

SAVAGE CITY A crime thriller series based on the Nikki Serafino novels by Elizabeth Heider

A pitch by Elizabeth Heider

What does it cost to survive? Can I remain ethical in broken systems? How do I fight the wolves without becoming one? And what happens when the person I love most has already made a different choice?

These are questions NIKKI SERAFINO lives — through the discipline of her body, the dedication to her work, and the relationships she’s built on her own exacting terms. Across seven books, the answers to those questions are going to cost her everything.

Nikki is a local civilian investigator embedded with the US Navy in Naples, a city she knows from the inside and an institution she capably navigates. She is formidably proficient, rigorously trained, and principled in ways that make her genuinely dangerous to the systems around her. She has built a life in Naples that reflects those values: a boat she co-owns and has rebuilt from the hull up, a platonic partnership with a Neapolitan cop that defies every social convention, and a relationship with a man she loves while struggling to maintain her independence. She has looked at this city — violent, corrupt, breathtakingly beautiful — and decided to live in it on her own terms.

That decision is what this series is about.

Because across the city, her childhood sweetheart TITO CALANDRA — a man who once stood beside her — has become the most sophisticated organized crime figure in southern Italy. Tito concluded, long ago, that the only way to protect the people you love in a city run by wolves is to become the most dangerous wolf. He carries his own moral logic, his own form of love, his own answer to the same question. Tito and Nikki are two sides of the same coin. But their paths diverged fifteen years ago, on the night Nikki’s brother was shot — and

the tension between them is charged with everything they once were to each other, and everything they have since become.

That tension is the engine that drives the Nikki Serafino series. It deepens with every season, and it builds across seven books, toward something neither of them can yet fully understand: a threat rooted in the covert world of Nikki's mother, and the international network that destroyed her. When that threat finally becomes visible, Nikki and Tito will have no choice but to stand together. Every season of this series is the architecture of that moment.

SAVAGE CITY is a propulsive crime thriller that begins in the streets and institutions of contemporary Naples — and expands, season by season, into the hidden architecture of international intelligence, military corruption, and the men who use power to buy silence. It is set in one of the world's most cinematically extraordinary cities, inside institutions rendered with authentic precision. This is Mediterranean Noir - the gritty realism of *Gomorrah* mixed with the sleek, high-stakes tension of *The Night Manager*.

The authenticity of the Nikki Serafino series comes from a writer who spent a decade embedded in the US Navy, deployed aboard ships across Europe and Africa, stationed at the US Navy headquarters in Naples, and working with law enforcement and intelligence agencies on multiple continents.

I lived inside these worlds, and witnessed how power protects itself. This story is everything I saw and couldn't say.

Two novels are in print — *May the Wolf Die* (2024) and *Children of the Savage City* (2026), both published by Penguin Random House — with a third in progress and the full seven-book arc mapped. The hidden threads introduced in Book 1 are already developing in Book 2. The architecture is already constructed and ready to go.

THE WORLD

Naples is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities on earth — a sediment of three thousand years of empire, plague, invasion, and reinvention built atop the roiling heat of a volcano. The city itself is chaotic and overwhelming and stunning. Sun-bleached palazzi rising above streets dense with scooters, graffiti, and the smell of frying dough and diesel. The Bay shimmering beyond the black mass of Castel Nuovo. A juxtaposition of volcanic rock and baroque marble. Washing lines strung five stories up between buildings that have stood since the Bourbons. The frequency of the city is almost unbearable — loud, hot, crowded, gorgeous, relentless.

Here, grace and corruption share the same narrow streets. Beneath the visible chaos, the city has its own internal structure: the Camorra, the organized crime network that has ruled Naples' informal economy for centuries — a true face of power far different from the respectable mask it wears.

The U.S. military presence is only the latest tenant of this ancient site. Twelve kilometers north, the Capodichino US Navy base is the headquarters of US Naval Forces Europe and Africa and 6th fleet — a command hub for 8,000 personnel, monitoring fleet movements and crisis response across two continents. Manicured lawns. Air conditioning. A day that starts with a flag ceremony and national anthem at 0800. An architecture of procedure and protocol, announcing that order has been achieved.

The base and its support site are built on land where the Camorra dumps and burns toxic waste. Its water supply is contaminated. Its housing office, compromised through Camorra influence, routinely places officers in dangerous neighborhoods — men who come home to find their cars being craned over their own razor-wire fences. The institutions built to impose order on this city are threaded through the Camorra ecosystem, the boundary separating these two worlds the thinnest of lines.

NIKKI SERAFINO knows these worlds from the inside. Raised in Naples, she lives its rhythms and relentless pulse — and she also has a keen understanding of the American systems. Nikki is the child of an American mother — a former US Naval cryptologist- and an Italian father — an intelligence officer with the local Carabinieri. She has always navigated the liminal space between these two halves of her identity. And she's turned this fluency into a career. She's a civilian investigator inside Phoenix Seven — the liaison unit connecting the US Navy to Italian law enforcement — her job to stitch together the jagged edges of two systems that share a geography and almost nothing else.

Phoenix Seven is staffed by Italian officers — many of them washed up after unremarkable policing careers: older men, territorial, contemptuous of oversight, and openly hostile to a woman of Nikki's competence and clarity. She navigates this the way she navigates everything — with discipline, care, resistant to provocation, and refusing to give anyone the satisfaction of breaking her.

She's very good at this work. And the longer she does it, the more she understands that the seam she's holding together is the least of it. The rot moves through both systems. And the corruption goes far deeper than Nikki can possibly know.

PILOT

PRE-TITLE SEQUENCE

Naples. November 2006.

A city at war with itself. The streets empty by 19:30. Twelve murders in two weeks. The old Camorra bosses caged in Poggioreale, and the new princes greedy and ruthless, battling for dominance. And thousands of criminals, released by a government amnesty program, roaming the streets like wolves, hungry to settle vendettas and to oust the usurpers their fiefdoms.

A condemned building in Quartieri Spagnoli, an old baroque structure gone to seed, metal braces on unstable walls. Nothing much from the outside. Within, a warm oasis. Four floors of crumbling plaster and squatters, mattresses and secondhand couches and graffiti decorating the once-elegant space. Anti-government energy, loud music pushing through the walls.

TITO CALANDRA — twenty-two, tall, muscular, with a preternatural gravity and the electric charge of a canny intellect. And NIKKI SERAFINO — twenty-one, full of sharp observation and ready action, long dark hair, and a child's full face not yet remade by the decade ahead of her — arrive together. She is confident: in her capability, in her equality to Tito, in the value of their work together, and in their passion for each other.

The room shifts. Small adjustments. A man near the door straightens, says something to the woman beside him. Across the room, someone catches someone else's eye.

A man — fifties, heavysset — finds Tito near the door. They embrace. He speaks quietly, close, one hand on Tito's shoulder. Tito listens, nods once. The man moves away looking lighter than he arrived.

A woman intercepts Nikki — thirties, a greeting warm but the eyes measuring. They speak to one another in Neapolitan dialect.

WOMAN *You found it?*

NIKKI *Of course.*

WOMAN *And?*

NIKKI *Tell your brother the Thursday patrol runs fifteen minutes early now. Has done since October. If he hasn't adjusted, he needs to.*

The woman nods, already calculating.

WOMAN *He'll want to —*

NIKKI *He knows where to find us.*

The woman moves away. Nikki finds Tito. Something passes between them — unspoken intimacy, coordination, agreement.

Someone presses wine into their hands. A joke. Friendly laughter. The music is loud and the room is warm.

Later.

