

Marked

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Marked

by [guesswhattimeitis](#)

Summary

Miranda gets a temporary tattoo, courtesy of Jack. The subject matter is...inconvenient.

Notes

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

Miranda had found herself more and more in the bowels of the Normandy these days. Tali and Jack both tended to haunt the less trafficked areas, and when the three of them got together for their “Girls Nights” they tended to either take over an observation deck or sprawl out in the maintenance area beneath the main engineering deck. Tonight was one such night, and they had all had a little to drink and were busy enjoying each other's company and airy conversation. It was a light way to spend some time together and to let loose a little.

It usually devolved into something less light, either deep conversations or the occasional bit of mischief. Jack and Tali fed each other's mischievousness, and Miranda may not have been a follower but she wasn't a total killjoy. She didn't usually start it, but she had a habit of finishing it.

“Have I ever mentioned I'm deeply jealous of your tattoos?” Tali's speech wasn't slurred yet, but it was probably only a matter of time. She was appraising Jack's arms, and reached out to trace some of the patterns in midair. Miranda smiled, it *wasn't* the first time Tali had mentioned it, but usually she was already several drinks deep and it was accompanied with a statement about how good it was to have close friends or how it was weird to share a ship with so many people who didn't wear suits. This was a surprisingly sober mention of tattoos.

“Maybe once or twice. You know I'd give you one myself if...well you know.” Jack held her alcohol better but also tended to drink it faster. Still, the three of them were still mostly there. Miranda felt only a little buzz, but she was sober enough to have an idea.

“You know, maybe there is a way.” The other two looked at Miranda like she had grown a head, so she added, “Well not a real tattoo, but something close.” Jack arched her eyebrows up, but the smirk that had begun to form on her lips seemed to indicate interest. Tali still seemed a bit puzzled, but she sat forwards and stopped playing with her hands as Miranda indicated that she would leave and return promptly.

When she returned from her office, she brandished a handful of permanent markers. While Tali didn't seem to recognize what they were at first, Jack got the idea immediately.

“Oh ho ho, now we're talking! Yeah I can work with that!” Miranda handed the small handful over, and Jack immediately started inspecting the colors. If Miranda wasn't mistaken, this wasn't the first time Jack had done this. She guessed it was practice for a real tattoo, or maybe to try out a design before committing. Not that Miranda would guess that Jack would ever not just rush into something like a tattoo, but the way she eyed the markers made it clear she knew what she was doing. Tali picked up what was going on pretty quickly.

“Oh! That's a great idea!” Removing the straw from her mask and placing her beverage down, Tali was immediately on board. She plopped down near Jack, and while her visor made it difficult to read her face, Tali was practically bouncing. Clearly she had wanted to try this ‘tattoo’ business for a while. Miranda liked to see her excited, this was going to be fun.

“Do you have any requests, or do you want me to freestyle something?” After a moment of thought, Tali indicated the latter. The trust between the two had clearly become quite strong, or Tali was a bit naive, but either way, it was a bold move. Jack could be...a troublemaker,

and if she was going to draw on Tali's suit it was brave to let her choose what it was going to be. Jack seemed to be lost in thought for a couple moments as she formulated an idea, and then with a wry smile she nodded. "Don't worry, you're gonna love this."

Jack gently took Tali's arm and the black marker and started drawing a long outline up the inside of her forearm. Her movements were deft, and practiced, and clear. It wasn't hard to see that Jack was an artist. She wouldn't call herself that, but she was. It didn't take long before the general shape was clear even against the dark fabric.

"Oh keelah! It's a thresher maw! I'm gonna look so cool." Chuckling, Jack nodded as she switched colors and started to sketch details.

"You already look pretty cool but this'll definitely give you some bonus points." Miranda loved seeing this kind of thing. She hadn't had a close group of friends in many years, and seeing the two of them enjoying the moment, and enjoying it with them, was special. It was one more gift for being on the Normandy. Jack stopped for a minute and appraised Miranda with a half smile.

"So are you next?" Miranda almost shook her head. She wasn't the kind of woman to get tattoos, real or otherwise. But...this was different. And it wouldn't be permanent, so there was no harm. With a nod, took a sip of her drink.

