

Tony's Rules by Xanthe



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Chapter 1 by Xanthe

*Take this man to your bed
Maybe his hands will help you forget
Please be stronger than your past
The future may still give you a chance*

It's late when Tony gets home. Gibbs even begins to wonder if he's going to come home at all. Then some time around 1 a.m. he hears a key turning in the front door, and Tony walks into the living room and flips on the light. He doesn't seem surprised to see Gibbs sitting on the couch, waiting for him.

"Where have you been?" Gibbs asks. Tony is wearing frayed jeans and a casual linen shirt and jacket.

"Mexico," Tony replies abruptly. He walks into the kitchen, opens the fridge door, and gets out a beer.

"Why?" Gibbs demands, his mind working overtime. There are too many loose ends - too many things he hasn't had time to clean up yet - and Tony could have been seeing to any one of them. He doesn't like the idea of Tony getting dragged into cleaning up *his* mess. Hell, how much does Tony even know? Looking at him right now, he realises that Tony knows everything, the sneaky son of a bitch. He always has. He always will. He's *Tony*

after all.

Tony pauses with his arm half raised to bring the beer bottle to his mouth. His lips are twisted in sardonic kind of smile, and Gibbs knows he's on really thin ice with that question.

"What - so you're allowed to fuck off to Mexico without saying a damn word but if I do it then it's a problem?"

Tony's eyes are glittering dangerously, and Gibbs knows he should back off, but hell, this argument has been a long time coming, so they might as well just go for it. He knows how it ends. He's had it before, with numerous exes. He's been waiting for it.

"I had reasons," Gibbs replies, tight-lipped.

"Yeah? Well I had *orders*, and those trump *reasons*, Gibbs."

"Vance sent you?" Gibbs is suddenly alert. "Why?"

"To tail Rivera - find out what he's up to."

"You did that quickly."

"Yeah, well, someone else beat me to it; someone with a grudge. Someone I didn't want to cross."

"Franks?" Gibbs feels a rush of relief. "Mike is alive? He's okay?"

"Well apart from the missing trigger finger which didn't seem to be slowing him down any, I'd say he's fine and dandy - and out for revenge."

Gibbs gives a low grunt of a chuckle. "Sounds like Mike."

Tony's expression softens slightly. "He called me 'probie'. I think he might actually be warming to me."

"He likes you. He always did."

"Never noticed." Tony takes a long, deep gulp of his beer.

"Well...he was never sure if you were good enough for me." Gibbs gives a little grin.

"I'm not. I'm too fucking good for you. I'm better than you deserve," Tony says quietly - so quietly that Gibbs knows he's really angry. He knows all Tony's moods, and Tony is at his most dangerous when he's quiet. "Nobody else would have put up with all your shit for all these years," Tony continues, in that same deadly quiet tone. "Christ, Gibbs - I know what you're like, and you know I've never tried to change you, but I did think now we're living together that you'd treat me more like your partner and less like *them*."

"Them?" Gibbs raises an eyebrow.

"Them! Everyone else: Ziva, McGee, Vance - hell, even Abby. I thought sharing your house - sharing your damn *bed* would mean something. Obviously I was wrong. Obviously it means nothing. Remind me of that next time I have your dick in my mouth, and I'm thinking it means something."

"I didn't want anyone else dragged into this!" Gibbs rounds on him angrily. "They already had Mike! I didn't want them getting their hands on you too."

Tony rolls his eyes. "Oh yeah. That one. It's always that one. 'I was protecting you, Tony. I was protecting you all.' Well, want to know something, Jethro? I don't need protecting. I'm not a kid - I've been in law enforcement for fifteen years, nine of them working for you. I've learned every damn thing you ever taught me and a few more besides. And I am tired of you treating me like a probie. I told you after the Domino screw up that I wasn't going to take that kind of shit again, and I meant it." Tony's chest is heaving, and he looks angrier than Gibbs has ever seen him.

"You moving out, Tony?" he asks quietly.

Tony laughs out loud. "Oh, you'd like that, wouldn't you, you miserable son of a bitch? I move out, and you go back to stewing in all your fucked up grief and pain and loneliness. And you know what? When you first went AWOL I *did* think of moving out. I thought to hell with you, because you don't deserve to have me always watching your six - or anyone else for that matter. You run off without saying anything, you don't keep me or the rest of the team in the loop - hell, you act like we aren't your team, like we don't count. Like *I* don't count."