A threadbare couch in a corner. Demijohn of wine nearly emptied. Around them the party has deepened into something loose— a guitarist in the corner, two couples dancing, someone making a speech nobody listens to.

Tito's arm around her. Nikki's head back, watching the ceiling. Comfortable in the way that comes from years of intimate knowing and trust. They speak to one another in Italian and dialect. She calls Tito “caro”, dear—and he calls her “Mio piccolo mostro” —my little monster. They're playful with one another, reminding us that, despite their underlying competence, they're still both very young. Naples makes you grow up fast.

A man passes, clocks Tito and Nikki, stares openly. His companion pulls him away before he can speak.

Nearby, someone is talking about a recent killing in Piazza Cavour— a man shot in the face. Tito shakes his head.

TITO (quietly) *They're burning too hot. They're going to bring hell down on themselves if they can't get control.*

Tito takes Nikki's chin and draws her into him. They kiss — at once passionate and familiar.

Her phone buzzes in her pocket. He feels it. Keeps her close.

She pulls back just enough to glance at the screen.

NIKKI *It's my parents.*

TITO (quiet) *Stay.*

NIKKI *We should go.*

TITO *Just a little longer.*

She looks at him. A small smile. She reaches for the wine.

Much later.

The party thinning. Nikki's phone face-down on the cushion beside her.

She picks it up.

The screen fills with missed calls. Her mother. Adriano. Adriano. Adriano.

Eight missed calls from Adriano.

She sits up. The wine curdles her stomach.

She calls him back. He picks up immediately. Nikki and her brother Adriano speak to one another in English, the language of their mother.

ADRIANO, V.O., *Where are you?* Nikki starts to apologize. Adriano interrupts: Listen to me. Have Tito walk you to Piazza Municipio. I'll be there in ten minutes.

NIKKI Adriano —

ADRIANO (V.O.) *Ten minutes. Go. Now.*

The streets. Dark. Moving fast.

The city at night during the curfew is dangerous — the silence wrong, the emptiness wrong, the occasional sound of something distant that might be fireworks. Maybe.

Tito is steady beside her despite the wine, that quality of alertness surfacing through a haze. They move quickly through the familiar streets.

He pulls her into an alley. Hand on her arm.

TITO *I have to do something. Two minutes. Wait here.*

NIKKI *Tito* —

But he's already gone, absorbed by the dark.

She waits. The city murmurs around her. Distant sirens. Somewhere above, a window shuts. She counts her own heartbeats.

When Tito comes back his face is different. Something she has never seen in him — terror. Something has happened in those two minutes that she will never learn the full truth about.

He grabs her hand.

TITO *RUN!*

Running.

Through the warren of the old city — narrow alleys, steep staircases, laundry on lines strung between buildings and on balconies, garbage in the gutters, closed shop fronts, votive shrines, walls close on both sides. Nikki's feet slapping on stone, her breath coming hard, Tito's hand in hers.

A BANG — the wall ahead explodes in a puff of plaster dust, raining down on them.

Another BANG. The clink of metal clipping stone.

Fear is total. Animal instinct and reaction. The city a labyrinth. No exits.

And then the walls open and they burst into the wide space of the piazza —

NIKKI's face. Then, a gunshot.

TITLES: SAVAGE CITY

The old neighborhood. Fifteen years later. Morning.

NIKKI leaves her building, gate clanging shut behind her. She is firm-faced and determined, body muscular and tattooed, hair cropped short and bleached. Moving with the graceful confidence and alert awareness of a fighter.

The city suddenly loud around her — trash collectors, a woman leaning in her doorframe calling out a greeting, calling her “*Nina*”, asking after her handsome boyfriend, *is there a white dress in your future?* A man reminding her that Gianni still needs to pick up those

cardboard boxes for his shop. The neighborhood that knew her before she knew herself, insisting she put the old identity, *Nina*, back on.

At Massimo's busy café bar, the ritual plays out: *Nicole, bellissima, where have you been?* He asks after her father. He tells her she's getting thinner — what would her mother have said? *She would have congratulated me on my self-discipline.* Massimo shakes his head. She should talk to her aunt. Isabella could tell her a thing or two about her mother. *Ah, your mother...a woman like Beatrice...needs many admirers, many lovers.* Nikki laughs, *I'm sure my father would have something to say about that!*

Then Nikki's brother GIANNI arrives — too loud, a man performing a casual visit. He is their mother's face on their father's failings: sharp chin, beautiful eyes, a lifetime of cock-ups and hasty reparations. He says he was in the neighborhood anyway. Just stopped in. She should come and see the shop sometime. *It's doing great. Just great.* Is Enzo coming Sunday? Is Massimo coming to the christening in Benevento?

Massimo, delighted, *won't miss it*, and asks if the whole family will be there. *Izzy too?*

GIANNI (*expansive*) *Everyone. The whole family. It's going to be a beautiful day.*

Then — almost too nonchalantly:

GIANNI *You know, Nikki, I was thinking about—*

Behind them, a loud conversation and the name *Tito Calandra* rises above the din.

Nikki freezes. Then a brisk smile at Massimo, a farewell, and she's moving.

Gianni — slurping the last of his coffee — chases after her as she strides through the city streets towards her Honda Hornet.

When alone, Gianni and Nikki speak English to one another—the language of their American mother.

GIANNI *You haven't talked to Tito recently, have you?*

NIKKI *Of course not! God, why would you even ask?*

GIANNI *We've stayed friends...you know. I didn't want to say, because I know how you get. He's invested in the shop—*

NIKKI *(stopping. Aggressive) What the fuck, Gianni? You can't take his money! How do you think Tito can afford that? You shouldn't...you can't be in debt to him.*

GIANNI *Hey, I can understand why you're upset. You two have history—*

NIKKI *Ages ago! We were just kids. He's syndicate now. You know what he is...what he's done. How much do you owe him?*

GIANNI *It's not like that. I've known Tito all my life. You have to be able to trust someone. And...Bea adores him. And...he's always asking after you.*

NIKKI *Don't you fucking tell Tito anything about me.*

GIANNI *Don't do that...that thing you do. Don't be so goddamn sanctimonious! People make mistakes. And you know what his father was!*

NIKKI *Tito chose what he chose. I don't want to be any part of that, and you shouldn't either.*

NIKKI *(mounting the Hornet) I've gotta go.*

GIANNI *C'mon...hey. Let's get something...a cornetto. I've got to tell you—*

NIKKI *I'm already late...sailing with Valerio today.*

She straps on her helmet. Gianni stands on the pavement behind her, slightly out of breath.

GIANNI *(low) It's going to be a good day, Sunday. Really. It's going to be fine.*

She drives into the city, easily weaving through traffic, the neighborhood receding behind her.

Meanwhile, somewhere else in Naples.

While Nikki is heading out the door to Massimo's, VALERIO ALFIERI — mid-forties, broad-shouldered, a face that defaults to laughter, but can go deadly serious in an instant — is pressed against a wall in civilian clothes, sneakers, slouchy hoodie, weapon drawn, waiting for the signal.

The FALCHI — the falcon squad, specialist motorbike unit, the men who move through Naples' narrow streets where squad cars can't follow — have been watching NINO CAPELLI. Puffed and reddened, hulking, a man of vicious impulsivity and no internal restraints. A hijacking gone wrong, a man knifed in a fit of irritation.

A signal. The team moves fast — door, hallway, room. Capelli, caught before his first coffee, unshaven and furious, is on the floor before he can decide what to do about it. Valerio stands over him, weapon still raised, breathing steady.

Professional. Efficient. Finished.

He holsters his weapon and steps back while his colleagues process Capelli into the morning light. He watches with the detached calm of a man who has done this many times and feels neither pleasure nor distaste.

