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ANGELS *of the* RESISTANCE

A NOVEL



USA TODAY Bestselling Author of *THE FLIGHT GIRLS*

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Praise for *Angels of the Resistance*

“*Angels of the Resistance* brings to life a deadly-effective and deeply moving sisterhood in Lien and Elif Vinke, based on real-life sister operatives of the WWII Dutch resistance.... Salazar shines a light on the grit and tragedy behind resistance work, never forgetting the humanity in her beautifully drawn heroines!”

—Kate Quinn, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Rose Code*

“A dazzling tour-de-force of historical fiction. You’ll cheer and root for Lien and Elif as they face a tangled web of love, danger and heartbreak while fighting to save all they hold dear.”

—Karen Robards, bestselling author of *The Black Swan of Paris*

“Combining meticulous research with riveting prose, Salazar crafts a story of family, romance and heroism that will keep readers riveted until the final page and beyond.”

—Pam Jenoff, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Woman with the Blue Star*

“*Angels of the Resistance* is riveting historical fiction at its finest. Teen sisters risk all to join the Dutch Resistance, which Noelle Salazar writes in vivid detail as she highlights not only incredible historical details but also the very real dangers faced by these brave women.”

—Madeline Martin, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Last Bookshop in London*

“Noelle Salazar delivers another knock-out WWII novel with *Angels of the Resistance*. Her writing shines in this intimate and beautiful look at one family of Dutch women and the lengths they will go to protect their own. Haunting, moving and unputdownable!”

—Sara Ackerman, *USA TODAY* bestselling author of *Radar Girls*

Praise for *The Flight Girls*

“This World War II drama highlights the role of women pilots and the sacrifices they made for our country. I read well into the night, unable to stop. The book is unputdownable.”

—Debbie Macomber, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

“Heart-breaking, validating, exciting, entertaining, and swoon-worthy... There are some novels that readers look to as the pinnacle of World War II fiction and storytelling. Noelle Salazar’s *The Flight Girls* is sure to earn its rightful spot on that list in no time.”

—*Hypable*, 2019 Staff Favorite Pick

Also by Noelle Salazar

The Flight Girls

Angels of the Resistance

Noelle Salazar



Noelle Salazar was born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, where she's been a Navy recruit, a medical assistant, an NFL cheerleader, and always a storyteller. When she's not writing, she can be found dodging raindrops and daydreaming of her next book. Noelle lives in Bothell, Washington, with her family. Her debut, *The Flight Girls*, became an instant bestseller. *Angels of the Resistance* is her second novel.

For Margaret Ann Salazar
who was so excited for this book
Rest in Peace
1959–2021

For sisters everywhere
For mine
Sharice, Dianna and Marisa
For my mother and aunt
Sharon and Diane
For my cousin sisters
Erin and Jill
Delena and Denielle

and

For Freddie and Truus

There is no love like a sister's love
Fierce
Loyal
Protective
Unwavering

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1

Haarlem, Netherlands
April 1940

Sunlight dappled through the green leaves, scattering golden light across the blanket where I sat, my back against the trunk of a tall birch tree, while I kept watch over the Aberman children.

The rain that had kept me up the night before, pummeling the roof above the third-floor bedroom I shared with my older sister, scented the air with the smell of damp grass, stone, and bark. I breathed in, soothed by its familiarity, and yawned, my eyes blurring with exhaustion as I tried to stay present. Too many late nights and early mornings were beginning to take their toll, and the clatter of dice being shaken and rolled by tiny hands before me, accompanied by laughter, shouts of outrage, and harrumphs of frustration, were almost soothing, lulling me into a false sense of security.

I glanced down at the book in my hand and the paragraph I'd read at least a dozen times without retaining one word. Unfortunately, sometimes running from my own thoughts by feeding my brain new information didn't work. Guilt and fear, it turned out, loved a quiet moment, whispering in my ears at night as I tried to sleep, and nudging at me while I sat at my desk in class, trying to focus on what the teacher said. Which was why I'd decided two months ago that I needed noise. Noise would distract me and help me escape the thoughts running through my mind.

