

Chapter Seven

Cassian arrives at a war-scarred manor in the human lands, transported by Mor, to meet with the self-styled "Band of Exiles"—Jurian, Vassa, and Lucien. The estate bears visible damage from past conflicts, creating a desolate atmosphere under the moonlight. Mor departs quickly, leaving Cassian to navigate the diplomatic mission alone. His arrival follows a frustrating encounter with Nesta, whose deliberate defiance during a training session has left him agitated and seeking purpose elsewhere.

Upon entering the manor, Cassian is immediately unsettled by Lucien's tension and the revelation that Eris, a long-standing enemy, is present. Memories of Mor's brutal mistreatment at Eris's hands flood Cassian's mind, igniting his rage. Despite his instinct for vengeance, he recalls Rhys's trust in Eris and attempts to adopt a diplomatic mindset. Lucien's wary demeanor hints at the volatile dynamics at play, forcing Cassian to suppress his emotions for the sake of the mission.

Cassian observes the room's occupants: Eris lounges with deliberate arrogance, while Vassa and Jurian watch the exchange with interest. Struggling to reconcile his personal hatred with Rhys's strategic alliance, Cassian grapples with the complexities of courtly politics. Vassa greets him formally, and Jurian's teasing remark lightens the tension slightly, though Cassian remains acutely aware of the underlying stakes. The chapter highlights his internal conflict between warrior instincts and the demands of diplomacy.

The encounter underscores Cassian's growth as he navigates unfamiliar terrain of alliances and enmities. His frustration with Nesta's defiance parallels his struggle to control his anger toward Eris, emphasizing themes of patience and restraint. The chapter sets the stage for future confrontations, both personal and political, as Cassian balances loyalty to his friends with the broader needs of their cause. The presence of Eris and the Band of Exiles hints at deeper intrigues yet to unfold.