Then he checks his phone.

Three messages from Nikki. The last one: *already on the boat.*

He says his goodbyes, gets into his car — a battered green Opel with a missing wing mirror, the backseat a mess of coffee cups, used Tupperware, crumpled homework and a pair of kid's football boots— and drives to the port.

He pulls up, kills the engine, reaches into the back seat and puts on his straw hat.

At the dock, CALYPSO is already rigged. NIKKI — cropped hair, tattooed arms and legs, the focused ease of someone who knows this work - is aboard and ready.

Nikki and Valerio speak in Italian.

NIKKI *You're late.*

VALERIO *(climbing aboard) We were making an arrest.*

NIKKI *Again? Leave some criminals for the rest of the cops.*

VALERIO *When do you need to be back?*

NIKKI *(checking her watch) A few hours. I've got to put things together for the night shift.*

He finds his spot at the bow. She takes the helm. The boat moves out into the bay.

The Bay of Naples. Late morning.

CALYPSO cuts across open water — 9.5 meters, forty-five years old, rebuilt from the hull up by the two people now sailing her. She's not glamorous. She is seaworthy, which is better.

Nikki at the helm, adjusting the tiller with unconscious ease. Valerio at the bow, trimming the sail without being asked. They don't need to speak. The boat responds.

Behind them Naples rises in layers against the sky — chaotic, gorgeous, improbable. And behind Naples, vast and dark and ominous, VESUVIUS. The mountain that has destroyed this city twice and will someday destroy it again.

Anchored offshore. An hour later.

Meal finished. Emptied wine bottle. Demolished provolone. Boat rocking gently beneath a bright sky, a creaking murmur and the slap of waves. Valerio asleep on the bench — hat over his face, one arm across his chest, mouth slightly open. The uncomplicated sleep of a man with a clear conscience.

Nikki tidying. Picking olives from the Tupperware one by one. Checking her dive watch.
18:54. Night shift. Laundry. Fuel for the Honda.

Valerio stirs. Lazy. Yawns.

VALERIO *(not shifting his hat)* *It may only have been armed robbery. Maurizio isn't so sure he was the one who stabbed the driver.*

NIKKI *Didn't you have him on CCTV?*

VALERIO *Footage was grainy.*

NIKKI *But you had an eyewitness...Isn't that enough?*

VALERIO *This morning, when we knocked the door, told him to get dressed and come with us, he cried and pissed himself.*

NIKKI *What kind of murderer does that? Might not be him.*

VALERIO *(another yawn)* *It's him.*

Nikki almost smiles. She peels off her t-shirt and goes into the water.

She floats on her back — the city and Vesuvius behind her — gazing up at the name painted on the hull above her. *Calypso*. Three years of stripped-back weekends and scraped knuckles and scuba gear scraping barnacles off the hull. The boat is hers in the way that very few things are hers. Chosen. Painstakingly rebuilt.

Not far away, a beautiful 15-meter yacht — the ANDIAMO — drops anchor, music thumping. On the back deck, a blonde woman climbs down into the water, shrieking with laughter, teasing.

Her boyfriend, FILLIPO, stands at the rail watching. Then he pulls up the ladder. The woman reaches for the hull, can't grip, reaches again, her head dropping lower.

Nikki, treading water and watching, shouts at the man. He gestures for her to fuck off.

The woman is clearly tiring, the laughter dying. Coughing. Spitting seawater.

Nikki calls Valerio's name.

The orange buoy arcs through the air. Nikki swims with the buoy towards the woman. Then, as she gets close, the woman dips beneath the waves.

Swimming past, Nikki comes from behind, threads her arms under, kicks them both to the surface, talks her down until the white fingers find the foam. The boyfriend starts his engine. Nikki treads water and shouts Neapolitan curses at him as he drives away.

Later, on Calypso.

CARMELA — tall, stunning, tanned, climbs dripping aboard, and flings herself into Valerio's arms, crediting him with her rescue. Behind her, Nikki, stern faced, full of adrenaline and outrage, tells her she needs to press charges. What Fillipo did was abuse. She could have died. Carmela protests, *Really, you don't know him. And, frankly, it's a little insulting for you to imply...I'm sorry, but it is. I just have to say it!*

Nikki and Valerio work together getting the boat underway. Carmela, wrapped in a damp towel, is already reassembling herself around her own beauty, refusing to acknowledge the

danger she was in. She flirts with Valerio, and pivots the conversation with the instincts of someone who has always used the available tools, asking about the boat – they’ve worked together for three years to rebuild and restore it. Its care is the center of their relationship.

CARMELA *Are you two fucking?*

NIKKI *No!*

CARMELA (laughing) *I wouldn’t judge you!*

NIKKI *Not every relationship with a man needs to be complicated by sex.*

CARMELA *Sex is the basis of everything - simply the nature of the animal. You can either use it, or be used by it. Once you realize and accept that fact, the world is so much clearer.*

NIKKI *I prefer to define my relationships. I want friendship — a relationship of equals.*

CARMELA *Men will always choose passion over friendship. You need to fuck him to find out what the relationship can be.*

Valerio — enjoying this conversation slightly more than he should — catches Nikki's eye. She invokes his girlfriend in Paris, and Carmela suggests a ménage à trois.

NIKKI *I'm not going to fuck Valerio. No offense, Valerio.*

VALERIO (grinning) *None taken.*

Then Calypso's keel strikes something. The steering goes wrong. Nikki cuts the throttle, goes down the ladder — and finds a body turning slowly in the current beneath the boat.

She surfaces. Looks up at Valerio.

NIKKI *There's a body in the water.*

What follows is a study of Nikki under pressure. Competent. Efficient.

She and Valerio work together rapidly, Nikki directing Carmela to get a rope from the cabin.

NIKKI goes back into the water — for the second time that day, in the rescue position, arms around a victim — and secures the corpse to Calypso with a rope before the currents can take him. He is fully dressed. No shoes. White tube socks. A dark ligature mark encircling his neck, the capillaries burst. She notes the currents, the coordinates, the competing tidal patterns that broaden the search area. She knows this sea.

She knows him from somewhere. She can't place it.

Later, on Calypso, the sky purple, city lights glimmering across the dark water.

Nikki calls her boss — she won't make it to work tonight. She'll need to swap with another shift. *Tomorrow morning is fine.*

The Guardia Costiera arrives. Then SONIA — a tall athletic Senegalese woman in her forties, thoughtful and precise — with her partner FABRIZIO, warm and bombastic, four children, the kind of man who fills a room with noise and misses nothing. Sonia surveys the scene, asks sharp questions, gives Nikki her card.

SONIA *If something occurs to you, call me.*

Back at the dock.

Calypso is berthed, the moon rising. Nikki and Valerio hose the boat down in silence, putting her to bed.

In the parking lot — CARMELA, pressed against a shiny black Maserati, kissing FILLIPO.

VALERIO *(quietly) That was fast. Not pressing charges, then.*

NIKKI *She knew he'd be waiting for her.*

Valerio's phone rings. His ex-wife. She needs him to take the kids tonight — Gemma and Davide, overnight bags, the bachelor pad suddenly a family home. He looks at Nikki.

VALERIO *I have to go.*

NIKKI *Don't do anything stupid.*

VALERIO *Don't you do anything stupid.*

They ride in opposite directions into the city.

Later that night, at Incendio

The pulsing nightclub is sensual and inviting with sleek lines and pulsing music. Traditional stone and plaster and velvet drapes transformed seamlessly into modern structures of stainless steel and polished glass. Attractive men and women seething behind the velvet cord.

