

HELLO OTHER

Book One – DISCOVERY

By S C Dinsdale

"Fear outs when the Truth is out of alignment, and opinions prevail."

Chapter 3: Innocence

The teacher is talking but I don't hear a word. A mass of colourful posters adorn three walls of the room and I'm trying to understand something incomprehensible.

"Whites Only", "Non-white Only", "For Use by White Persons." The bold words seem shockingly strange and unnatural.

Confronting signs are displayed in pictures of doors, buildings, and park benches. Some posters display an unfamiliar word, "apartheid." Making sense of other student's work is proving impossible. Everyone else is listening to the teacher, apparently unperturbed by the disturbing imagery surrounding us all. When the bell signals the end of social studies, the room empties. Hurriedly, I walk over to my classmate and ask what she thinks about the posters.

"That's what it's like in South Africa," she replies in a matter of fact way without stopping.

Another classmate hovers nearby, stepping closer to confirm that apartheid really does exist. Emphatically, she tells me how awful it is. Her older siblings and parents are politically aware and politically active. They believe that New Zealand needs to apply pressure by refusing to trade or play sport with South Africa until racial segregation ends. My twelve year old mind is reeling.

The transition from a small private single sex school to the largest high school in our city, which is co-ed and has recently abolished uniform, is a cultural shock. After leaving my beloved primary school I entered the restrictive controlled environment of a segregated school, where attendance at chapel was compulsory and religion was taught as a subject called divinity. Becoming progressively shy and withdrawn, I restricted myself in response to the strict new environment...

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