"Ooooh what'll you do for her?" Tali was excited, and couldn't stop looking down at her arm, but seemed just as excited to find out what Jack had planned for Miranda. Jack gave her the same option.

"Depends, you gonna let me choose?" Miranda wasn't sure about that part. It would be easy to ask for something, anything that might be appropriate or small. There was a real chance Jack would choose something deeply offensive or crude, just to be funny. But, in the spirit of friendship and trust, and with only a hint of hesitance, she nodded. And then took a bigger swig of her drink.

"Brave move." Tali pronounced the fear Miranda had felt. But she wouldn't back out now. She was committed. And that was that.

It didn't take terribly long for Jack to finish the coiled thresher maw on Tali's arm, and as Tali lifted it and admired it, Jack shifted to sit in front of Miranda. Clearly she had an idea in mind and once Miranda rolled up a little bit of the shorts she had opted for tonight and offered her upper thigh, Jack got straight to work. Furrowing her brow, Jack began to focus hard. It would have been concerning, but Miranda had finished off her drink in the last couple of minutes and had let go of her sense of pride. If it was really that bad she could scrub it off, or just wear long pants for a couple days.

With delicate strokes, Jack started her outline. Tali was staring in rapt attention at Jack's progress, though she occasionally admired her own 'tattoo' as well. After some time, it was starting to become clear that Jack was sketching a figure. It could have been much worse. Miranda relaxed a bit, though it was clearly a woman in a sort of pinup style. It had the potential to be dirty still, but as it was it seemed cute, almost demure.

Jack stopped for a moment to swap colors, and then with a conspiratorial grin she whispered something in Tali's ear. Miranda couldn't hear it, but she knew Jack was up to something. Well, she could handle a little light teasing, she wouldn't let it bother her. Besides, she could always get Jack back for it later.

Soon it was clear it wasn't just a pinup of a woman, but it was—of course—a cheerleader. *Yeah ok I should have seen that coming* Miranda thought. The nickname was nothing new, but she rolled her eyes a little once she realized what it was. Clearly Jack was saving the head for last to 'shock' her with her own face, and was likely going to draw a little Cerberus logo on the chest of the skimpy outfit, but it could have been *much* worse. Miranda chuckled a little, and Jack looked up at her with a grin.

"Have you figured it out yet?" Miranda nodded.

"You decided to put me in a cheerleader outfit on my own leg, very classy." Miranda's smile dropped a little as Jack shook her head.

"Close, but no cigar. You should close your eyes though so I can finish, and no peeking." *Oh no* Miranda thought. *What else could it be?* But she had already come this far, and she wasn't going to be a bad sport now. She closed her eyes and felt Jack move the marker over the place where the chest was, and then shortly after to the head. *Oh no. Oh NO.* Miranda couldn't be sure but...she had a good feeling. Or rather, a very bad feeling.

"There we are. Now you can look." As she slowly opened her eyes, Miranda could hear Tali try to suppress a giggle. Time to face the music, and see what she had allowed.

It was a pinup girl, in a small little cheerleader outfit. Miranda already knew that. But...with the final details, she almost gasped. Across the chest was a red and black N7 logo Miranda knew all too well. And to match, with short blonde hair and a little smile that Miranda was surprised to see so well rendered, was *Shepard's face*.

Miranda felt her whole face and ears turn red. This was so much worse than something crude. It was...frankly, well done. Jack really flexed her artistic muscles to draw such well-done figure work and small details. A little miniature Shepard on her leg, unmistakable as the commander, and as cute as it was, it filled Miranda's head with all kinds of crazy thoughts. The first was of Shepard in a real version of the outfit. The second was of Shepard discovering this image on her leg and what she might say. But ultimately Miranda was mortified. Jack and Tali were both beaming seeing her so embarrassed, but she just took a deep breath before responding.

"I'll regret saying this later, but...I love it." Her face was an even deeper red now, but it was true. More embarrassing than the image itself was the fact that Miranda loved it. It was stupid, it was silly, it was mortifying, and it was wonderful. Maybe it was the alcohol talking. Or maybe having an image of *Shepard* on her body had touched something deep in her heart she didn't want to admit.

