
ELLA

Lycan Mating Games, Book Three

S. CINDERS



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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only.
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Prologue

James

Ella and I stood hand in hand as the massive crowd of people descended upon us. I squeezed her hand, unsure if I was reassuring her or myself. I had a horrible feeling about all of this. Something was off, but I wasn't sure what.

These were not ordinary wolves; they were trained soldiers with the intent to kill. With vacant feral sneers, they remained a few feet back, poised to pounce when commanded. They moved in sync; it was almost like a dance. I had goosebumps, watching them—no, these were not mere wolves. Holy shit, what kind of wonderland had we landed in?

Several men and women in uniforms pulled up in unmarked black vehicles.

Something is wrong! Jessie's voice splashed through my mind.

Wait, I had told her, but for what I wasn't sure.

There were guns aimed toward us. I had never been so afraid for our lives. They seemed to be waiting for someone or something.

Ella was trembling, or maybe it was me. I gritted my teeth

and stood taller. They might be taking us in, but they hadn't won, not by a long shot.

Finally, the door to one of the helicopters opened, and a man in a dark suit exited. I couldn't see his face, but that body was massive. He exuded danger with every step. He stood taller than every other person in attendance, including myself.

I felt the rage and fire in his movements. He was going to kill us.

A hand came up to remove dark sunglasses, and Ella gasped.

"James Smithson and Ella Andres, you are charged with treason to your country. You have the right to remain silent..."

He Mirandized us, but I could hardly process what he was saying.

"Clarence?" Ella blurted out.

The man, who looked to be the spitting image of our dead friend, continued as if she hadn't spoken, until he was finished reading us our rights.

"Clarence, how are you alive?" A frisson of hope lit inside of me. That hope died at his next words.

"It is Detective White. Now, are you going to come willingly, or is this about to get interesting?"

Ella reached her hand out. Whether to touch him to see if Clarence was real or to strike out at him, I will never know.

My body arched in pain as currents of electricity shot into our bodies. Two of the officers stood there holding Taser guns, grinning like idiots.

The man I knew as Clarence rolled his eyes at them like they were naughty children. All the while, we flopped in agony against the concrete.

Strong hands grabbed me, and handcuffs were placed on my ankles and wrists. I tried to communicate with Ella, but it was as if they had shut off the mind link that we had.

She glanced back at me, having had the same treatment, and I thrashed against the officers holding me, trying to get to her.

I was roughly yanked to my feet and escorted to a separate vehicle, where they shoved me into the back seat. There was a wall of steel between the front and back.

I tried to see where they had taken Ella but couldn't, from my position.

There was a great howl in unison from the soldiers, and to my surprise, Clarence got into the passenger side of the car I was in.

His voice was low. "Well done, Smithson, I didn't think you would be able to bring her in."

Terror bloomed across my chest. "What are you talking about?" I snarled.

He laughed. "You have been undercover too long. Shit, I almost thought you were serious out there."

I was serious—deadly so.

"You will be up for promotion after this." Clarence rubbed a hand over his jaw. "I hope those stupid fucks weren't too hard on you back there. They weren't supposed to Taser you, especially since you called in the surrender."

I was going to vomit. *I did this?*

Clarence looked back at me. "Man, that must have shaken you harder than I thought. Your dad will kill me if I actually harmed you."

My dad? I didn't have a family.

"Or your mom, shit, Emily is fucking crazy when she's angry. You need to call them when we get back to headquarters. Let them know you are okay and that this hell is over."

I tried to speak but had to clear my throat twice.

"Wh-what is my father's name?"

Clarence eyed me. "Are you shitting me? This isn't funny."

"Tell me!" I demanded.

His mouth fell open. "Daniel, your father's name is Daniel Smithson. James, are you okay?"

I couldn't answer. No, I was not all right. My mate was

ripped from my hands and deemed a traitor. My friend, and father figure, was back from the dead and working for the other side. I had an entire history that no longer existed. I had parents named Emily and Daniel, maybe even siblings. I demanded to know where they were taking me.