Nikki pulls up to the curb, and takes off her helmet. Nikki's handsome boyfriend and the club owner, ENZO DI PAVOLA jogs out to greet her with a warm, lingering kiss. In his thirties, Enzo is rare blend of old world and new: an ancient sculpture of Adonis come to life in an edgy suit.

ENZO *You coming in?*

NIKKI *Not tonight. I have work in the morning.*

ENZO *(another kiss) Shall I come by later?*

NIKKI *Please.*

Meanwhile, a basement room at TITO CALANDRA's PALAZZO near Capella San Severo.

The purpose of this room is evident in the walls, the floor, the iron rings set into the stone at intervals. A well-established cell.

The MAN IN THE CHAIR is in his fifties — a middleman. Disheveled, bruised, shallow fast breathing because breathing hurts. He's been here for days, worked over efficiently — as needed.

TITO CALANDRA — late thirties, imposing, a boxer's frame in a tailored shirt, dark eyes that see and understand the darkness of the world. Moving with the unhurried confidence of a man who's already calculated every outcome. He is the most sophisticated and ruthless organized crime figure in southern Italy. He's also the boy who came to BEATRICE SERAFINO's kitchen table hungry for warmth and care. There is no evidence of that vulnerability now. He sits across from THE MAN IN THE CHAIR, leaning forward. Unrushed. Almost gentle.

At the door, Tito's right-hand man, BENEDETTO DE ROSA — understated sophistication. compact, a neatly trimmed beard and an arched nose, crooked mouth. A man who lives by his own exacting logic, merciless when the situation demands. Profoundly loyal to Tito.

TITO *My men tell me you're ready to talk.*

MAN *Yes. Yes. Whatever you want.*

TITO *What I want is the truth. Can you give it to me?*

MAN *Yes. Yes. Please.*

TITO *Do you know why you're here?*

MAN *Please...please...I'm nobody.*

TITO *That isn't the truth, is it?*

MAN *I swear, it's the truth.*

TITO *If you're nobody, then I have the wrong man. And if you are the wrong man, then I've treated you unfairly. Do you think I've treated you unfairly?*

MAN *No. No. Please...I have a family.*

TITO *I'll begin with what I know. You are Stefano Pinto. You are a driver of refrigerated trucks — in and out of Naples. In and out...up to Caserta...and Rome. And further North. Am I correct?*

MAN *Yes...but I swear I don't know what's in the trucks. I swear.*

TITO *Even when you stop in Caserta? When the cargo is moved?*

MAN *How did you —*

TITO *It's my business to know. So, I am right in saying that Stefano Pinto is not a nobody. And I am also right in saying that Stefano Pinto knows when the next shipment will arrive. I'm going to ask this once. Which ship? What time?*

The man in the chair calculates. Finds only one viable answer.

He gives the information

Tito's suspicion confirmed, but his face gives nothing away. Tito trained his face in childhood against a violent father, and the discipline is absolute.

TITO *(to De Rosa, quietly) Take care of it.*

Then he turns and walks out.

The basement corridor.

Stone walls. A low ceiling. The smell of damp. Bare bulbs at intervals, casting yellow pools on the floor. Two of Tito's men straighten as he passes. He doesn't acknowledge them.

A staircase. Stone steps worn smooth by centuries of use.

The ground floor.

A guard at a thick metal door nods. Tito passes through into the main building.

Sound strikes before the light — voices, music. Through the open door of the main salon of the fifteenth-century palazzo: well-dressed men and beautiful women, relaxed, unhurried. Heads turn as he enters. The room adjusts to his presence like a compass needle finding north.

He moves through it without stopping. Outside, into the ivy-covered courtyard, manicured garden, soft yellow lights, night sky above the open space. A jasmine smell. The sounds of the party muted. Tito stands alone for a moment, his men waiting at a distance.

He rolls his neck. Breathes.

Tito is tired: the weariness of a man who has carried something enormous, alone, for a very long time.

He rolls down and buttons the sleeves of his shirt.

His face is composed. The mask is back on.

He gestures to his men and they move out through the gate, into the neighborhood, heading through the evening streets.

Piazza San Domenico Maggiore. Minutes later.

The city wakes at night - when the heat that sears the streets during the day begins to relent, and when the rising shadows give the illusion of lower temperatures. People decant from their homes, staying out of doors until the early hours of the morning. Restaurants and nightclubs pack, spilling out the shopfronts. Parents with prams and toddlers wander the streets and along the waterfront, children playing in the yellow pools of streetlights.

Tito moves across the piazza with three men, unhurried, talking, starting to relax. He is at home here. The neighborhood has known him for thirty years.

Then — across the piazza, outside Massimo's — a figure at the bar. Cropped hair. Tattooed arms. The particular quality of stillness he would recognize anywhere, in any crowd, in any city on earth.

He pauses. Hesitates. Composure subtly altered.

He excuses himself from his men. Crosses the piazza.

Nikki is collecting a package from Carlo when she turns and finds him already there.

A dark figure coming toward her — she tenses before she knows why. She seems to know that posture, the boxer's frame, the angular lines, the surety of his stride. Her body fills in the rest before her mind catches up.

Then he's here, standing before her. Fifteen years older, and dressed in tailored clothes, but those eyes carry that same intense expression she remembers. He's grown into that expression, his body settled around it like cement.

TITO *(quiet)* May I join you?

NIKKI *I'm not staying. I just came to pick something up.*

He takes in the cropped hair, the tattoos, the fifteen years written on her face. She looks back in that way he remembers: measuring, giving nothing away.

NIKKI *I didn't know you still came here.*

TITO *I don't. Not since you came back to Naples.*

Nikki shifts, adjusting to the uncomfortable tightness in her chest. She's avoided Tito for fifteen years. It shouldn't be any surprise he avoided her, too. But a shadow of melancholy passes through her at his words, a half-remembered part of herself she's left behind.

TITO *It's your place. I knew you didn't want to see me.*

NIKKI *Oh.*

CARLO, the bartender, finishing mixing a drink from the bar, catches sight of them.

CARLO *Tito! (looking between them, grinning) My God. Nina and Tito — back together at last!*

NIKKI *We're not together.*

CARLO *Of course, of course. What can I get you?*

TITO *(to Nikki) Will you stay for one glass?*

NIKKI *I have work in the morning.*

He nods. Doesn't push. Waits.

A moment passes between them — weighted, unresolved. Fifteen years of everything neither of them has said.

And then, with the careful ease of a man who believes the difficult part has already been handled:

TITO *Well, I'm glad we'll have Sunday. It will be good to be in the same room again.*

Nikki stares

NIKKI *What do you mean, Sunday?*

TITO *The christening.*

He reads her face. And understands in an instant that Gianni never told her. He'd interpreted her silence as acceptance. He was wrong; his decision to approach her tonight a miscalculation.

He doesn't show her this.

TITO *(steady) Gianni asked me to be Fredo's godfather.*

The air goes out of the room.

Nikki is very still.

NIKKI *(low) Gianni asked you to be godfather to his son?*

TITO *I thought he...I assumed you knew.*

NIKKI *You assumed...*

TITO *Nikki —*

NIKKI *Don't.*

TITO *I think if we can talk, we could come to an understanding.*

Nikki (glaring): *I hear you're quite successful now. The great Tito Calandra. Does it feel good to be so powerful?*

TITO *There are ugly things in the world, Nikki. Unless someone is willing to get down to that level...keep them in order, they destroy everything.*

NIKKI *Is that what you're doing? Keeping order?*

TITO Yes.

NIKKI *Well, that's fucking amazing. Good for you. Just...fucking stay away.*

Nikki leaves.

TITO stands in the piazza and watches her until she rounds the corner and disappears. His men are waiting across the square, patient, saying nothing.