"You didn't answer the question," Gibbs says tautly. He's pretty sure he knows what's coming.

"No, I'm not moving out," Tony replies, proving him wrong. "I'm staying. Know why? 'Cause I'm not a quitter, and I WILL one day get it through that thick skull of yours that you don't have to be alone and miserable anymore because you belong to ME now."

Gibbs gives a slow, surprised smile. "Sounds kinda territorial."

"It is. I've been holding back, treading on eggshells around you just like everyone else, but not anymore."

Tony slams down his beer bottle and crosses the room to where he's standing, and it's all Gibbs can do not to take a step back. Tony's eyes are glowing furiously.

"We've been living by your rules for long enough, but I have some of my own. And Tony's rule number one is this - you belong to me. You run off again without telling me, you treat me like I'm not the most important person in your life, and I promise that I *will* hunt you

down and string you up by your balls. Hear me?"

Gibbs feels himself bristling, because nobody ever talks to him this way. They're all too scared of him - even Vance. Then he remembers Shannon, and he knows that someone else did once talk to him this way. And it's been so long. His silences, his anger, his grief - they've kept everyone at bay all these years and wrecked every single one of his subsequent relationships - except this one. Tony is the only one who has stayed close, got in his face, and **demanded** to be let in.

"Tony's rule number one, huh?" he says, thinking he can live with that.

"Better start learning them," Tony tells him. "I've got a few. Rule number two..." he glances over at the open box on the coffee table. "There comes a time when you have to move on. We all have crap in our pasts, Jethro - yeah, yours is worse than most, but you've let it define you for too long. Move on."

He goes over to the coffee table and picks up a photograph of Shannon and Kelly from the box. "I'm not asking you to forget them - I'd never do that. But do you think Shannon would want you grieving like this forever? Move on, Jethro. It's time. It's past time." He puts the photo carefully back in the box with all the others.

Gibbs feels his breath hitching in his chest. "Not that easy, Tony."

"Who the hell said it was? That's not the damn point," Tony replies firmly.

Gibbs gazes at him uncertainly, unsure if he can do it. Tony seems different - much more assertive - and Gibbs realises he's pushed him into this after all these years. He also knows that where the others all left, Tony isn't giving up without a fight. And that's what makes him different.

"I'm not giving up on you, you bastard," Tony tells him, as if reading his mind. "Not now, not ever. If I was, I'd have done it before now. No, I'm hanging on in here, Jethro. Remember Semper Fi? Remember 'never leave a man behind'? Well I'm damned if I'm gonna leave you here among the dead. I'm going to drag you back to the land of the living. And you can kick and holler all the way but you **are** coming back with me."

Gibbs is surprised by his reaction to this statement. He feels...relieved. It appears that someone thinks he's worth saving, and he's surprised to find that means something.

"Here." He goes over to the box, plucks a piece of paper from it, and hands it to Tony. Tony takes it, a question in his eyes. Gibbs nods at the paper, directing Tony to read it.

"Rule number 51 - sometimes you're wrong," Tony reads out loud. Then his face splits into a wide grin. "About damn time you admitted that, Jethro. I've been waiting for long enough."

There is silence for a moment. Gibbs hesitates, and then, finally, he says it: "I'm sorry, Tony."

Tony's eyes flash in recognition of what he's hearing. "Good," he says. "Knew if I stuck around for long enough that I'd finally hear you say it. Tony's rule number three - never give up on Gibbs, no matter how much he pisses you off."

Gibbs manages a little laugh at that. Tony just stands there, shaking his head ruefully. He hands Gibbs the paper with Rule 51 on it. "I'm going to bed," he says. "You coming?"

"Yeah. In a minute."

Gibbs waits until Tony has gone, and then he goes over to the table, picks up the box and puts Rule 51 back inside. There are dozens of photos in the box, pictures of Shannon and Kelly all mixed up with the pieces of paper on which he's written down all his different rules. A lifetime of rules. He gazes at the photos and the rules for a long time, and then he closes the box.

He takes the box upstairs to the main bedroom and puts it away in one of the big packing boxes. Then he moves the packing boxes from the bed and dumps them at the side of the room. He hears Tony in the bathroom, taking a shower, humming to himself. Gibbs likes the sound - it makes him smile. He goes into the guest room, where he's been sleeping ever since Shannon and Kelly were killed, and gets fresh linen out of the closet. He returns to the main bedroom and makes up the bed.