Clarence was worried. I could see it in his tightened mouth and observant eyes. "Back to headquarters in Wyoming. Miss Andres will stand trial there for treason. Look, James, you need to take some time off from the force. The USLUF will understand. You have been undercover for over a year now. Fuck, you look harder and meaner than I have ever seen you. It's like I don't even know you anymore."

I nodded curtly. "I feel the same."

Another officer got behind the wheel.

"That woman is a wildcat. Shit, she had to be tasered two more times."

My snarling face was against the cage in seconds. "Don't you fucking even talk about her! You don't know shit about anything."

If my hands and feet had been free, I would have ripped him apart. Clarence looked from me to the other officer. "Give him some space."

"I didn't say anything, man!" The officer glowered at me.

"He's been under a long time." Clarence's tone brooked no further argument.

We rode in silence as night descended and stars began to appear across the expansive horizon.

The only explanation I knew of was that Jessie had changed something in the past, or that

Rinwald had, and that we were in an alternate future. I knew that I needed to keep my mouth shut. If I were found insane, they would never let me go free.

Thousands of thoughts raced through my mind. I was desperate to know if Ella was okay. Even in this changed future,

Ella was still fighting for what was right. I felt a distinct tightening in my chest and a knot at my throat.

I had to find out what had happened.

"What will happen to Miss Andres?" I choked out.

Clarence met the eyes of the other officer, and I knew that I wouldn't like the answer. He sighed. "If found guilty..."

"There is no fucking way she will be found innocent," one of the officers muttered. Clarence ignored him. "If found guilty, she will be subjected to the highest form of punishment."

"Death?" I asked. Surely, this wasn't real!

"Look, James, we don't need to talk about this shit. You were bound to grow some attachment to the subject. That's why we don't like to do missions of this length. You won't be asked to pull the trigger, if that is what you are worried about."

But what Clarence didn't understand was—I already had.

It was my fault that she was caught. He said I had called in the surrender. I felt bile racing up my throat.

We should never have left the GMU.

What have I done?

Chapter 1

James

"Sit your ass down," Clarence grumbled as I paced the tile of the precinct.

I had taken a shower and gotten a few hours' rest before he hauled me in to reunite with my mom and dad.

Fucking hell—before today, I didn't have a mom and dad. I was freaking out with worry over where they had taken Ella, and now, I was supposed to make nice with strangers. It was too surreal.

Obviously, Jessie had been successful when she altered the timelines and saved our friends from dying in that fateful plane crash. But she had also damned Ella to a life in prison and opened a can of worms that I had no idea if we would ever escape from.

I glanced over at Clarence; he was different from the man I knew. Physically, there wasn't a difference. As to personality, this Clarence was more of a colleague than a trusted friend. He still had his no-nonsense attitude and a sharp eye for inconsistencies.

"What in the hell is the matter with you?" he grumbled,

almost as if he knew what I had been thinking. Sighing, he continued. "Listen, James, I need to speak with you."

He rubbed the black stubble covering his dark chin. Clarence was intimidating as hell, and that says a lot coming from a man who stands five inches over six feet. In this timeline, his dark skin was covered in scars from numerous fights and busts gone wrong. Tattoos flowed on most of the exposed skin I could see on his forearms, and I wondered what path this Clarence had walked.

Turning to face him head on, I answered, "What is it?"

He frowned, and I felt heat in my cheeks.

Damn it.

"Sir," I added out of respect.

"Sit," he barked the command.

I plopped down, but my foot immediately started tapping.

"Look," he began. "Going undercover for that length of time can knock the hell out of anyone. I know you don't want to do this, but I am requesting that you go on medical leave for a few weeks. I want you to see a doctor, take a run, and make sure you are all right to serve."

My jaw clenched. "I am not crazy."

His expression didn't change. "I didn't say you were. Nor do I believe that all people who see a psychiatrist are crazy."

I rolled my eyes. "Right," I said sarcastically.

Once again, he ignored my outburst.

