Blood On Blood
by skazka

Summary

At a Gecko family reunion, there's always a mess afterward. Richie finds Seth in a tough spot, and has to make a decision.

Notes

Content notes in endnote.

See the end of the work for more notes.

Richie finds the two of them in a mom-and-pop motel — the kind of low-rent operation he can't believe still exists any more, the kind of old time motor court that won't be here in five years' time, but not all bad. The owners are trying to spruce the place up a little, air freshener wafting out from under every door and fresh paint in the parking lot, but it's not working; the respectability only goes as deep as a few layers of paint and you can smell the desperation even sleepwalking through it. Snatches of memory from every other doorway, bad scenes that went down in the stairwells; the place is a maze, just like the Titty Twister, and underneath all the improvements it's still a place where people who couldn't make it go to cool their heels. Richie might as well be sleepwalking, drawn through the right doors and down the right hallways like he's being dragged on an invisible chain. It's a desperate place, cheap, strained. He can see it with his eyes closed. Richie shuts his eyes and lets intuition take him all the way to his brother's door. There's a chain on the door, but it busts loose easily and a light push yanks the screws out of the doorway. Glass crunches under Richie's
shoe. Seth's going to love that. These shoes are new, Richie thinks of telling him, but the hotel room stinks like bile and greasy paper wrappers and when he shuts his eyes the throbbing sense sweeps over him that really bad shit happens in hotels like these.

His brother is there on the carpeted floor, very still. Kate kneels over him, her hands still balled up in fists on his chest. Like emergency CPR, only it isn't working and Seth's heavy chest isn't rising and falling; he's stripped to the waist in a white undershirt and all motionless, wet, gray. No, not still at all. Not to a better set of eyes. There are little tremors running through him, little tremors like electric shocks zapping along the surface. Down his arms, which are as thick with muscle as they've ever been apart from the scabs.

Too late, too late, too late, too late. He should've doubled back. He should've left sooner. He should have—

*You're too late, Richard. You can't save him, and he didn't save you.* Hissed in his ear, not sexy but scornful — not the real Santanico, the lost girl on a roaring rampage of revenge. But the vision. The idea of her back to haunt him. Seth never could handle himself when it came to this stuff. His heartbeat is nearly nonexistent. Richie can't hear it. Too fucking late.

"Shut up, Richie says.

Kate's eyes are massive, suspicious. "I didn't say anything."

But Santanico's not whispering in his head any more. Richie thumps the heel of his hand against his cheek, trying to dislodge the memory of her, trying to kickstart his brain. Great big black-box brain, nitrogen-cooled, not fucking processing this.

"What the fuck did you do to him?"

Kate looks just the same. She's not still either; her heart is beating hard and strong, her lungs are pumping without a dope hit to slow them down. "What did I do?" Kate's voice is raw and he can feel the fear and anger hanging off her in layers, radiant heat. "I tried to help—"

"You don't ever touch him—"

Her small face hardens. "So he is still your brother."

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Cup of ice, cold water, dirty towel for a dropcloth, torn bedsheet. Like south-of-the-border surgery. Seth's awake in the bathtub and twitching with cramps, heaped over on his left side. Breathing shallowly now — whatever reptile part of Richie's newly-christened culebra brain can sense the difference, but it's not reassuring. Richie's balled-up suit jacket is under his head, which seems like the decent thing to do even if it can't help — Seth's heartbeat is a weak throb, with no heat. Whatever's in him is more than just heroin.

Kate says he's done this before. Just not so bad, most of the time he just coasts off but this time was different. She had to subdue him first, and then this happened, the seizures, the foaming at the mouth. Not pretty. And no hospital. He's just on the brink of death. Death's door. Right up on the edge. Richie's going to shove him off.

"So give me the lowdown. Status report." Seth tries to raise his head, grinning like a dog, gray-lipped. "Tell me how much this is gonna suck."

He doesn't think Richie is really there, and it shows. Richie sticks the heel of his hand under Seth's
jaw and tries to get him to open his eyes wider. See what he's seeing — not much. He can't keep his eyes open, can't get them to focus, like there's something else darting in front of his field of vision. Before long he'll be the late great Seth Gecko, who died half-blind and hungry in a backcountry hotel room with a little girl.