He doesn't move for a long moment. Then he turns and strides through the neighborhood he rules.

Simultaneously, at Valerio's one-bedroom apartment in the narrow streets of Quartieri Spagnoli.

Valerio's apartment — a bachelor pad, shabby secondhand furniture, posters on the wall masquerading as art, stacks of books and newspapers, wires looping out of boxes—entrails of dead electronics that he hasn't gotten around to burying. Dust on everything.

He's transforming the place to accommodate his kids. Changing the sheets on his bed. Setting up a camp cot in the living room.

The kids arrive: DAVIDE, 13, and GEMMA, 15. Takeaway at the kitchen table, too loud, too warm. Valerio watching his children when they're not looking.

Nikki's flat. Later that night.

The building is an annexed eighteenth-century palazzo in the old neighborhood — a wide entrance off an alleyway leading to a shaded courtyard of cement and stone, an eerie neo-gothic chapel in one corner, deteriorated by weather and neglect. Up a flight of steep stairs,

Nikki's apartment is a hodgepodge of rooms carved from the original edifice in the 1950s: high ceilings of plaster and exposed timbers, eclectic furniture spanning decades, upholstery in muddy greens and oranges. A heavy wooden bookcase dominates the living room, packed two deep with more books than the shelving was designed to manage. On the bottom right shelf, a gun safe. The walls hold maps, a framed Freddie Mercury poster, and a series of weapons — a crossbow, and battle axe. Further back: a personal gym, a punching bag, a stack of weights.

It was her mother's place. BEATRICE SERAFINO bought it in 1971 — an American woman, a former US Navy sailor, putting down roots in a city that wasn't hers by birth. Nikki doesn't know everything her mother was. She can't guess that these walls hold secrets she can't possibly imagine.

ENZO arrives, fills the small space with his energy. They fall into bed. Afterwards he stares at the ceiling, sweating in the August heat.

ENZO: *It's fucking hot in here.*

NIKKI: *I told you. The air conditioning's broken.*

ENZO: *You could just move in with me. The offer still stands.*

NIKKI: *I'm fine.*

ENZO: *It isn't safe here. I don't like to think of my girlfriend living down here. Alone. If I have you close, I can take care of you.*

NIKKI: *I don't want to leave. This place — it was my mamma's.*

He doesn't push. He doesn't yet understand that this flat with its broken air conditioning and its battle axe and its books stacked two deep isn't a problem to be solved. It's a thread connecting Nikki to something she hasn't finished yet.

She lies in the dark, not sleeping. The body in the water. Tito's face. The graveyard she thought she'd left behind, open again.

The next morning.

Nikki on her hornet — across the city and to the US Military base, Capodichino. Greetings to the gate guard.

In the offices of Phoenix Seven. The cold hits immediately — Americans keep their spaces at refrigerator temperatures, even in August.

In the corridor, MARIO emerges from the bathroom — fifties, a big man, heavy jowls, vertical lines slashing the edges of his mouth like a ventriloquist dummy, decades of densely packed muscle now going soft. He falls into step beside her, heading toward the office. Doesn't look at her.

NIKKI *Thanks for covering the night shift...I'm sure Angelo—*

MARIO (loudly) *When someone can't handle the stress of this job, it means more work for everyone else.*

She doesn't respond. They walk.

Then — a stumble. His hand shoots out, grabs her arm, fingers digging in, pulling her into him. Hard. Not a stumble.

She reacts before she thinks — his wrist locked, twisted, his body turned, his back to the wall and her forearm across his chest before either of them has taken another step. Close enough to smell the garlic and cologne and something gamier underneath.

A beat.

Then Mario laughs. Low, delighted. As if she's confirmed something he suspected. For him, this is the beginning of something, not the end of it.

She releases him. Steps back. Her face gives nothing.

They walk into the office.

JACOPO steps forward immediately, hands Nikki the duty phone, handing over from the night shift. He's done this before — inserted himself into the ugly space between them. *Pasquale's called — he's going to be late.*

Mario packs his bag with deliberate slowness. He turns — a long, flat appraisal of Nikki, head to foot.

MARIO *Some people aren't built for this job.*

He leaves.

Jacopo exhales.

Nikki sits. Works.

Then, fingers and toes numb, she stands — jumping jacks, squats, push-ups, hoodie pulled tight. Fast, slightly too hard.

The duty phone rings. Vehicle incident in Varcaturò.

She takes the keys to the duty vehicle and heads north.

Simultaneously, at Valerio's apartment

Breakfast — chaotic, warm. Gemma picking at her food. Davide eating everything.

Their mother, GIORGIA, arrives at the door, divorce visible. She tells Valerio she needs more money for the kids. *Davide's grown three shoe sizes in the past six months, and Gemma needs new clothes before school starts.*

The kids file out. The apartment goes quiet.

Valerio heads outside. Stops at his regular café.

NINO CAPELLI is already there — puffed and reddened, hulking, a delicate ceramic cup gripped in beefy hands. Beside him, a woman with a childlike physique and glazed eyes, a thick layer of makeup doing nothing to mask the desperation in them.

CAPELLI (*bellowing*) *Capo Alfieri! So nice to see you.*

VALERIO *What are you doing out of jail, Capelli?*

CAPELLI (*grey teeth, grinning*) *Can't keep a man who has an alibi. Wanted to tell you myself.*

Valerio looks at the woman. Offers his hand.

VALERIO *You need help? Come with me now.*

She hesitates. Shakes her head. Capelli laughs.

As Valerio leaves, Capelli calls after him.

CAPELLI *Good luck catching flies, Alfieri.*

Valerio calls his partner Maurizio, asks why Capelli's been released. He was alibied by his cousin, nothing they can do. Valerio wants Capelli back inside. He's going to get more evidence.

He rides across the city to FEDERICO'S salumeria in Quartieri Forcella. Federico outside, accepting a delivery, bald pate shining in the heat.

FEDERICO ERRICHILLO, a preternaturally tall, birdlike old man, wearing thick-soled white sneakers with Velcro straps, and black-rimmed glasses perched on wide ears. Large, bony hands.

The conversation is careful, oblique. Federico — a recovering addict and brother of Camorra Boss LUCA ERRICHIELLO, has extracted himself from that dark world a decade ago, wants nothing more than to be left alone. He listens as Valerio asks about Capelli, about Luca, about what people are saying.

VALERIO *What have you heard about Nino Capelli? I know that he does work for your brother, Luca, sometimes —*

FEDERICO *Fuck my brother. And fuck Capelli. Why do you come to me for this? I don't want trouble. Just...leave me out of it."*

VALERIO *You know what Luca is...what he does — that he's trafficking women and girls. Knowing it makes you a part of it.*

FEDERICO *The world is run by wolves. It's their system, their rules. We can't change it. The best I can do is keep my head down. Take my advice. Protect yourself. Protect your family. Stay far away from them.*

Valerio's phone rings. Sonia. *Come to the morgue.*

Varcaturo

A garbage fire blocks the main road — black smoke visible from kilometers away. Nikki diverts, parks, jogs to the scene. Multi-car pileup. The bewildered McAllister family in their blue Ford minivan — COMMANDER McALLISTER, his wife JUDY, two teenagers on their phones. Recently arrived in Naples. Defensive with fear.

Nikki translates. Mediates. Reassures. She is very good at this — gripping the jagged seam between two systems that share a geography and almost nothing else.

MCALLISTER *What's the best way to get to Support Site from here?*

NIKKI *Follow me.*

She leads the blue Ford through the labyrinthine back streets of Varcaturo — slowly, carefully, watching the mirrors.

