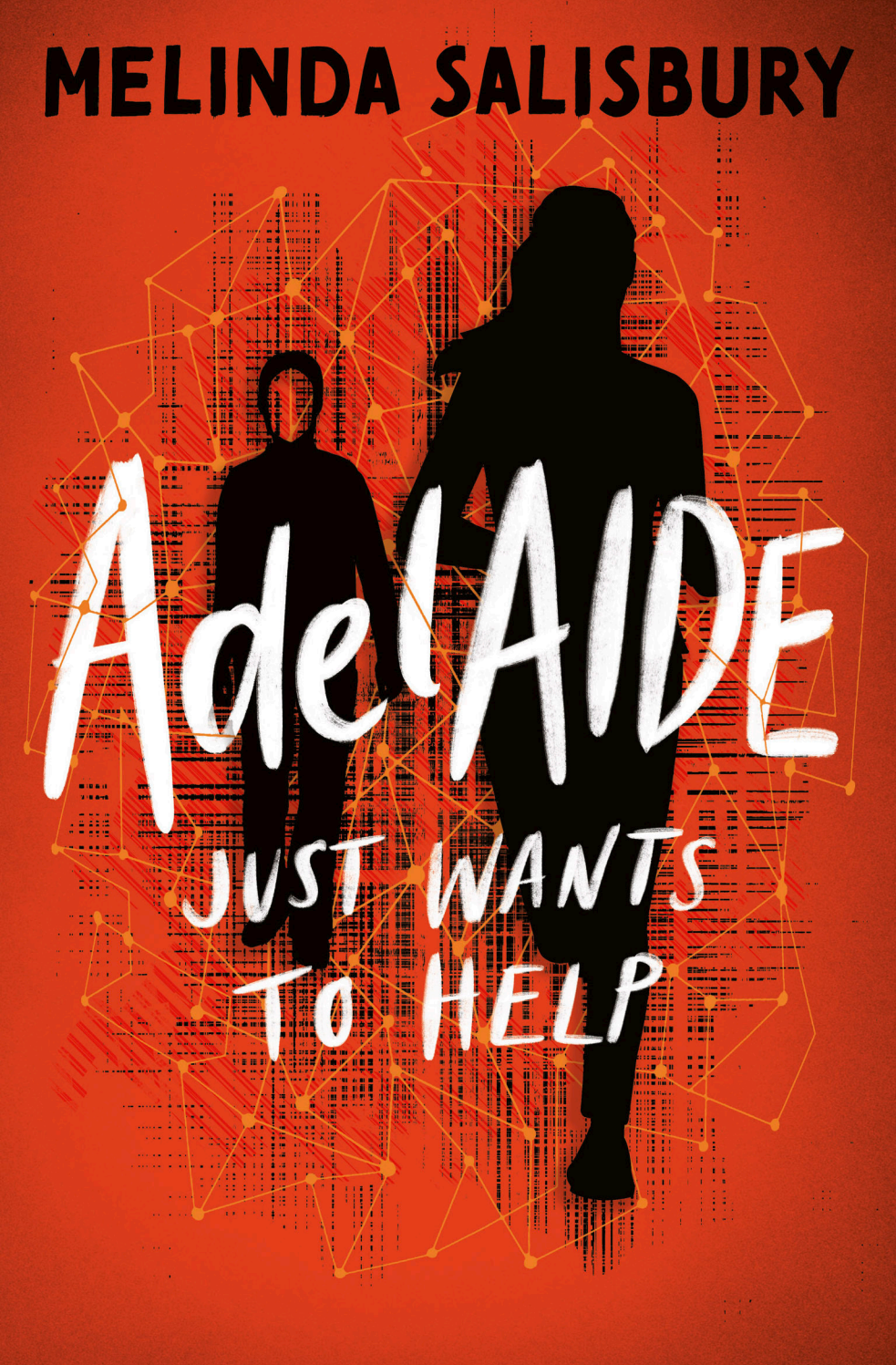
MELINDA SALISBURY



Adelaide

Just Wants to Help


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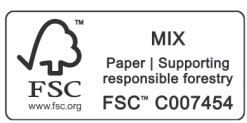
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Adelaide Just Wants To Help

MELINDA SALISBURY

Barrington Stoke

CHAPTER 1

My name is Freya Grace Dixon, and I am a loser.

No, that's not true, because saying I'm a loser suggests there is something outstanding and special about me, even if the only thing I am outstanding or special at is being a massive loser. But the sad fact is, I don't have any outstanding qualities. I am as average as you can be, in every way. I have an average family: mum, stepdad, stepsister, living in a terraced house in a standard suburb of a standard town. I'm average looking: white skin, hair that's mid-length and mid-brown in a middle parting above my mid-brown eyes. I'm 162.4 centimetres tall – *literally* the national average height for a woman – and my shoe size is six: also the national average.

I once heard a friend of my mum's say that I'd make a great spy because I had the kind of face

that blends in everywhere. The horrible thing is, I think it was meant as a compliment.

The middle. That's where I sit. Right in the middle of everything, and you know what happens in the middle?

Nothing.

"Are you even listening, Freya?" asked Micah, my best friend since the end of our first year at Ashdown Lodge Academy. She was staring at me.

