

Who do they say I am?

I say I am Karen
And I want to be free
To define who I am
And simply be me...
To look in life's closet
And check out the shelf;
Be clothed in the labels
I choose for myself.

Daughter, sister,
Mother, all three -
I'm nothing
Without my family,
Who've shaped from the start,
Whether known or unknown,
The me that I am
Who is me alone.

But step through the door
And out of the fold...
I encounter a world
Of labels untold,
Which sees not the person
I think to be me,
Ascribing instead
What they want me to be.

I say I am Karen,
And in yesteryear
Thought my name was the only
Label to wear,
Till they labelled me 'coloured'
And made me believe
'My sort' was not good,
Making heart and soul grieve;
And tho I could try
I was not good enough -
So I learned I am Black,
Made of sterner stuff!
Learned to think, learned to speak
Learned to know my own mind -
To choose my own labels:
But did I leave self behind?

I say I am Karen.
They ask 'Karen from where?'
And I know, for I've learned,
I'm not Karen from *here*;
So I sift through the labels
Within and without,
Seeking one which will speak
Of the me I'm about:
I know I'm not English -
That's one I won't own,
Tho this country is all
I have ever known;
Black British!
Caribbean!
They're labels I bear
To place for someone
A girl from nowhere.

I say I am Karen
But the me I embrace
Is so much a product
Of labels I face;
Makes me see and peel back
At least some that I use
And walk, just a while,
In another's shoes.

I say I am Karen.
I am me alone -
A complex concoction
Of labels I own;
Of those I've rejected
Or skewed to my way,
And still others I'm sifting
To see what they say.
Yet in wearing, not wearing,
Those labels, I see
Sometimes I lose sight of me.