Then — a red Jeep at the side of the road. Passenger door open. Driver's side window shattered. A man slumped in the front seat.

Nikki stops. Gets out. Reaches through the shattered window.

No pulse. Blood on his face and chest. A bullet hole in the windshield.

She sends the McAllisters on to the base.

Staring at the vehicle and the dead man.

A FLASH — a dark street, a gunshot. A body collapsing.

Stands alone on the rural road in the merciless midday heat. Something has switched off inside her — some system designed to protect her from exactly this. She cannot reconstruct how she got from the car to the body.

She calls.

VALERIO *(in the Naples city center, striding towards his motorbike) Ciao Nikki. Can I call you back? I'm in the middle of something.*

NIKKI *I have a situation. There's a man in a car. He's been shot. He's dead.*

Valerio pauses, asks if she's joking, and learns her location, says he'll get someone to the scene.

Nikki calls dispatch, reports the incident. Then she does what she always does: she investigates.

The Jeep's interior — messy, rifled. On the back seat, a US Navy lieutenant's cover. Nikki calls dispatch again, says, *He was American. Get NCIS.*

Tire marks in the dirt shoulder showing he pulled over deliberately.

NIKKI (*softly, to herself*) *Why did you pull over?*

Fresh motorcycle tread marks 100 meters away.

She photographs everything.

The Carabinieri arrive, taking over the scene, ordering her around.

NIKKI *I need to stay. Our victim is American. I've contacted NCIS. They're on their way.*

CARABINIERI OFFICER *How do you know he's American?*

NIKKI *Military uniform in the back seat.*

Simultaneously, the entrance of Ospedale Cardarelli

Valerio arrives, parks his bike, meets Sonia waiting for him in the lobby, like a rigid sentinel at the door.

SONIA (*starting to walk*) *You took a long time.*

VALERIO (*walking along Sonia*) *Not too long. What happened? Why did you need me here?*

SONIA *I had a suspicion about this body you found. It seems I was right.*

Simultaneously, The crime scene in Varcaturò

Nikki back in her vehicle, ready to move it

Carabinieri beginning to process the scene, blocking the narrow road.

Then DURANT COLE — NCIS Special Agent, forties, face like a renaissance monk.

American, cultured, speaking Italian, tall, lean, with a neatly trimmed beard and salt-and-pepper hair. Cotton shirt with a floral print, and grey slacks. Arriving in a white volvo with the confidence of a man who has routinely seen worse. He takes in the scene. Takes in Nikki.

Introductions, and Nikki briefs him.

DURANT *You discovered the body?*

Nikki describes what she's found, and her hypothesis: There were at least three shots fired — and from two different angles. Forensics will tell us whether they're from the same weapon. One shot was fired through the windshield — this entered through his cheekbone. Then there are two shots from the passenger's side of the car — one bullet entered the chest — with no exit wound. The second bullet shattered the glass in the driver's side window.

DURANT *(with a slight smile) Keen observation. What did you say your job was?*

Simultaneously, at the Morgue at Ospedale Cardarelli

The drowned man from Calypso is on the table — male, mid-to-late forties, badly decomposed. Sonia describes the pathologist's findings: cause of death: strangulation. No water in his lungs. He was dead before he entered the sea. Sonia asks Valerio if he's ever had yassa — a Senegalese chicken dish. He shakes his head, puzzled.

She takes his hand. Places it on the dead man's chest.

SONIA *Feel it. The texture.*

He feels it. Looks at her.

SONIA *The pathologist confirmed it. After this man was strangled — he was boiled.*

Outside, Naples blazes and hums, incandescent with heat.

END OF PILOT

CHARACTER ARCS

NIKKI SERAFINO'S ARC

NIKKI SERAFINO has learned, at tremendous personal cost, that the systems meant to protect will fail you. Her brother Adriano was murdered — a bullet meant for Tito, her childhood sweetheart. Afterwards, Tito went on to embrace the underworld, while the institutions around Nikki — military, police, family — proved impotent or complicit. Nikki's response was to build a life on structure, discipline, and the absolute refusal of vulnerability: *If I stay sharp enough, self-contained enough, and in control of every variable, I can survive this world. I can prevent the people I love from being hurt again.*

Season One is the relentless destruction of that belief.

ACT I: Nikki's Theory of Control

We meet Nikki at what looks like equilibrium. At 36-years-old, she has rebuilt herself physically — cropped hair, tattooed arms, a fighter's body, skills, and instincts. She has also rebuilt *Calypso* from the hull up — chosen, painstakingly reconstructed as a shared project with Valerio, seaworthy.

Nikki's friendship with Valerio is warm but kept at a friendly distance rather than allowing him to become a true ally.

At Phoenix Seven, she is competent and isolated. Her colleagues and supervisor daily test her ability to absorb and not retaliate.

With her boyfriend Enzo, Nikki has projected a version of equality that he has never claimed and does not feel. She believes he sees her strength and respects her autonomy. He believes she needs protecting and is waiting for her to understand this. They are not having the same relationship.

And, forever in the shadows, there is Tito— who has known her since she was a child, who knows her as well as she knows herself — and whom she has painstakingly extracted from her life, but never completely from her soul.

The body in the water ends this careful balance. It represents what Nikki cannot control: the rot beneath the surface of the beautiful life she has built, and the currents that will drag her into it.

Then Nikki meets Durant Cole — who arrives in the pilot as the first person in years to look at Nikki and see precisely what she is. *You're underutilized.* He calls her Sherlock. He asks for her opinion on the case and then actually listens to the answer. He is damaged and brilliant and genuinely good.

Nikki is secretly hungry for this relationship. It offers professional validation — which she associates with safety. And it fills a space that has been empty since Adriano. But this is a poison pill. Unbeknownst to Nikki, Durant is already damned before they meet.

Act II: The Cracks

The christening in Benevento. The whole family. Tito at the same table, across fifteen years of careful distance, suddenly undeniable. Enzo discovering that Tito is more to Nikki than she can admit, and the source of her greatest rage and pain. Gianni managing everything and failing to manage anything.

The investigation deepens. The truth about Markham gradually emerges: before he was a victim, he was a monster: a predator protected by the institution. Violent pornography on his laptop. His ex-wife's testimony. Sylvie Morris, reaching out from an earlier deployment,

violated and disbelieved, suffering years of silence and shame. Yet he was promoted with glowing fitness reports, and passed on to the next ship and the next set of victims.

Nikki and Durant work this together. The partnership deepens with every episode. There are morning coffees, interviews, evenings going over evidence, shared values, and genuine intellectual respect. Nikki blossoms with this relationship. In Phoenix Seven, her capability has always been a liability, but Durant respects it.

Meanwhile, the pressure in Nikki's other relationships intensifies. Enzo begins to show his dark side. Small things at first — tantrums, attempts to pull her toward a version of their relationship she hasn't agreed to, and a subtle pressure to be smaller, more available, more inside the world he understands.

Carmela reappears. This time at Incendio. She is the uncomfortable reflection Nikki refuses to look at directly. Both women have made adjustments to live within this broken system — but Nikki has resisted and redefined her life, while Carmela has adapted by embracing its rules. The last time Nikki saw her, she was drowning and Nikki was driven to rescue her. Nikki intervenes a second time when she finds Carmela being beaten by Fillipo — and is injured for her trouble.

And Tito. Always at the edges.

The Midpoint

The case appears, briefly, to resolve. A man is arrested for the murders. But this is a false ending — a breath before the floor falls away.

Enzo takes Nikki to the island on his boat. An echo of Calypso — but out of phase and wrong. This is not her boat, nor her sea. She is here because he has arranged it.

He proposes.