What Richie doesn't say is, you'll see everything so much clearer afterward. Every particle of film grain, every line and freckle — every line and freckle you won't be getting, because you're never getting old, you're going to stay as fit and lively as you ever were, it's just a roll of the dice whether you grow massive wings or spit acid or lose your shit and start chomping on traffic cops and little kiddies or what — or if you set up camp doing private dances whenever your old-time pimp gives his say-so.

He says, "Things are going to get a little weird."

Seth's fucked everything up this time. Richie's fucked up everything for both of them, but Seth's fucked up bad. He grips Richie's hand.

This shit is going to kill him, and he knows it. Careless, clueless — he reaches for Richie's hand but it hurts to lift his arm, there's a wet abscess in his shoulder winking like an eye. Richie grips his hand and squeezes, feeling the bones shift.

Kate watches from the doorway, her junior Jodie Foster face all screwed up with worry and disgust. She doesn't have to look. She keeps stepping out into the hallway — maybe to say a prayer or two, Richie doesn't know. For all the good that's going to do lifelong reprobate Seth Gecko.

Richie's fangs are like hypodermics; he can feel his face crease and go leathery and Seth's look of expectation changes accordingly. Like he knows what's coming even if he can't see it.

Second time around's always easier.

Seth's body is slack under him, too heavy and too loosely-strung; Richie can smell the heroin in him, blisteringly strong and all wrong — whatever's in there that shouldn't be, poisoning his brother. Richie's jaw clamps in place against the thick scabbed crook of his brother's shoulder and the rest is biology, the blood hits the back of his mouth in a bitter surge — but Richie drinks, he can't help but drink, and the flavor of Seth in it is like a live wire. Tequila burn, with a chemical chaser — he's too hot, and the temperature surge makes Richie stagger a little, and batten down harder. Seth swears, flailing hand digging in tight against Richie's back, his body spasming beneath him and then going still — his brother's body battered and sweating, the brown-white trickle of heroin making its way back out of a particularly sluggish vein, like a grimy backwash — there's going to be more where that came from.

This part is the part that's going to suck.

He'll hold him as long as it takes. Seth's body seethes and kicks but Richie forces his forearm across his throat to brace him in place, yanking him back like a straitjacket. Covering him. Like Seth covered him up — covered up the marks he left the last time they parted ways, like a turtleneck over a bad hickey.

He has to let it happen. All the worst shit getting cast back up, like the labyrinth on steroids. Once more with clarity.

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Richie helps him out of the shower. The marks on Seth are already healing, both the ones Richie's
responsible for and the ones Seth did to himself; the welts of tapped-out veins are shrinking to freckles. Richie can see them across his body — like a road map. Places he couldn't get to alone. Jesus Christ, no wonder Kate looks like she's been through a war zone. Seth used her to get high. Maybe she thought the change of scenery would clean him up. Maybe he had a connection here.

"Did she help you get drugs?"

He still halfway-expects bravado, but Seth stays downcast, staring back at the dripping tap. The suntan has faded from his face, but the rings under his eyes are there to stay. He's got eyes now like a war photograph.

"Yeah, she did."

"What about the last time? Did she shoot you up?"

"It wasn't her fault. She wasn't there. Some guy sold me a bad batch."

"What, you can't tell the difference?" Richie's staring at him now, "You could've died, Seth."

"As a matter of fact, I did fucking die, so if you could lay off me, that'd be great. We called it quits, I didn't think you were coming back. You didn't haul it all the way here just to keep me from checking out, did you?"

You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave. Old Gecko family proverb. "You weren't doing so hot without me. The pastor's daughter must make a pretty terrible getaway driver, huh? She's better with a needle."

"Kate wasn't a part of it. You don't bring a kid to a robbery."

Not unless you want to show them how it's done. Maybe in another life the two of them are looking after Kate Fuller, journeyman bank robber, but not even dad would have pulled this shit.

Seth rubs his face in his hands; his scabbed mouth is healing. Richie hands him the one ragged towel and when Seth stands up the water drops run off in shining tracks.

Blood on the carpet, blood in the bathtub, blood in the sink. Kate's sitting on the unmade bed, surrounded by wreckage. She looks like she hasn't slept in about a week, and her hair hangs in her eyes; in her hands is a red book with its front cover torn right off the hinge that is still, unmistakably, one of those cheap hotel Bibles.

"Shower's all yours."

"Thanks." She swings her legs over, pushing the book away.

"Still saying your Hail Marys?"

"Cut the crap, Richie. How did you find us?"