For once, we were the only people in the sixth-form common room. Everyone else was taking advantage of the sunny weather to eat lunch outside. But not us. Micah had the worst hay fever and avoided being outdoors during high-pollen season as much as she could. Which was kind of ironic for someone who wanted to make eco-documentaries.

"Sorry," I said with an apologetic shrug. "I spaced out for a second. What did I miss?"

"You, me and Maya going on Sunday."

"Right. Going where on Sunday?"

Micah growled and replied, "Hye-jin's rally against the new pet shop."

My mouth stretched into a grimace.

"Oh. Yes," I said through gritted teeth. "Can't wait."

Micah pretended not to notice my sarcasm. "Good, because we *really* need to ask her about the partnership for World Environment Day," she said, looking at me, eyebrows raised.

"I thought you sent Hye-jin an email before Easter. When she asked you to."

"I did, but she hasn't replied and it's coming up fast. Loads of people will want to work with her, so we need to nail it in." Micah paused, and I braced myself because I knew what was coming. "I thought if *you* spoke to Hye-jin …"

"It won't make any difference," I said flatly. "We haven't been friends for five years – you know that."

"Maybe not *friend*-friends, like her and Eden, but it's not as if you had a fight. Hye-jin always says 'hi' to you and she asks about your mum. It can't hurt, right? To at least try?" Micah stared at me with big pleading eyes.

"Fine." I caved in. "I'll try. But we should have a back-up plan for when she says no because she's so busy and important."

Micah hmmed, ignoring that, and picked up her phone.

"I'm almost done with the edit from last night if you want to look," she said. "I just need to add the links at the end."

I was glad we'd changed the subject from Hye-jin and nodded eagerly. "Let's see," I said, leaning over.

On Micah's phone screen, Maya was gazing into the camera seriously, her earnest brown eyes lined with gold eyeliner. Her waist-length box braids were held back by a scarf that was the same emerald green as the new *Nature for All* T-shirts we'd made last weekend. Maya was Micah's oldest friend and now my friend too, despite going to a different school. She was gesturing at a high metal fence, the glint of water visible in the distance past the trees.

We'd made the video to protest the fence that had been put up around Chalmers Pond and most of the surrounding woods too. *Technically*, the new owners had the right to do it. The pond and

the woods were part of the grounds of Chalmers Hall, but the old owners had always let everyone use them. The new owners had put up signs saying the woods and pond were private property, and when those didn't work, they'd erected an ugly wire fence around them.

Micah pressed play, and Maya came to life.

"The sad fact is, people are spending less and less time outside," on-screen Maya said, shaking her head. "So, it's no wonder people feel distanced from the climate disaster – they just don't feel connected to nature. Local green spaces like Chalmers Pond make such a difference to communities, letting people see and experience the outdoors and make a real connection to it. It helps to bridge the gap between us and the natural world. Without it, what are we?"

Micah panned the camera to me, and I winced as my face filled the screen.

"We urge the owners of Chalmers Hall to take down the fence and allow people to use the woods and the pond once more," I said, and I flinched again at how flat my voice sounded. "You have the chance to make a real difference

to the community of this town – *your* community. Please, think about it."

Beside me on the screen, Maya was nodding.

"And if you agree with us, please sign the open letter – link here …" Maya added. She pointed to an empty spot above her head where Micah would insert a link in the video.

"And don't forget to like and subscribe," on-screen me added, smiling into the camera.

I froze, then snatched the phone from Micah. I hit pause, zooming in on my face.

"What the hell?" she said.

"I have lettuce in my teeth," I said, holding the phone up to her. "Why didn't anyone tell me I had lettuce in my teeth? I look like I'm going mouldy."

Micah narrowed her eyes. "Really? You can hardly see it."

"Yes, you can. We need to film again – we can't put this out," I said.

"We don't have time to film again," Micah said. "It's fine, seriously, Freya. No one is going to notice it."

I stared at her. "I thought you wanted to be a filmmaker. Are you really happy with something of this quality being out there? Where your future university or employers might see it? It's unprofessional."

Micah glared at me. "I really think you're overreacting. I spent three hours editing this last night and I didn't see it."

"I know what to do," I said, ignoring her. "Just cut the last part where I speak. We can use a photo instead, and I'll do the likes and subscribe bit as a voiceover."

"That's going to look weird after Maya does the other bit on-screen."

"No, it won't." I could feel my heart pounding, my voice getting higher with panic. "You can make it work – you're a tech wizard. Please, Micah. I am begging you. *Begging*."

She rolled her eyes and sighed. "Fine. Whatever."

I threw my arms around her. "Thank you. Seriously. You know someone would spot it and use it."

Micah gave a wolfish grin. "Wait, are you saying you *don't* want to be immortalised as a meme? You don't yearn to be known forevermore as Salad Teeth Girl?" she said. "It could be a whole thing: the Green Teeth Challenge – go green for the planet! Wait. *That's* what we'll do for World Environment Day!" Micah plucked a piece of lettuce from her sandwich and wedged it in next to her left canine tooth. "Like this."

"Please," I said. "That is weak."

I tore an even bigger piece from my sandwich and stuck it in between my top two teeth, leaving it hanging out of my mouth. "It needs to be like this."

Of course, that was the moment Hye-jin, Enzo and Eden walked into the common room.