On the surface, this seems a romantic gesture, but Enzo wants Nikki to step back inside the system — under his protection, in his image of what a life together looks like. When she resists, he doesn't hear a no. Intimacy is twisted into control.

Enzo abandons her on the island — and Nikki must find her way back to the mainland, with few resources. And, when the ferry pulls into port, the heat of the city has erupted into riots. The darkness that has always been underneath the beauty finally visible on the surface. Nikki moves through it in the silk dress Enzo bought, the small concession to vulnerability that has cost her everything she feared vulnerability would cost.

The city streets are filled with smoke and fireworks, people protesting recent police actions, and roving gangs of teenagers. When Nikki makes it home through this gauntlet, she doesn't find safety — instead, an intruder is in her home — someone Enzo hired to frighten her back into his arms.

Nikki's theory of control, and her most careful, most rational attempt to forge intimacy safely has failed. The man she believed saw her as an equal has demonstrated that he does not see her at all.

Act III: The Collapse

Unsafe in her home, Nikki turns to Durant. And in turning to him, in allowing herself to need someone, she begins to face what she has been protecting herself from since Adriano died. The grief. The guilt. The unbearable helplessness of loving people in a world that is not safe. And Nikki remembers that night — and the death of her brother.

Durant is able to receive this with genuine empathy because he has carried the same weight, in different proportions, for decades.

He takes her in. Fresh towels on the guest bed. Botticelli on the walls. A man who has made beauty out of survival, who has been doing it longer than she has, who knows exactly how much it costs.

Returning to work, Nikki is fired from Phoenix Seven. Despite everything — the competence, the training, the discipline, the years of embedded history. The institution ejects her, as institutions eject the people who are inconvenient to them. Her investment in the system has returned nothing.

Calypso is vandalized. The boat Nikki chose, rebuilt, painstakingly — damaged. The physical embodiment of her theory of control, broken.

She retreats into the cabin one last time. Lies in the dark. Tries to rest in the safety of the old beliefs, but they no longer hold.

Then the other symbols of order are shattered.

Admiral Redford — the highest-ranking US military officer in Italy, the man at the apex of the institution Nikki has spent her career navigating — is kidnapped.

Nikki returns to her home to find her brother Gianni savagely beaten. His family threatened. He appears on Nikki's doorstep looking at her with the eyes of a cornered animal.

Please. I need you to save my family.

She can't do it alone.

This is what she has spent fifteen years refusing to know.

She goes to Enzo first — and sees, in his face, that the relationship she believed she had does not exist. Perhaps it was there once, but it has long since vanished.

Desperate, the lives of her family in the balance, she goes to Tito.

This is an act of terrible surrender — to the very system she has spent her adult life fighting to stay outside. She goes to the man she has refused to acknowledge for fifteen years, in the palazzo near the Cappella Sansevero, where the veiled Christ rests in marble, and asks him for help.

To her shock, Tito gives it. Without conditions. Without cruelty. Without using her need against her.

This is who Tito is. This has always been who Tito is. The sin-eater, taking on what Nikki cannot bear, protecting her in ways she has refused to see or acknowledge.

She isn't ready to understand this yet.

Then he gives her the gift she didn't know she needed.

A few days before she died, Beatrice and I talked about you. She didn't blame you for what happened.

At his words, an ache opens up inside, so deep she could drown in it.

The Climax

The arc reaches its reckoning at the grotto of the Sibyl at Lago d'Averno where Nikki finds Admiral Redford trussed in a cave. The idol with clay feet. And Nikki discovers that Durant Cole, the ally she trusted, is actually the vigilante killer she has been hunting. This realization is an existential shattering.

Durant has redirected the investigation to protect himself. Nikki learns the full, devastating logic of why he killed Markham: because Markham raped and tormented him on his first deployment, a poor kid from a small town deep in the closet and so ashamed, and then continued to rape and torment others for decades while the institution promoted him and gave him glowing fitness reports and sent him on to the next ship. Durant tried to report it. But Redford shut him down — not from malice, but through the particular cowardice of a man who mistook a young sailor's desperation for a coming-out conversation and decided, kindly, that he didn't want to hear it.

By the time Nikki met Durant, he was already past the point of return. She had no chance of saving him. Just as she had no chance of saving Adriano.

The gun. The flare-lit room. Durant's face.

You don't understand what I am.

She understands his logic. The system failed him catastrophically and repeatedly. The institution protected the monster, Markham. And Durant's response — to take justice into his own hands, to enact the control the system refused to exercise — comes from everything the world taught him.

Like Nikki, Durant believed that he could escape from the pain of his past by constructing a life of order and discipline. But these could not protect him, and he has glimpsed the truth too late.

Nikki empathizes with Durant. Despite his deception, the kinship and affection they have built is authentic. Perhaps Nikki also sees that the decisions he made are not so far removed from the ones she might make if she stayed on this path.

But she cannot permit Durant to kill the admiral.

Her theory of control may have failed, but her ethics have not. She still believes she can remain ethical in an evil world. Nikki holds the line.

Ultimately, Nikki's discipline and training fail to save those she loves: just as she held Adriano in his last moments, Durant dies in her arms.

Nikki's theory of control — the belief that if she stayed sharp enough, self-contained enough, and in control of every variable, she could prevent catastrophe — has failed in the most specific and devastating way possible. She couldn't save Adriano. She cannot save Durant. Her strength and her discipline and her training are not sufficient. They never were.

The Closing Image

Nikki ends the season with a painful reckoning. She is stripped of her armor and her old beliefs are in ruins.

However, the final image — Nikki and Valerio at sea again - offers a way out from her previous isolation: interdependence. By finally stopping her refusal of this connection, Nikki accepts that trust and vulnerability do not necessarily equal death, providing a sliver of hope as she begins to rebuild her life.

That is where Season Two begins.

TITO CALANDRA — THE SIN EATER

TITO CALANDRA is the most sophisticated and ruthless organized crime figure in southern Italy. He is the son of a brutal psychopath now serving time in Poggioreale for a particularly vicious murder. He's also the boy who came to BEATRICE SERAFINO's kitchen table hungry for warmth and care.

A natural leader, Tito spent his early years marshalling a group of local kids — including the then-9-year-old Nikki Serafino. Under Tito's leadership, the group went on to become intelligence experts, floating through the city and observing, building a network of information and influence that would later become the foundation of his empire.

At the age of 15, Tito and Nikki became intimate. Two sides of the same coin, Nikki called Tito caro — dear — and he called her Mio Piccolo Mostro. My little monster.

This intimate relationship was cut short when Nikki's brother, Adriano, was shot and killed; a bullet that seemed intended for Tito. He has accepted Nikki's accusation, has become a sin-eater, but only he knows the truth of what happened that night.

His enterprise, guided by street-sense, an instinct for power, and an understanding of alliances and systems, built an empire. First in Italy. Then Europe. Then Africa and the Middle East. He is powerful, and surrounded by men and women deeply loyal to him. Even his second-in-command, Benedetto De Rosa — a clever, ruthless logician who trusts no one — trusts Tito completely.

Tito believes that the only way to stay safe — and to protect those he loves from a world run by wolves — is to become the most powerful wolf. When Nikki encounters Tito in the piazza outside Massimo's, he tells her: There are ugly things in the world. Unless someone is willing to get down to that level, to keep them in order, they destroy everything. She dismisses it as self-justification. As the season develops, she begins to understand that while she and NCIS are investigating the networks that run beneath Naples, Tito is at the

center of those same networks — not merely profiting from them, but controlling them with a purpose she cannot yet see.

Tito carries a burden he has not told anyone. We will catch glimpses of it, but not understand it yet. We will know only that he is hunting.