When Tony emerges from the shower, Gibbs jerks his head in the direction of the main bedroom.

"In here," he says.

Tony follows him, looking mystified. He looks at the boxes stowed away to one side and the made up bed. "You sure?" He slides an arm around Gibbs's waist. "I know you haven't slept in here since..."

"Since they died. Twenty years. And yeah, I'm sure. It's time. Like you said - it's past time."

Tony's hands are warm on his body, pulling him close. Tony kisses his mouth gently, and it feels strange to be in here, where he last slept with Shannon. It hurts, but it feels right. He wonders if she's somehow watching, and if so, if she minds. He wonders how she'd feel about him making love to Tony in this bed - in their bed. He never made love to any of his ex-wives in here. That was another thing that had pissed them all off.

Tony's hands are insistent, undressing him quickly and efficiently. He realises that Tony knows him, inside and out. He knows just where to touch him and where to kiss him to arouse him - the same way Shannon did.

Tony strips him naked and then nudges him over to the bed. They tumble between the sheets, and Tony is on him the minute they land. Tony's hands and mouth cover him, gentle but firm, insisting that he focus only on the here and now and forget the past.

He wants to remember Shannon, to cling on to the pain that's kept him locked up in his prison of grief for so long, but somehow he can't. The past slides away from him - and now there is only Tony, making love to him for all he's worth. He can only think about Tony's hands on his hips, Tony's mouth on his lips, Tony's lips trailing down to kiss his jaw, then his chest...and then moving lower. There is only Tony's body moving rhythmically against his own, Tony entering him the way he's done hundreds of times before, and then Tony moving inside him. Tony is within him, as he joked about just the other day. Tony got inside him, and he's never going to let go. Gibbs knows that now.

Some time later - much later - he lies with Tony's head resting on his chest, Tony's weight keeping him grounded. His hands are on Tony's back, stroking gently.

"Rule number four," Tony says, breaking the silence.

Gibbs isn't surprised that neither of them is asleep. "Yeah - what's that?"

"One orgasm a night isn't enough." Tony looks up at him and smirks and then moves his hand downwards. Gibbs slaps the back of his head for that, and Tony laughs. "Maybe not tonight though," Tony agrees, returning his hand to Gibbs's chest. "It's been a long day. And you're not as young as you used to be."

"Neither are you," he retorts, and Tony pouts and then laughs again. Tony is so vibrant and full of life, and Gibbs thinks that if anyone can drag him back to the land of the living it's Tony.

"By the way - I told Vance to post a guard on your dad," Tony says.

"I already posted one," Gibbs tells him.

"Guess there's two people guarding him then." Tony shrugs. "But, see, that's Tony's rule number five - your problems are my problems."

Gibbs looks up at a ceiling he hasn't gazed at in twenty years and smiles. "How about we double that guard? Let's take a trip to Stillwater tomorrow. I'd feel happier being there to look out for him myself - and it's time I introduced him to you."

"He's already met me," Tony says, looking up, green eyes endearingly confused.

"I mean introduce him to you properly."

"You mean...oh!" Tony grins widely and leans up to brush a kiss over Gibbs's mouth. Then he rests his head back on Gibbs's chest again. It feels good there. Gibbs likes the weight and feel of it. He puts a hand on Tony's head and strokes his hair gently, the way he used to with Shannon.

"Am I gonna have to start writing these rules of yours down?" Gibbs asks.

"Nope - they're in everyday use," Tony tells him. "Just like yours. Think you can remember them?"

"Rule number one - I'm yours. Rule number two - there comes a time to move on. Rule number three - you'll never give up on me. Rule number four - one orgasm a night isn't enough." He snorts a little as he says that. "And rule number five - my problems are your problems. Any more?"

"Yeah - but you'll learn them as we go along. You're a quick study."

Tony grins at him in the darkness, and Gibbs resists the urge to slap his head again. Instead, he wraps his arms around Tony's body and hugs him close. Tony closes his eyes, still grinning, and within seconds he's fallen asleep.

Gibbs lies there for a long time, just holding him. Something feels different. He's not sure what it is at first, and then he realises; after twenty long, lonely years he's not alone anymore. Tony won't let him be alone anymore; he suspects it might even be one of Tony's rules.

Gibbs glances towards the door and for a brief moment he thinks he sees Shannon standing there, red hair falling over her shoulders. She smiles at him. Then she raises her hand, gives a little wave... and is gone.

The End

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