Going, doing, and helping was what led me to taking the Saturday afternoon childcare job. It was why I'd suddenly began offering to run errands or clean for my mother, rather than complaining when she asked. It was why I'd begun staying after school, poring over books I knew I'd be assigned to read the following year in an attempt to get a head start. I'd been determined to become a barrister like my father had been since I was a little girl, and the extra studying filled my head with new and complicated words, lofty ideas, and imaginings of grandeur—which were a much-needed diversion from my otherwise too quiet world. And Haarlem, our sweet little city by the sea, was more than just quiet. It was practically silent, as if all sound emitted was whisked from our homes and carried by the near-constant wind out across the water where it dissipated

into the gray clouds above.

“You cheated!”

“I did not!”

I blinked, startled out of my thoughts, and turned my attention to Isaak and Lara, whose earlier mirth had become something less friendly. At six and eight years old, I knew their moments of getting along would become less and less frequent as their interests changed and their peers’ desires began pressuring them in other directions. But for now, they still got along for the most part. Until someone inevitably cheated at a game.

“Lien,” Lara, the younger of the two whined, her wide brown eyes staring up at me, “Isaak cheated.”

“I didn’t!” the older boy protested, his mop of brown curls vibrating with his insistence.

I crossed my arms over my chest, becoming a miniature version of my father when he’d been alive as he’d solved similar skirmishes between me and my elder sister, Elif.

“Well,” I said. “I wasn’t watching to say either way so what shall we do? Quit? It would be a shame. You were both having such a good time. Perhaps have the roll in question rolled again? What would be fair to the two of you?”

Like my father had always done, I gave both participants a choice, rather than accusing or taking sides. If they were having fun, the one at fault would usually feel bad and acquiesce, so as not to ruin the day.

Isaak huffed. “I’ll roll again,” he said.

I hid my smile. Isaak nearly always cheated; Lara was just finally catching on. Keeping my expression thoughtful, I nodded.

“Sounds like a sensible plan,” I said, and then shot to my feet as a sudden shriek split the air in two.

I leaped over their game and stood at the edge of the blanket, a human barrier between whatever trouble was brewing and the children I was responsible for.

“What was that?” Lara asked beside me.

Without looking, I corralled her behind me, my eyes scanning the park around us.

Haarlemmerhout Park covered sixty hectares of land in the southern part of the city. Beech, horse chestnut, linden, and silver maple trees towered above lush green blankets of grass and mossy winding paths where lovers were often caught stealing a kiss by young families out for leisurely bicycle rides. In a park so big, on any given day, one could find a spot to spend several hours in and not be bothered by others. It was strange

enough to hear sounds besides ours, but sounds of distress were especially surprising.

Movement on the other side of some nearby shrubbery caught my eye, and I glanced over my shoulder.

“Isaak,” I said. “Watch your sister for a moment. I’ll be right back.”

Heart thudding in my chest, I marched across the soft, damp grass, intent to stop whatever danger was in motion. But as I rounded the tangle of budding green plants, all I saw were two boys in the middle of the walking path bent and staring at a small lump on the ground between them.

One of the boys prodded the lump with a stick and the lump shifted and lifted its small head, hollering again at his aggressor. I sucked in a breath, pinpricks of anger and sorrow mixing behind my eyes, making them burn.

“Stop that!” I yelled, trying to make all 162 centimeters of me look taller than they did. “Get away from that bird!”

Two pairs of wide eyes met mine, and then the stick was dropped as the two boys ran off and out of sight.

I hurried to the bird, tears clouding my eyes.

“Hello, little love,” I whispered, looking for an obvious injury. “Did those mean boys hurt you?”

He eyed me from where he lay, and I chewed my lip as I looked him over best I could without touching him. The wing I could see seemed intact, his spindly legs curled into little enraged fists.

“Is he okay?”

I wiped my eyes and glanced up at Lara, who was standing with her brother beside me, their small faces pinched with worry, dark eyes full of concern.

“I’m not sure,” I said, and pointed. “This wing looks okay, but I can’t see the other one without moving him.”

“Should we take it somewhere?” Isaak asked.

I sniffled and leaned back, getting hold of myself before my emotions erupted from the place I kept them shoved inside. It was only a bird after all. Not worth the tremors of despair threatening to burst.

“No,” I said. “But maybe we could move him out of the way.” I pointed to the shrubbery beside us. “Why don’t the two of you build him a little nest over there?”

As they ran off to gather leaves and small branches, I stared down at the creature.