"It's a culebra thing. It's a Santanico thing — the same way she found him, probably, and it didn't feel any less fucked up from the other side. Like there's a big rip in the fabric of the universe and all he had to do to find his brother was pull. "I got a bad feeling."

"Then why did you take so long? Three months of fleabag motels and knocking over check-cashing stores—"

"I was busy, okay? I can't just drop everything every time Seth seems like he might be getting a bad
idea."

Kate gathers her hair up in her hands, nothing to tie it back with, a penitent Magdalen. There's hate in her eyes. Things have gone badly for her. "He'd do it for you, you know."

Richie passes her by, pausing in the doorway and scuffing broken glass. It's dark out, but the convenience stores stay open, and the bars. "He didn't want me to. You want anything?"

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Richie sits up cleaning his gun like dad taught him — like dad taught Seth, the memory spilled over with the blood. Fast, precise. Seth is drowsing next to him on the bed, so still.

He shot him all up with pain and if he can touch him, he can take some of it out again — an even distribution. Richie puts a hand out to touch him, feeling for the nightmare thread and leaning in. Seth is dreaming about the labyrinth, about dad.

In a vision, they're both kids again, facing the burning building — not ducking from the blistering heat like Richie knows they were during the real thing, cringing away from the kind of heat that'll crack your corrective lenses in their dollar-store frames and singe your little-boy eyelashes, but facing down the consuming fire. They aren't fleeing this time; they are walking back into it, self-immolating, a pair of twins. It's not like the visions that hit him by mistake, this one he wants and he'll ride it all the way to its conclusion. But Seth is stirring — waking up, and Richie is still dreaming.

This is what Richie wants, to walk elbow-to-elbow with Seth down into the bowels of hell. The details are right — the broken bead curtain, the burning upholstery, the smell of accelerant. Glass windows breaking in their frames. But the scene is ancient. It's primeval. It's something from a story.

— and it's like old times, Seth's forehead bumps into Richie's and his gas station sunglasses jostle, Seth's arms clinch close around him and Richie sinks back against the wall, the shitty furniture creaking under them as Seth shifts his weight off the bed.

"Listen," he says hoarsely, "I think I need a refill here."

His stubble rasps against Richie's neck. Richie pulls his collar open, feeling the top buttons of his shirt pop and his undershirt snag back — there's going to be a mess and it's going to be a real pain in the ass.

She did this, too. And he'd liked it. The memory of that prickles around under the surface of Richie's skin, so close that he'd be willing to bet Seth can taste it — the illustrious Gecko brothers splitting up over a woman is the last thing either of them wanted to happen but Santanico's not some front-desk girl at a reservation casino, she's a snake witch from the desert and every moment Richie is away from her is one he's going to have to pay for in blood. But Seth is his brother, and the hard-edged pinch of his teeth breaking skin makes Richie grit his jaw and groan.

Seth's mouth sets against his shoulder, and Richie lets him in. His hands find Seth's body under his coat — densely muscled, surging with ink. Seth still smells like that cologne his ex-wife got him, which makes no goddamn sense, because there's a prison term between him and the last time he had a chance to wear it. He smells like motel soap and resiny wood. That smell snakes into Richie's nose and mouth, and it lets him relax a little as the deed takes place, as whatever invisible lines of connection weave around them now get swapped in the blood. He's going to save him, one way or another.

He owes him a little peace.
They overstay their welcome by three days — three days and three nights in that slaughterhouse before Seth mauls the two-bit security guard sent out to roust them. Kate gets spooked, and they reconnoiter their chances in the parking lot on the spread of a stolen road map.

"You have your license, right?" Richie asks her, from under the hood of a stolen car.

"A license." Digging in her jeans pocket, fanning out cards between her fingers. She's been busy. Seth has too.

"Yeah, well, I'm gonna need you to drive."

Sleep all day, party all night — never get old, never die. Trawl up to New Mexico, Utah, cut a messy loop through Mormon country — Kate Fuller trades her blue jeans for gas-station sundresses and grimaces at the two of them packed into the backseat. Seth rubbing his fingers over his front teeth like he's trying to figure out where the parts go when the culebra fangs come out. He'll show him how this is supposed to go when an expert's in the driver's seat. Shifting bone and skin hardening into ridges, venom pricking at the back of his mouth — Seth makes a face, but he's going to have to suck it up. The crosshatch of scales rises up on Richie's forehead and sweeps down the bridge of his nose, crackling like calluses.

Seth's hand covers his face, like he's trying to trace the terrain with his fingers. A little bit reverential. Annoyed or moved, Richie shuts his eyes.