In Season One, his focus is a criminal network responsible for arms shipments — run by a ruthless operator in Eastern Europe known only as the Ghost. Over the course of the season, Tito identifies the shipments, disrupts the communications pathways, finds the nodes — and in the finale executes a sophisticated multi-country simultaneous operation, intercepting the shipments and capturing or killing every member of the network.

When the boxes are opened, they contain US military munitions.

This is the man operating behind the neighborhood, behind the palazzo, behind the oblique generosity Nikki will encounter when her world falls apart. She will see only a fraction of it. What she sees, she will misread.

In the foreground, Tito moves at the edges of Nikki's life with the patience of a man who has accepted that he cannot rush what he wants most. When her world collapses — her job stripped, her flat vandalized, Gianni in debt to the wrong people — she comes to him. Asks for a loan. Fifty thousand euros to keep Gianni alive. He grants it instantly. He already knows about her suspension, the attack on her home, all of it. He tells her something else: the man who attacked her, Raffaele Barile, was not his. He was sent by Enzo.

Tito then does what Tito does. He speaks to Enzo's father, Vincente Di Pavola. The matter is settled — sixty thousand euros in compensation, which closes Nikki's debt to him, and frees her.

His final message, delivered through Benedetto: *he would prefer you not sell the flat.*

There seem to be no conditions. But Nikki's distrust of and hatred for the man responsible for her brother's death cannot see the reason for his generosity.

Perhaps he is the monster she believes. Or maybe he is also a man who has loved the same woman since he was fifteen years old, expressing that love in the only register she can accept — oblique, deniable, and without expectation.

This dynamic is the moral spine of the series. Nikki holds her ethics and pays for it alone. Tito adjusted his to fit the world. The question the series keeps asking is whether it is better to survive as a wolf or die trying to keep your soul. Tito is one answer. Nikki is another. The tension between these two ethical worldviews drives the series.

VALERIO ALFIERI — THE SAFE HARBOR

VALERIO ALFIERI is the most open man Nikki Serafino has ever met. Twenty years in the *Falchi* — the falcon squad, specialist motorbike unit, the men who move through Naples' narrow streets where squad cars can't follow — and he has somehow remained uncynical. He knows exactly what the system is. Where the rot sits. Which cases will be managed upward and which evidence will quietly disappear. He has spent two decades learning to navigate all of it without becoming part of it. That navigation is a form of hard-won discipline, rare - and invisible to everyone who hasn't tried it.

His relationship with Nikki is its own argument against the city's logic. A platonic partnership, self-initiated, actively maintained, built around two years of stripped-back weekends and scraped knuckles restoring a forty-five year old sailboat from the hull up. In Naples, this is culturally unusual. Neither of them has ever felt the need to explain it.

Season One tests everything Valerio has built.

His pursuit of NINO CAPELLI — a man of vicious impulsivity, a hijacking gone wrong, a driver knifed in a fit of irritation — runs into every wall the system can construct. The alibi holds. The evidence disappears. Capelli walks out of custody and finds Valerio at his regular café, grey teeth grinning, delighted to deliver the news in person. Valerio offers his hand to the woman beside him — glazed eyes, thick makeup doing nothing to conceal the desperation underneath — and she shakes her head.

Valerio keeps going. It is what he does. He tracks down predators and cages them. He cannot buy his children a luxurious, safe world, but he can do this.

And then Gemma disappears.

Valerio is a man of action, and he doesn't stop to calculate the cost. He knows what happens to missing girls — and he knows that he doesn't have much time. So he sells his soul to the devil - through Federico to LUCA ERRICHELLO. Until now, Valerio has kept his hands clean — or as clean as is possible in this place. Now, he crosses into enemy territory without breaking stride. He will pay a high price for this decision.

Gemma is found in time. Maurizio's police work gets there first.

In the final act, something tells him Nikki is in danger. Not a phone call, not evidence — instinct, the particular frequency of twenty years of knowing her. He arrives at the grotto of the Sibyl at Lago d'Averno and fires twice. He saves her life.

He doesn't call it heroism. *We do what we do. You can't keep a tally.*

The season ends where it began — on Calypso, on the water, the city blazing behind them. Valerio is still the most open man Nikki has ever met. Still uncynical. Still the person who just shows up — without conditions, without ownership, without asking anything in return.

Valerio's friendship is an important realization for Nikki. Enzo offered protection as Possession; Durant offered protection as Vigilantism; Tito offers protection as Power. Valerio offers Interdependence.

The price of Valerio's choices will be paid in full across Season Two. He enters it as a chastened man — present, accountable, equal — with a crack in his carefully maintained integrity. Small. Invisible to everyone but him.

And to Luca.

DURANT COLE — THE DARK MIRROR

DURANT COLE arrives at a crime scene in Varcaturò.

He is the first person in years to see Nikki clearly — to treat her as a peer, to tell her she is underutilized, to fill the space her brother Adriano once occupied. She trusts him almost immediately. They bond over Italian culture, over Dante, over a shared contempt for institutional failure.

Durant joined the Navy to read Dante in the hills of Naples. This is what he tells Nikki, and it is true — as far as it goes. What he doesn't tell her is that Dante is not an interest. It is a framework for a world he has already decided he inhabits. The damned souls who chose their damnation and must be made to own it.

Decades earlier, as a young petty officer named Anthony Sparks aboard the USS Ingraham, Durant was repeatedly raped and tormented by his commanding officer, Lieutenant Seth Markham. He tried to report it, but his commanding officer, Keith Redford, chose not to hear it — willful blindness, the *Don't Ask Don't Tell* era. Durant was left with two things: the wound, and the knowledge that the system would not save him. So, he saved himself. He built a life, joined NCIS, and became the man who hunted corruption from the inside, and presented himself as living evidence that the system could be redeemed from within.

Then Seth Markham appeared in Naples — as a captain now, set for promotion to Admiral. And still destroying people — Sylvie Morris, others before her, others to come. And Durant understood that his decades of discipline had purchased nothing. The destruction continued, and he had not stopped it.

He had read Dante carefully enough to know what this meant. If the institution would not send the wolves to hell, someone had to. He killed Markham. He killed Lieutenant Soros, who recognized him at a bar. He killed Salvatore Mollo, because Nikki had inadvertently made him a witness. Each killing was cold, exact, completely logical. And then he

befriended Nikki, monitored her investigation, redirected it when it got too close, and told himself he was protecting her.

Durant is Nikki's dark mirror. He has built the same wall Nikki built — discipline, control, vigilance, the carefully constructed life. Durant sees in Nikki a kindred soul. Someone else trying to keep chaos at bay. He respects her discipline. He envies her ethical center. And he has already decided, somewhere beneath the sophistication and the Dante quotations, that he is damned — that the grotto of the Sibyl at Lago d'Averno is where his arc was always going to end.

In his final act, Cole kidnaps Admiral Keith Redford and takes him to the Grotto of the Sybil at Lago D'Averno, the mythological entrance to the underworld. He no longer sees himself as a law enforcement officer but as a damned soul. He justifies his actions as a necessary purging of evil.

His arc concludes when he forces a final confrontation with Nikki. Despite his affection for her, he chooses to maintain his certainty in his own damnation. He is ultimately shot and killed by Valerio Alfieri during a struggle with Nikki, dying with his eyes open in the darkness of the cave. His death completes the thematic loop of a man who traveled to Naples to find Dante's hell and ultimately found himself a permanent resident of it.

In Durant, Nikki sees what she will become if she plays her theory of control to its natural conclusion — isolated, certain, and lost. She stops him. The cost of that refusal is what she carries into everything that follows.