“I’m sorry you’re hurt,” I whispered, my eyes once more filling with tears.

There was something so awful about seeing a creature, fragile and

vulnerable, unable to help itself, left to the devices—or torture—of others. To feel and be so powerless...

“We’re done,” Isaak said, kneeling beside me, his cheeks pink from the effort. “Are you crying?”

I shrugged.

“It’s just a bird, Lien.”

I pursed my lips. “It’s a living creature, Isaak,” I said, my voice soft. “We should always do everything we can to help others. Even if they’re just birds.”

I pulled the scarf from my neck and stared down at the gull. “You ready?” I asked him, and then swooped the fabric over it and wrapped my hands gently around its body.

“Do you think it will live?” Isaak asked as I set the bird in the nest.

A glimmer of sadness pressed at my heart. I knew that sometimes even when the best efforts were made and all the prayers were whispered, they were still not enough.

“I hope so,” I said, setting the grumbling fowl on the nest the kids had made. “The two of you did a great job. It’s a handsome nest. He should be very grateful.”

“He doesn’t sound it,” Lara said, and I managed a laugh.

We watched the gull for a while longer as he warily eyed us back and shifted his small body on the pile of foliage and sticks, and then I shepherded the children back to the blanket and their games.

“Play with us,” Isaak said, holding up a well-loved deck of cards.

I nodded and took a seat, happy for the distraction.

As the afternoon passed, the children, easily bored, moved on from card games to running through the grass, twirling until they were dizzy, and a game of tag until, tired out, they lay side by side, Isaak reading and Lara drawing, while I opened my math book and studied for an exam the following Monday.

A breeze kicked up and I shivered, noticing the light around us had changed from golden hued to dismal. I glanced at the sky to find the sun, tired from her brief exertion, had pulled up her blanket of clouds and disappeared beneath a dark gray cover, giving the cold wind permission to sweep in and scatter the papers Lara was busy drawing on.

“Hurry,” I said, and the three of us took off in different directions, chasing down pictures of dogs, horses, and trees, all the while laughing as papers somersaulted and cartwheeled across the vast lawn.

As I pulled a gangly giraffe drawing from the branches of a budding shrub, and a rotund elephant from a springy bed of moss, I heard the

telltale buzz of a plane in the distance. I searched around me for more drawings and then lifted my eyes to the clouds again, listening as the sound amplified, the airplane coming into view, heading in our direction.

“Kids,” I said, my voice a warning. I gestured for them to come closer and then took hold of their arms and pulled them beneath the cover of a tall birch tree.

“It’s just a plane,” Lara said.

But no plane was just a plane when a war was going on.

Lara pulled on my arm and I gave her what I hoped was a smile as a light rain began to fall, tapping on the leaves above us before sliding off and peppering us with drops.

The planes had come more and more often in the past several weeks, but I’d never given them much thought before today. Had never felt even a glimmer of fear, assuming they were headed to France or England where the war was actively happening. But for some reason today, the sight and sound of this one put me on edge and the closer it got, the harder my heart beat.

The drops of rain grew in size with every second I stood with my eyes glued to the plane, watching and waiting, but for what I didn’t know. And then I saw a door open.

“Isaak,” I said. “Lara.” I pushed them behind me, causing Isaak to trip over a large root. He recovered and grasped my hand, his eyes wide with fear as I placed my body in front of theirs, the rumble of the engine above like thunder, shaking the air around us.

But no guns discharged as it flew by. No bombs were dropped. No damage was done at all, save for the fraying of my nerves and a cascade of fluttering white.

“What is it?” Lara asked.

We watched as the wind caught and scattered the overturning debris, sending it floating through the air across what looked like the whole of the city.

“I don’t know,” I said, letting go of their hands and taking a step forward, watching as one of the items landed softly on top of a shrub near where our blanket was laid out.

Isaak reached it first, snatching it from where it lay and turning it over, a frown on his handsome face.

“What’s it mean?” he asked, handing the paper over to me.

I took it and frowned. Vibrant blues, reds, and whites glared back at me as I tried to make sense of what I was seeing. A white bird on a flag. A drawing of a young, blond man in uniform with a large drum strapped over

his shoulder, and words. Dutch words with a German message that sent a shiver down my spine.

I swallowed, my fingers trembling as I held the paper. Because they weren't just a German message. They were a Nazi message.