"I'm never going to get used to that."

"Never's a long time, Seth."

"What'd they do to your glasses?"

"I don't need them any more." They're still back at Santanico's, floating in her collection of demon stripper ephemera, lipsticks and snakeskins. She might be out of his head, but there's going to be hell to pay anyway.

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Richie comes back around the convenience store aisle with a bag of chips he can't eat and a bottled soda he won't drink, only to find his brother is painting the countertop in shades of red. Watching him eat isn't pretty but Richie can't look away — he goes for the flesh as well as the blood. Maybe that's the particular screwball eccentricity of how he got bitten, or some hidden quality in Seth bursting to the surface like a spar of bone, but it's grotesque, Rick Baker splatter alongside animal intention, like he's lost in what he's doing. It's fascinating. It isn't pretty.

"Holy fucking shit—"

"What do you want?" Seth raises his head, but only grudgingly. He's lost control and now he's frantically trying to claw his way back onto it; you can hear it in his voice. The last time Seth sounded like that, it was Richie who fucked up. He's a growing culebra now; he got hungry.

"I told you to take care of the guy, not rip his head off."

The gas station attendant is in pieces when Seth drops him — just some scabby kid, only now he has a splash radius. The smell of blood makes Richie's throat prickle. He sounds like Seth just now, the long-suffering kid brother.
"I got the keys, didn't I?" The keys are swinging from his hand, weirdly jaunty. There's a red mess on the countertop, and a guy with no face behind the counter, and Seth's palming cigarette packs like nothing happened.

"Excuse me, but are you or are you not a professional thief? Did you think that I can't handle a gas station lock? You didn't have to go all Near Dark."

Seth turns to face him. His fangs have retracted, but there's still a metallic scale-shimmer passing over his face. His beard is black with blood.

"Shut the fuck up, Richie."

"Oh, for Christ's sake."

So much for being cool. They're going to have to torch this place. Richie drags him by the collar, scattering Marlboros and Red Apples.

In the gas station backroom there's a busted faucet sticking straight out of the wall and a plastic bucket.

"Clean yourself up. And don't touch anything." There won't be any prints left to lift once they're out of here, a classic Uncle Eddie-style blitz — but the smell of blood is making Richie nervous, edgy. He forces it down, and tries to stiffen his spine, bring the rest of his bearing down to an acceptably cold-blooded level.

Get in, get out.

Seth washes the blood from his face. Seth scrubs his hands and wrists raw, and the stink of blood is replaced by the stink of industrial soap — just like prison, Richie catches in a fleeting thought, but he's never been there. It's Seth who's oozing unfiltered thoughts. Mostly anger, some satisfaction.

His face has gotten thin, but his back is still broad, muscles straining beneath his undershirt. The fresh tendril of new tattooing wraps up past the edge of the fabric and around his neck. Just the two of them, in with the sacks of plastic cups for the Icee machine and the fuseboxes. Seth dries his hands on a rag. Richie watches him, watches his face.

He's missed working with him, but this is all wrong. This is all kinds of fucked up. It's Richie who flies off the handle and Seth who has to mop up. That's the natural order of things — like back in that hotel room, with the hostage on the bed, all-red everything and Seth gentling him down after one of Santanico's visions. Now it's on Richie to return the favor. He wants, preposterously, to hold him. His undead junkie ex-con brother with muscles like a garbage bag full of pythons.

Richie clears his throat. Seth jerks upright, like he'd forgotten he wasn't alone.

"If we're getting the band back together there's going to be some ground rules."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Numero uno, no more shooting up horse and getting yourself killed."

"Well, wish granted. Jesus Christ, you are self-righteous for a dead guy." Seth feels around in his cheek with his fingers. Looking for a little piece of broken fang, maybe.

"No, I'm smart. I need you at the top of your game. Point the second — you need to control yourself, all right? Don't rip anybody's head off without clearing it with me."
Seth's face pulls into a sneer. His eyes are narrow and dark, hard. "Yeah, I'll think about it next time."

"All right, then. Just two simple rules. Do we have an understanding?"

Grabbing him by the elbow, clapping a hand to the side of his neck. Seth doesn't receive it like Richie wants him too, with reconciliation. Seth bristles. "Listen, Richard. You don't make the rules. We're not doing this shit anymore. You don't get to tell me to calm down."

"I didn't. I never said the words calm down. You're not a screaming woman or an old man firing a gun into the air."