I was about to demand that he take me to see Ella when there was a knock at the door. A bear of a man came in with a bright smile, followed by a tiny woman with violet, worried eyes.

That is, until they alighted on me. Immediately, joy leapt into the violet depths, and she exclaimed, "James!"

I found myself catching this woman as she launched herself at me. Something inside of me knew who these people were. I was meeting my parents for the first time. This was what it felt like to hold my mother.

I was stiff and awkward, and damn it if my eyes didn't sting a little bit.

Fucking hell.

"I have missed you so very much," she whispered into my chest, giving me an extra squeeze.

Before I could answer, or worse, make a complete ass out of myself and cry, I was wrapped up into a bear hug by my father.

"He looks so thin," my mother was saying to Clarence as my dad hugged the life out of me.

"He looks good!" My dad's voice filled the room. "You look good, son," he said proudly. "We can't tell you how happy we are to have you home."

My words caught in my throat. There was a jumble of emotion that I couldn't possibly explain to them. They looked at me like I had hung the moon and the stars. *Shit, I wasn't going to fucking cry.*

I bit the inside of my cheek—hard.

My parents looked to be in their late thirties, perhaps early forties. They were a handsome couple and I approved of the way my father wrapped his arm around my mother as if it were second nature. She smiled up at him so lovingly that my heart ached. I had that with Ella.

I needed to get back to her immediately. Yet, meeting my parents, this was something that I never thought would happen or even could happen. I guess a part of me never let myself contemplate the people who had given birth to me.

I was a number in my timeline, a machine. I was part of a pod. That was where I met Ella. She is the sole reason that life had been somewhat bearable. Ella was meant to be at my side; she was a part of me. I felt like I was missing an arm.

I glanced back to my parents. This time, there was concern in their eyes as they returned my gaze. My mother bit her lip and leaned into my dad. *Shit, I wasn't acting like myself, but the*

tricky thing was that I had no idea how to behave like myself in this timeline.

Clarence cleared his throat, drawing everyone's attention. "I was just explaining to James that the agency is giving him a few weeks off to rest and recuperate."

My mother breathed a sigh of relief. "That will be just what he needs. Your brother and sister are anxious to see you, as well as your Aunt Avery and Uncle Finn and their kids. The pack has missed you."

I had a brother and a sister? An aunt and uncle? It was too much, too fast.

My father moved swiftly from my mother's side, placing a steadying hand on my shoulder. Normally, I wouldn't tolerate a strange wolf touching me. But the instant he connected with me, I realized that he felt my instinct to run. My wolf recognized him as our alpha.

This was beyond weird.

My dad's tone was low so only I could hear. "What is all this about, James? Are you all right?"

I nodded shakily. "Yes, sir. Just trying to acclimatize myself."

But it seemed that was the wrong thing to say. He flinched and answered, "You only call me sir when you are in trouble."

Shit. Shit. Shit.

"Sorry, erm, *Dad*. I'm just tired, I guess." I tried to sound convincing, but my mother's eyes began to glisten with unshed tears.

Clarence's look was reeking of 'I told you so.'

Bastard.

"James, your leave is effective immediately. Don't try to come in. Your badge will be deactivated. I want you to take some time and be with your pack. Remember what I said; you should talk to someone; that is not a sign of weakness."

I felt like a kid as my parents exchanged worried looks with

each other as I followed them out of the precinct to their large SUV.

"James." My father opened the trunk and took my duffle bag to toss inside. "Now that we are out of there. I want to know the truth. Are you okay?"

Was I okay? No, not even a little bit.

My mother added, "What happened to you?"

I wanted to tell them so badly. But if I told the truth, they would never believe me. *Fuck, they would probably try to have me committed.*

"It's been a crazy year," I replied in a somewhat credible tone. I figured I would try to stick as close to the truth as possible.

My mom's lips trembled, her violet eyes bright as she spoke. "I just feel like it's been forever since I have seen you."

I almost laughed, but it wasn't funny. Instead, I took her outstretched hand. "I feel the same way."