A Nazi invitation.

"For the good of your conscience," it read. "The Waffen SS is calling you."

My fingers tightened, crumpling the paper. It wasn't the first time I'd seen one these garish signs. I'd spotted them a couple of times over the past several months, adhered to light posts and once, shockingly, in the window of a small shop. Was this where they had come from? Or was this a new tactic? Were we to be inundated regularly with this raining down of terrible requests for our men to join the German forces?

Of course, I knew all about the war Germany had started. It was all anyone talked about since the news the year before that Hitler had invaded Poland had come not so much as a shock as it had with a sigh of acceptance. And when England and France quickly declared war on Germany in retaliation, no one was surprised. Scores of Jews had been entering the Netherlands for the past two years in hopes that our neutrality during the Great War would extend to whatever this war turned out to be. But the poster in my hands made me worry that perhaps they were wrong. Perhaps this time we wouldn't be so lucky.

Because if we were to stay neutral, what was that plane doing here?

"What's it say?" Lara repeated her brother's question, reaching for the poster.

"Nothing." I folded it and shoved it in my coat pocket. "It's trash." I checked my watch, noticing a thread had come loose on the worn, too-big brown band, making it sag on my wrist. I tucked it inside the cuff of my sweater. "We should get you two home. Your parents will worry if we're late."

The three of us packed away the items we'd brought in a cloth bag, and then I stood by trying to quell my impatience as I watched the two of them take the corners of the blanket and try to fold it into a neat square.

"Here," Isaak said, handing me the lumpy heap with a proud smile.

I grinned as I tucked it under my arm and took a last look around for stray toys, papers, and drawing implements.

"Ready?" I asked, and the two nodded. "Shall we check on our bird friend before we go?"

"Yes," they said in delighted unison.

The gull was just as we'd left it, and in fact looked to have made himself

more at home, burrowing deeper into his new nest of leaves and twigs, his narrow beak nestled down into his puffed white chest.

“See?” I whispered, glancing at the children crouched beside me. “I told you you made him a handsome home. Look how happy he is.”

Convinced the bird would live, we walked across the grass to the sidewalk. I glanced at the sky and then moved in closer, making sure I was at most an arm’s length away from both kids should I need to protect either of them from an oncoming bicyclist or any other dangers that might befall them. I knew how fast the unthinkable could transpire. I’d seen it happen before.

“That was a bad one,” Lara said as we walked.

“What was a bad one?” I asked, looking around to see what she was talking about.

“The plane,” she said. “It was a bad one. I saw the spiders.”

Spiders. It was what she called the Nazi insignia.

I nodded. They were the bad ones indeed. I’d never felt that more than I did now, a seed of doom planting itself in the pit of my stomach as I wondered if that plane, its engine noise still reverberating through my body, was just the beginning of something more. The warning crack of thunder before a storm.

2

“Lien saved a bird!” Lara announced as soon as the front door of the Aberman house swung open, revealing a very pregnant Mrs. Aberman who stood aside to let us in.

“I can’t wait to hear all about it,” she said, winking at me over her children’s heads. “After the two of you wash up.”

As the children ran upstairs, I followed their mother into the sunny kitchen to wash my own hands, noting the colorful drawings hanging from nearly every surface with a bittersweet smile. Not long ago, the kitchen of my own house had looked similar. Now though, the only art left was a family portrait, painted by a child’s hand in primary colors and propped up on the mantel over the fireplace, and some mature, stark and colorless images of the countryside that were more gloom than joy. The rest of the happier pieces had gone in a box that had been placed in the third floor closet, set among other items that had once had a place in the main parts of the house, but were now relegated to this one space, in the dark, with the door shut.

Noticing the cloth bags filled with groceries on the counter, I dried my fingers on a towel and reached for the closest one, pulling out a bouquet of deep purple beets.

“Oh, Lien,” Mrs. Aberman said, easing herself into a chair. “I should say no, but my feet are killing me. I swear the market was more crowded than usual. Of course, that’s probably just because I’m the size of a house now.”

“You’re not,” I said, glancing at her as I set a large bag of flour on the floor of the pantry.