The next morning Miranda woke up without a fuss. She had curbed her drinking shortly after the trio had finished with their ‘tattoos’, had plenty of water and a light snack, and slept well. Waking up too early though had thrown her off of her game, though. It was about 4 o’clock in the morning, which was a good deal earlier than she had anticipated or wished to wake up, but she was so quickly wide awake she decided not to try to return to sleep. Kicking her legs off the side of the bed, she decided that she may as well go and start her exercise early.

Once the covers were off, she was reminded immediately of the vibrant display of art on her thigh, and had to take a moment to look at it with sober eyes. It was...obviously Shepard. Miranda had hoped that there might be some deniability about it but it was clear to anyone that knew her it was Shepard. It wasn’t that Miranda wore anything short enough to show it that often; in fact, the fact that she had worn shorts the previous night was already an oddity. But she always tried to relax when it was Girl’s Night and shorts felt appropriate. It was a good thing, too, as it was far easier to conceal something on her leg than it was to conceal something like her arm.

But she also tended to exercise in shorts. With an incredible metabolism and excellent physical fitness, Miranda found that she was liable to overheat if she wore pants whenever she went for a run or lifted weights for a considerable period of time. This didn’t usually cause a problem (except for the occasional lingering look as she walked past) but today it might. She considered wearing pants for once, but decided against it. Ultimately, it was too early in the morning to run into someone else, so she decided to risk it.

Changing into her workout attire, Miranda pulled her hair back into a tight ponytail and grabbed one of her water bottles. A pair of shorts, long enough only to cover the top half of the ‘tattoo’, and a comfortable and adequate sports bra was all she would need. Without a backward glance, she strode out of her quarters and off to the elevator.

The crew deck was quiet, no one else was awake yet. That was good enough for Miranda. Getting into the elevator, she keyed in the cargo hold, and started hopping back and forth from one foot to the other. No reason to waste the ride down, she started her warmups. Getting to the hold, she lightly jogged over to the semi-permanent workout area the crew had set up. There were various machines and weights, and Miranda settled on some light running for the morning. Cardio was important, and just getting on a treadmill and running would clear her head before the day began.

Starting the nearest machine, Miranda stepped on and adjusted the pace. After a light start she worked up the speed, and let her mind wander over what she had to get done later in the day. Reports to file, assessments to complete, logs to analyze, crew to socialize with, and various errands and tasks to assign to others.

Her thoughts came to a screeching halt when the elevator doors opened and Shepard walked in.

Immediately Miranda was doing mental damage control. *Don’t panic, just keep exercising.* She knew that she might just be able to avoid notice if she looked disinterested in Shepard’s entrance, and that panicking would only draw attention. Then again, she was the only one

down in the hold. And Shepard was clearly in her own workout gear, quite similar to Miranda's, so she was going to walk over and start her own exercise routine.

Secretly Miranda hoped it was arms day, but that thought was quickly shooed away by the terrifying and recurring thought that Shepard was going to see the 'artwork' all up her thigh. *How the hell am I going to explain this?* She wasn't going to have too much time to think.

"Morning. You're up early." Shepard was making her way to the free weights but had to pass in front of the treadmills to do so. Miranda had neglected to bring headphones so she had to engage with Shepard and not just nod.

"You're up early too. I didn't think anyone else was ever up this early." *Oh no why am I talking this much,* Miranda questioned herself. Well, she was running pretty fast, maybe Shepard wouldn't notice it. Maybe she would simply walk by—but that would be too simple. Too merciful. Shepard had slowed down as she passed Miranda and did a slight double take. *Oh no.*

"Do you...have a tattoo? I didn't think you were that kind of adventurous." Shepard had a grin on her face, and she had stopped in front of the treadmill. This was bad and Miranda knew it. She had to give some explanation, and fast.

"It's not a real tattoo, it's just something Jack drew," Miranda said, immediately realizing that wouldn't be enough of an explanation. Time to give the short version. "Last night Tali was talking about wanting to try a tattoo, so we had the idea to give her one with markers, and Jack decided to give me one too just for fun." That would be sufficient, Miranda was almost certain of it. Almost.