"Then don't tell me to be cool."

Richie holds up his hands. "I wouldn't dream of it."

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry. It's just a lot to process right now. You know, you killing dad and getting facefucked by your girlfriend's snake right in front of me."

"Are you done calling me a backstabber, or should I let you finish?"

"You fucked me over, then you fucked her over, and now that you're back you're gonna do what? You sold me out, Richie, shit's not going to be just like it was."

"Before what?"

"You let her take you from me."

"I didn't let her do anything. I made an executive decision."

"Why didn't you tell me you killed dad?"

Something shifts, shutters into place, and something inside Richard slips its chain. Seth shoves him against the wall, bouncing off the metal sink, and Richie drags him down. Right there on the concrete floor — Seth's idea of foreplay means smashing his head into the ground a couple times hanging on by a fistful of hair and Richie drives a knee into his hip, forcing him back over with his eyes streaming reddish tears and the top of his scalp hurting like hell.

Seth's surging with freak strength. They're going to kill each other here, Seth's knuckles splitting against Richie's jaw and Richie slamming an elbow into whatever soft surface he can find, spiking twice. Harsh grappling slides seamlessly into something else — breathless grinding, mouths sealing on mouths. Seth's fingers gouge at Richie's mouth and he can taste little pieces of gas station attendant ground in beneath Seth's fingernails. Richie sticks a knee between Seth's legs and they slot into place, clumsy dry rutting alongside the industrial cleansers and the pallets of cigarettes — Seth fumbling at him, tugging his belt out of its buckle and jerking him off against his hip. Seth fills his hand and Richie feels out the shape of his erection through the fabric of his pants, the hard swell of blood against his palm.

"I'm sorry," Richie says, "I'm sorry," until Seth chases the sounds from his mouth and they're just sounds, not apologies.

The two of them are clinched together face to face, Richie's hand makes a fist in Seth's collar and Seth sucks hard kisses down the line of Richie's throat — there's no gouge of teeth, just the heat of his mouth and the hardened edge of something that used to be familiar. Richie's missed him, missed this, maybe — the collision between the two of them, even if it didn't go like this back then. It's not
choreographed. They aren't fighting, but they aren't undressing, either. Richie wants to touch his face, and so he does.

It's absurd, the blood and the sharp teeth and the smell of soap and cellophane. Richie on top and not sure how to stay there, forcing his leg back for a better angle as he yanks his underwear down, momentarily too-rough — Seth cries out with annoyance and pushes him back. Kissing is like fighting, pressing for advantage — Richie swipes his tongue through Seth's mouth, and Seth bites. There isn't enough time to think it might be wrong.

Seth maneuvers him onto his side then, grinding against the thickest part of Richie's leg with his belt buckle clanking away, the friction bringing him off the old-fashioned way. Richie shuts up and lets him do it, welcomes it as his hand works his own erection, until Seth's eyes find his and he helps him out, all forgiven. There's a million things Richie wants to do, Richie wants to swallow his brother up and drink him in, but maybe this particular thing — swapping handjobs and trailing bloody spit on a concrete floor — has to be Seth's. Transplant this action to prison, or the parking garage of a luxury hotel. That's more like it.

Seth kisses his forehead, his face, calls him by name. Richie smells salt on his face and lets him, he presses back against him for the finish.

They lie there for a while in a tangle, venomous and drowsy; Seth's lips track down Richie's cheek but he lies back, lets the top of his head touch the concrete floor, shuts his eyes. There's still stuff to see behind his eyelids — the visions have dimmed a little, on a ten-point scale the images of ancient bloody Aztec terror have been cranked back from an eleven to a manageable six. The two of them are together, and the rest of it is manageable.

Afterward, Seth combs his hair for him in the bathroom and Richie fixes his collar, worrying the bitten tip of his tongue against the line of his hard palate. On the way back to the car Seth is limping, and the black gasoline smoke rises up behind them. Kate knows something happened, but she doesn't know what. Let her wonder.

They're still en route to El Rey. Some place no one knows them. They're just taking the long way around.

End Notes

Content notes: consensual fight sex arising out of a genuine fight, consensual sibling incest, mentions of past abuse/parricide, drug use and accidental overdose, semi-voluntary psychic linkage.

scorpiod -- I had an amazing time writing for you this year and there were so many amazing, fantastic ships and prompts to choose from in your letter. This doesn't even scratch the surface of the awesomeness there but I hope it works for you!

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