passing, but technically he's there, but I tagged Kelly Chambers because they actually talk about her. I don't know.

While I may have to make a summary of canon divergences that occur across this series, the largest mentions in this particular fic are that Miranda and Kelly had something of a short term relationship pre-ME2 while Shepard was being reconstructed, Shepard speaks to Liara shortly after having been resurrected, and Liara chooses not to continue the relationship (although that's going to be another fic in the series), and in her freshly-dumped, freshly-back-from-the-dead mindset Shepard has made some questionable choices vis a vis Aria T'Loak and Councilor Tevos (also to be explored in a later work).

Special thanks to fragileKnight1 here on Ao3 for talking endlessly about Mass Effect and this particular series with me, this would not have gotten written without you.

Special admonishment to EA and Bioware for not letting me kiss Miranda as femshep without mods, shame on you.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!