"I'll have to track down Tali later and check that out. What did Jack put on you?" *There it is.* Miranda cursed herself inwardly. *Pants wouldn't have been that bad, would they?* There was still a possibility to salvage this.

"Oh it's nothing, Jack just got a funny idea and drew it before telling me. It's nothing, really." If Miranda thought those words were going to make Shepard stop her line of questioning, she was dead wrong. Shepard was practically leaning over the treadmill with a look of anticipation and interest on her face.

"A funny idea, huh? Come on, let me see it!" *I've died and gone to hell.* Miranda pressed the button on the treadmill to bring it slowly to a stop. Stepping off of it, she made the three or so steps over to a bench and sat down, and Shepard followed. With a barely restrained wince, Miranda rolled back enough of her shorts to expose the whole thing, and Miranda's whole world stopped.

If someone was going to describe Shepard in a single word, they would likely say something like 'courageous' or 'heroic' or 'dashing' or some other wide descriptor. But Miranda suspected that if you asked a crewmember on the Normandy they would respond with 'physical' or 'personal' or 'doesn't have a good sense of personal boundaries', which wasn't a single word but still. It was considered a rite of passage for the commander to completely blow past your personal bubble without realizing it.

She was a touchy woman. If you showed her a datapad, more often than not she'd put her hand on it and pull it closer to her face, but not actually take it from you. Instead she would just lean in too close. Or if you showed her something on your omnitool she would inevitably grab your wrist or elbow to steady your arm, or whatever she instinctively thought she was doing. Even beyond things like this, she often would place a hand on a shoulder, or on the small of someone's back as she passed them in an enclosed space, or she would put her hand on someone's hand when she comforted them.

It wasn't a bad character trait. And if you made her aware of it she would apologize profusely, and if you asked her not to touch you she never would again. There was an understanding that she was simply acting out her familiarity with others when she touched them. Thus, it had become a known quantity; if she was comfortable enough to get in your personal space, it meant she trusted you and cared about you. But inevitably this could still be...a tad uncomfortable at times, for various reasons. She tended to touch things she was looking at, as if to see them better.

Which is how, as Miranda rolled up the bottom hem of her shorts, she found Shepard's hands on either side of her bare thigh.

Her initial reaction was to freeze. It would be inaccurate to say that the touch was unwanted; Miranda had wanted Shepard to touch her this intimately for a while. She still had some misgivings about it, and some conflicted feelings about their relationship and whether or not she should try to pursue anything, but Miranda didn't lie to herself about what she *wanted*, just what she thought she ought to do about it. She was mortified by the 'tattoo' of course, but that thought had almost completely left her mind with how painfully aware of Shepard's hands she had become.

And then Shepard closed her eyes, threw back her head and let out a piercing laugh. It was deep and hearty and full, and Miranda immediately relaxed. She wasn't sure exactly why Shepard found it so hilarious, but she was willing to accept that. It was so much better than most of the alternatives she had pictured. Shepard's hands still hadn't left her leg though. They were warm, and surprisingly soft, and strong, and she had to rip her brain away from those thoughts as Shepard finally was able to speak.

"Damn, Jack got you good, huh? This is really good, I can't believe how accurate she got me," Shepard said. Her wide smile told the whole story. "A cheerleader for the cheerleader, it looks good on you." Miranda felt like her face couldn't get any more red. Shepard continued, "Do you think she'd do one for me?" With a nod, Miranda responded.

"Are you kidding? She was practically giddy doing that. She and Tali had a good laugh too." It was true, and Miranda was willing herself to relax. Shepard hadn't reacted negatively, and that was the best part. Her hands flanking Miranda's thigh were a different matter, but the conflicted feelings in her stomach could be dealt with. Shepard ran her thumbs over parts of the image as she looked closer and got another good laugh in. Miranda drank it in as best she could, trying not to think about how she wished Shepard would move those hands a bit farther up. *I need to end this train of thought right now*, she told herself in vain. It was the next words out of Shepard's mouth that took her even further by surprise.

