

They Ask Me Where I Come From

They ask me where I come from
And I'm not sure what to say;
Not certain of the question,
Or if I'll play along today:
While they gaze at me expectantly
I ponder for a while...
'So, where do you come from?'
They repeat with patient smile.

Hmm... where do I come from?
What would you like to hear?
I hear the words you utter,
But their meaning isn't clear:
I've oft been asked that question –
My response should not take long,
But tho' the answer's mine to give
Somehow I sometimes get it wrong!

'Where do you come from?'
It's buzzing round my mind;
Such a heavy-loaded question
I very often find:
Referring not to who I am –
The way that I see me –
But laden with assumptions
'Bout what they think they see.

My skin, it seems, speaks loudly,
But its message isn't clear;
It depends on who is listening
And what they want to hear;
And because that is the way it is,
Sometimes, without intent,
I can't hear the simple question
Without questioning what is meant.

Right, I've got my answer!
I know what I'll reply;
The question isn't difficult –
Sometimes I wonder why
I try to read so very much



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Michael Jagessar

Behind the word that's said,
When the answer to the question
Springs instant to my head:

Tottenham! That's where I'm from;
I'll say it clear and loud!
It's not everybody's paradise
But I'm from Tottenham, and I'm proud!
Born just slightly up the road,
I've lived my whole life there;
A Tottenham-girl, that's what I am,
If you know me, that's quite clear.

A brief silence.
A kindly smile.
'Yes... but where do you *come* from?
Jamaica...? If not, then where?'
All my life just isn't long enough
To make me come from 'here'!

And then there came my calling
And in truth I found it odd,
For the voice which said 'Leave Tottenham'
To me did not sound like God;
For sure I heard God calling,
And yet it seemed to me,
An assumed and human answer
To leave home and family.

I know that quirky God we worship
Sometimes sends where we don't know,
Throws a spanner right into the works
And dares us, 'Will you go?'
But sometimes that self-same quirky God,
With His mysterious way,
Is not all that mysterious
And asks simply, 'Will you stay?'

So I agonised and fell apart,
Then got a grip at last –
The Tottenham-girl that I had been
In part was in the past;
But she's not gone, she's not forgotten,

So my heart can cope somehow -
Re-formed and re-located...
Maybe Totten-Lutonian now?

A new home.
A new identity?
Where do I come from?

You know, it's really quite peculiar -
All different, yet still me,
At once, no longer who I was,
But not yet who I'll be.
Just trusting in that still, small voice,
Amidst the tumult, clear,
Which says 'No matter who or where you are
You're mine, and I am here.'

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