

Ballet Blues

It was my love of dancing
That first exposed me to the lie
That being black means you're not enough
Innocent, dressed in a tutu
And pink slippers
I was forced to toughen up

My mother removed me from the class
When I told her of the prejudice
I was young but knew something wasn't right
And wondered why I faced this
In a ballet class of 25
With one solitary friend by my side

I stood out because my skin is not white
And I was left out because that somehow
Made me not right

During our break
We sat cross-legged in a huge circle
One of the girls passed around her brand new toy
Everyone gleamed over it
Her latest pride and joy

Whilst I waited for my turn to clasp it
And show appreciation like the rest
I watched her exclaim and point at me
Make sure that girl doesn't touch it
Send it back around it's for the best

I was embarrassed and confused
And as tears pricked my brown eyes
I appeared nonchalant and quiet
As not to bare my aching inside

Our ballet teacher saw it all
And didn't say a word
Instead she announced
The success of last weekend
Their annual
Ballet Christmas celebration

She thanked everyone for their participation
Well all the girls but me
As I was never given that invitation
A smile had always graced my face
But that day
Something changed in me
As my heart felt a pain
That wasn't commonplace

Two strokes of racism
In the space of an hour
Both adult and child
One ballet class soured
It didn't stop my love of dance
Yet rooted a deep sadness within
That I think will never pass

I was barely five years old
And I knew I wasn't mean
So these girls and the teacher
Were not opposed
To my actions
But just the colour of my skin

By Onycha Walford