“Ha, well if you decide the marker isn’t enough, maybe I could give you a real tattoo.” Nothing in the research Miranda had done indicated that Shepard knew how to give someone a tattoo. She hadn’t even thought to try to look for that kind of information. But now, Miranda’s curiosity was piqued. In a way that made her heart race. Having a temporary drawing of Shepard on her was one thing, but letting Shepard herself put something *permanent* on her body? That was something that she’d be thinking about for days.

It would probably make sense that Shepard knew how to give tattoos. She had plenty of them herself, and in her own experience if someone had many tattoos they had probably thought about being an artist at some point, if they had any artistic ability. Miranda had no idea if Shepard had any artistic ability; there had never been an opportunity to find out.

Miranda’s brain was finally released as Shepard removed her hands from her legs, and she made no attempt to apologize for the agonizingly intimate touch. There would be time enough for thinking about that later, but the idea of a real tattoo had Miranda intrigued. She hadn’t considered it before, but there was always a first time for everything.

“And if you were going to give me a real tattoo, what would you pick?” Miranda was curious now if Shepard had any ideas. Maybe it would be an insight into how Shepard saw her.

“You wouldn’t pick your own? Tattoos are usually pretty personal.” She had a point of course, a very good one at that. But curiosity won out anyways. Miranda had her own ideas for tattoos but she really wanted to know if there was something that Shepard saw as a part of her.

“I mean I’ve had an idea or two, but you seem to be the resident expert. Well, apart from Jack.” Shepard had the second most amount of tattoos on the ship, and while Shepard didn’t have nearly as many by a long shot, she was still considerably covered.

“Ha! Well, I supposed I could think of a couple ideas... I’d probably have to tell you what they were before you’d let me ink you though, huh?” There was a moment where Miranda’s brain went completely blank. The idea that she would sit down in front of Shepard, and just let her give her a tattoo without any input and with no idea of what it was...that was a level of comfort and trust Miranda wasn’t sure she had, even with Shepard. Maybe if it was small. Maybe. But it was a terrible idea. *I’m thinking too much about this, oh no do I want to?* Conflicted, Miranda shrugged her shoulders.

“That depends. Can I trust you that far?” Neither of them were going to get much working out done. Miranda wasn’t mad at all, she just thought it was funny that she was having this conversation on a bench in the cargo hold instead of literally anywhere else. Her voice was a bit flirty, but only as flirty as she could reasonably make it at this early hour of the morning with no coffee. Shepard responded in kind.

“I’d like to think I’d never do anything to lose your trust. It means a lot to me.” Shepard’s voice was lower than Miranda had anticipated, and surprisingly serious. Heart racing, Miranda’s feelings ran ahead of her common sense.

“Well, then yes. I trust you completely.” *What the fuck am I agreeing to,* Miranda asked herself. The smile on Shepard’s face was probably worth whatever she was going to put on

her skin, if Miranda was honest with her feelings. There was very little that she wouldn't go along with to make Shepard happy, and that fact had worried her many times over. But the heart wants what it wants, and as idiotic as it felt, Miranda doubled down.

“Anytime, anywhere.” It was easy to say. And terrifying. Control was something Miranda demanded, and relinquishing it on this scale was difficult. But facing fear was something she was used to by now, and if facing it was going to put a smile on Shepard's face, it was worth it. *I'm an idiot*, Miranda told herself.

“If that's the case, I'll give it some good honest thought. And you can always change your mind, you know.” Shepard was giving her an out, a safe way to go back and recover from this agreement. But Miranda didn't take it. She didn't back down from challenges.

“You let me know when you've got it figured out, and I'll be ready.” Shepard nodded in response, and as she made her way to the weights, she stopped and seemed to think for a moment before calling back to Miranda where she remained on the bench.

“Would it be gauche to match one of mine?” Miranda's heart leapt into her throat. She let the implication of a *matching, permanent tattoo* wash over her for a second before responding with unwarranted confidence.

“I trust your judgment, Shepard.”

