

Bonus Scene – *Heat of the Exiled*

POV: The Rival

The Queen had not killed him.

That was worse.

He could still smell her.

Weeks had passed, and yet the scent of her—deep moss, blood-bloom, sovereign heat—still lingered in his lungs like smoke he couldn't exhale.

He touched the scar she'd left across his chest, where her power had burned through his attempt to dominate her.

It hadn't scarred his body.

It had scarred his **mind**.

He remembered the moment she turned her back on him.

Not with fear.

With **disinterest**.

He'd been born to rule.

Bred for supremacy.

And she had looked at him like an animal too small to eat.

Now, deep in the ruins of an abandoned Apex nest far from her territory, he tore through prey nightly, rutting through female monsters until they screamed his name or choked on it.

But it wasn't enough.

None of them smelled like her.

Until tonight.

He felt the shift before she entered—**not her**, but the **one marked by her**.

He rose from the bones of his last conquest, blood still drying on his thighs, as the new female stepped into the den.

She was trembling.

Not with fear.

With **heat**.

She was tall, feral, half-shifted—scales up her spine, claws flexing, but her breasts still soft and bare, nipples peaked, eyes wide with scent-drunk desperation.

She fell to her knees without speaking.

But he smelled it immediately.

The Queen's **scent** on her skin.

His cock twitched.

Fangs bared.

"Where did you come from?" he asked.

Her voice was a whimper. "I dreamed her. Woke up... aching. Dripping. And I followed it."

"She sent you?" he growled.

She shook her head. "I don't think she knows. I think the scent wanted me to find someone else."

His blood pounded.

Because even now, even in exile, the Queen was **choosing for him**.

He reached down and gripped the female by the hair.

Dragged her up.

Sniffed her throat. Her mouth. Between her legs.

She moaned when his nose touched her inner thigh.

Not because it was *him*.

Because it was *her scent*.

That was the last straw.

He shoved her against the stone wall, her legs spreading instinctively, slick and twitching and *begging*.

"You want her?" he snarled.

"Yes."

"Too bad," he hissed, lining up his cock. "You get **me**."

He thrust into her.

Hard.

And the sound she made wasn't a scream.

It was **a prayer**.

POV: The Rival

He slammed into her—again and again—each thrust an act of violence, of **vengeance**.

Not against her.

Against **her**.

The Queen.

The one who had crowned herself while he knelt bleeding. Who had let the forest claim her, who had looked at him like he was dust under her claws. Forgotten.

He rutted the female with no mercy, her back scraped against the cold stone, her legs locked around his waist, her throat bared in perfect submission.

But still—**not enough**.

He gripped her by the hips and turned her.

Bent her.

Pressed her cheek to the wall, ass high, dripping and open for him.

When he entered her again, she sobbed.

"Please," she gasped, "please, make me hers—"

He snarled.

"You think she'd take you?"

The sound of his cock slamming into her echoed like war drums through the den.

"You think she'd let you kneel at her throne? Let you worship her with your tongue?"

"Yes," the female whimpered. "I dream of her—every night. She smells like heat. Like home."

He pulled out just long enough to slap her soaked cunt with the head of his cock. She moaned. Shivered. Came.

Without being touched.

And he hated it.

He gripped her throat from behind and yanked her up, still buried deep inside.

Her head lolled against his shoulder. "Would she fuck me like this?" he hissed into her ear. "Would she let me knot her like a bitch in heat?"

"She'd ride you," the female gasped. "Break you. And you'd love it."

He bit her.

Hard.

Just under the jaw, where the mating bond should have gone.

But it didn't spark.

Didn't take.

Because she wasn't **her**.

And she never would be.

Still, he came.

Deep, hot, brutal.

Flooding her until she collapsed to the floor, legs twitching, the moss below slick with both their heat.

She rolled to her back, eyes glassy.

"You came hard," she said. "But you still look... empty."

He stared down at her, chest heaving.

Because she was right.

He'd used her body.

Drenched her in seed.

Made her moan the Queen's name.

And **he still wanted more.**

POV: The Rival

The female lay twitching in the dirt—used, spent, glowing from within.

But he didn't feel the same.

He stood over her, cock still half-hard, streaked with her slick, his hands bloodied from gripping the wall.

And still—**nothing.**

Nothing that scratched the itch. Nothing that filled the hollow her scent had carved inside his chest.

He breathed in again.

And that's when he felt it.

Not a memory. Not a craving. A tether.

The Queen hadn't just scarred him.

She'd *branded* him.

Not with a mark—but with **absence.**

Her scent lingered in his blood like a phantom limb. Like a part of him that had been removed without consent, and now throbbed every night she didn't claim it.

He stumbled back from the female, panting.

Fell to his knees.

And moaned—not from pain.

From **heat.**

His own.

He was in rut.

Not natural. Not timed. Induced.

By her.

By the phantom echo of her power.

By the fucking *scent-mark* she'd *denied* him in the clearing, back when she chose the other.

"No," he growled, clawing at his own chest. "You don't get to haunt me."

But she did.

He touched himself.

Stroked his cock once. Twice.

And her scent flared in his mind.

Moss. Ash. Blood. **Throne.**

He saw her.

Riding him.

Not as a mate.

As a **punishment.**

She wasn't soft in his fantasy.

She **used** him.

Made him beg. Made him choke on her taste. Made him scream her name while the others watched, while his former followers **knelt to her instead.**

He came.

Hard.

Knees buckling.

Body twitching.

Seed pooling in the moss, untouched.

And when it was over?

He looked at the trembling female behind him, the one still marked with the Queen's scent, still whimpering from the force of his knot.

And he realized something terrifying.

He wasn't rutting to forget.

He was rutting to **summon her**.

POV: The Rival

He didn't sleep anymore.

Sleep meant scent.

Sleep meant her.

Sleep meant waking up in a tangle of claw marks and semen, snarling her name into empty air with no relief.

So he stayed awake.

Stalked. Hunted. Fucked.

But nothing worked.

Until the storm came.

It wasn't made of wind.

It was **sound**.

Low. Subsonic. Meant for Apex ears only.

It rolled through the forest in pulses, vibrating the bones of every monster within a hundred miles.

And buried in that frequency was a voice.

Her voice.

It wasn't meant for him.

It was meant for **them**—her bonded, her tribe, her Sovereign court.

But he was still Apex.

He still heard it.

“Prepare the den.”

“It grows.”

“They will come to take it.”

“Let them try.”

The scent hit him before the last word finished.

Fresh.

Alive.

Dripping with arousal and power and **domination**.

He doubled over.

Clawed at his own stomach like he could rip the ache out.

It wasn't lust.

It was **bond-hunger**.

And he didn't even have the right to feel it.

She'd denied him.

And still... she was inside him.

He shoved his hand between his legs and growled.

“No more rutting. No more worship. No more waiting.”

He stood.

Naked. Hard. Still leaking.

The female stirred behind him. “You smell it too,” she whispered.

He didn't answer.

He just turned to the east.

Where her power pulsed like a second sun.

And he spoke one vow into the trees, into the moss, into the roots that had once knelt for her:

"I'm coming for you, Queen. Not to beg. Not to kneel."

He bared his teeth.

"To *fuck* you."

A pause.

Then deeper—

"To *breed* you."

A final whisper, darker than the forest itself:

"And if he dies trying to stop me?"

He smiled.

"Even better."

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