Mrs. Aberman was the most beautiful woman I’d ever seen. The natural flush that graced dewy skin flecked delicately with pale freckles didn’t need even a dash of rouge for enhancement. She wore her glossy dark curls swept off her face, and held herself with the grace of a ballerina. I’d often found myself staring at her in admiration as she spoke with such patience to her children, or laughed at her husband’s jokes. The fact that she’d attended university and held a degree in teaching made her even more spectacular in my eyes, especially since I’d decided I too would pursue higher education. It was rare to know women her age and older

who had sought something besides marriage and a family. And while she had given up the one for the other, much as my own mother had done, knowing she'd aspired to more was both fascinating and inspiring.

"Were the children good for you today?" she asked.

"They're always good for me."

There was silence, and I met her eyes across the table. We shared a smile.

"They're *mostly* always good," I said. "We had a nice time. There were a lot of card games."

"There always are."

Heavy footsteps coming down the stairs announced the arrival of Mr. Aberman, who entered the kitchen with his shirt sleeves rolled up like always, his feet bare and pale against the gleaming dark hardwood floors, and his ever-present grin in place.

"Well?" he said. "Are you quitting? Were they terrible?"

"I was just telling Mrs. Aberman how good they were," I said, placing five apples in the bowl on the table and folding the cloth bags I'd emptied.

"They're upstairs chattering away about an injured bird," he said, looking around. "I'm almost afraid to ask."

I smiled at my favorite teacher. Mr. Aberman taught ninth grade literature with patience, grace, and a lot of humor, which I suspected was needed when dealing with the antics and hormones of fourteen-and fifteen-year-olds.

"There was a bird," I said. "We did not bring it home with us."

He gave a great and comical sigh, and his wife and I laughed as I passed him a small block of butter to be put away.

"It was a fun afternoon," I said.

"You are a godsend, Lien," he said. "I was able to get every paper on my desk graded."

"Good," his wife said, with a mischievous smile. "That means you can cook the dinner tonight."

"It would be my pleasure," he said, and she turned wide eyes to me.

"I think maybe you're also a miracle worker!" She reached over and slapped Mr. Aberman's hand. "Pay her well before she decides to never come back."

As I pocketed the money I'd earned a few minutes later, the kids came barreling down the stairs to tell the tale of the bird and how they'd painstakingly picked each leaf, stick, and blade of grass for its nest.

"They did a wonderful job," I said. "Despite whatever injury the poor thing was nursing, he seemed quite happy in his nest when we checked on

him before heading home.”

“I daresay you three are heroes,” Mr. Aberman proclaimed. “Which deserves...” He opened a cabinet and peered inside as the kids jumped up and down, clearly knowing it was the cupboard treats resided in. A moment later their father proffered three wrapped chocolates, one for each of us.

“Thank you,” I said, pocketing the candy.

“Thank you!” Lara and Isaak yelled before running off to another part of the house.

I checked my sagging watch. “I’d better go,” I said, my voice filled with regret. “I have homework.”

“On a Saturday?” Mrs. Aberman looked to her husband, who raised his hands in surrender.

“Don’t look at me,” he said. “I’m the nice teacher.”

I left the happy household with a grin that began to fade as soon as the door closed behind me, shutting their joyful voices inside while I stood just beyond reach on the other side. I began the short walk home.

Each step led me away from the light and airy feel of their family, and closer to my own, where laughter was rarely heard these days and a pall lay over the house, dark and heavy and oppressive. Where words that used to fill the space were barely spoken, and we moved about like ghosts, together but alone.

At the corner I turned right and found myself ignoring both the ticking on my wrist and the windows of the famously forward-tilting shops, which, when I was younger, made me feel as though I were being watched over, but recently had begun to feel like they were glowering down at me, disappointed and full of accusation.

But rather than skirt to the outside of the city center like I often did these days, I stayed within the shopping area, taking in the familiar sounds of Haarlem, letting the noise fill me up in hopes it would linger when I returned to the silence of my house.

Bicycles squeaked past with chains in need of oiling, little faces in wood carts smiled up at me, their parents at the helms. Teenagers on handlebars, their friends pedaling, some recognizable from school, others not. Restaurants teemed with people looking for a late lunch or early dinner, patrons spilling out the door or sitting at tables, the candle centerpieces lit, the flames dancing in the breeze.

As I walked past my mother’s shop, I slowed my step and glanced inside. It was rare to find her alone, and today was no different. As she examined a piece of clothing with one woman, another browsed items on a