Shepard had acquired a tattoo gun on the Citadel, some fancy model that she had apparently had her eyes on. She had even tested it on herself first, a small geometric design added to her left wrist. Joker had followed soon after, requesting the outline of the Normandy on his forearm, something he had apparently meant to get during his time aboard the first Normandy but hadn't. Both were pure black, and Shepard had informed Miranda the design she had in mind was also going to be black linework.

There was an infinite care Shepard seemed to take in the way she prepared her equipment. She also asked Miranda about a half dozen times if she actually wanted to go through with it, and Miranda had assured her that yes she was ready. The fact that Shepard kept asking and kept making sure she was alright had already put her at ease.

Miranda had even let Shepard decide where the tattoo would go, within reason. After asking for a suggestion of placement, Shepard had indicated that her right forearm was a good place for it. Satisfied with the placement, Miranda offered up her arm and hoped she had placed her trust well.

It wasn't that she didn't trust Shepard; it was that she trusted so rarely, and rarely this deeply, that she had some cause for concern.

Before she started, Shepard insisted that Miranda should try not to look. It would be difficult, but she agreed, letting the entire thing remain a surprise. Once Miranda's arm was thoroughly prepared, Shepard traced the design she had come up with in place. It took time, but Miranda knew this could be a lengthy exercise.

She wouldn't have to sit in silence or isolation though. There was a small group of onlookers that had gathered, Jack and Tali among them, with Garrus and some of the other crew mingling nearby. Shepard estimated it would take just an hour or two, but it was nice to know she wouldn't be trying to keep herself busy with her dominant hand occupied for an entire day. Jack seemed excited to see Shepard work, and with Tali unable to get a real tattoo she was more than excited to live vicariously through Miranda's experience.

It hurt. Obviously it hurt. But it was more subtle than she had expected. It wasn't long before she had tuned it out to a reasonable degree. Jack and Tali watched Shepard's steady hand with a rarely witnessed focus. Jack seemed to understand what the tattoo was while Tali was clearly only vaguely aware of its meaning. They knew not to spoil it, but Miranda took it as a hint. It must have some sort of human meaning, though beyond that it could be anything. Trying to follow the motion of the needle traced across her arm didn't get her anywhere. After a short while she stopped trying to guess it.

After all, she trusted Shepard. With her skin, with her heart, with everything.

Not that she would say those things out loud, but she kept them close to her heart. Letting this woman mark her in a very real way was probably insanity. But she didn't analyze it too far, it was too late to change her mind.

It didn't take long at all. The design wasn't too large, or too detailed, and Shepard worked efficiently. After finishing, she wiped it off, gently applied some ointment, and then leaned back to admire her handiwork. Satisfied, she finally let Miranda look.

At first, it wasn't overwhelmingly obvious what it was. Well, it was a woman, that was clear. But it took a moment before she found the deeper detail. She was beautiful, but simple, with an ancient helmet resting on her head without obscuring it, a spear in her hand and an owl on her shoulder. *Athena*, the name came to Miranda, though the exact meaning wasn't on the tip of her tongue. Before she could ask, Shepard moved in close and rolled up her own right sleeve.

There on Shepard's own arm was another woman, similar in style but holding a bow and crowned with the moon. *Artemis*, again the name came unbidden into Miranda's mind.

"And now we match. I have Artemis, the goddess of the hunt." That tracked with Shepard's personality. "And you have Athena, goddess of wisdom and war." Shepard traced a finger ever so lightly over her handiwork. "I'm the hunter, you're the strategist. Complimentary." She said it simply, and didn't explain herself further. Miranda felt a smile creeping fast onto her face.

"I love it. Austere, simple, but with meaning. Thank you." Miranda admired it, not wanting to look Shepard in the eyes. She might regret this later, but not now. Maybe not later either.

End Notes

Ok I'm going to just start finishing and posting these bad boys as I get to them.

Yes, I know, Miranda and Jack don't see eye to eye in canon, but this series supposes the events of ME2 take place over the course of a year, and I've decided they bond in their own way.

As of right now, these works are not in chronological order as they would happen within the framework of ME2. Sorry if that's confusing, it'll make more sense as I post more works.

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.

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