Next To Nothingness

a group poem by Anfield Writers

Hygiene, insecurity, poverty,
desperation.
The silent, hidden face of
shame and isolation.

I remember how they laughed,
pointed, held their noses.
I remember my mother said I smelled
of beautiful yellow roses.

I must make do.
I water down shampoo.
My blouse is more grey than white.
I am conscious of the smell.

I remember the loneliness
of the school yard – cold and harsh.
I remember it gripped me
like a long-lost friend.

I count pennies one by one.
The price of fuel, water rates, food.
How did it get to this –
Where did it go wrong?

I remember the teacher pointed
at my dirty apron. I walked out of class.
I remember she said the words "poor home."
Being dirty – it's next to nothingness.

Now the plastic bottle is cut up.
Scraped dry. Shampoo gone.
I try to lather my greasy hair with
the remnants of a bar of soap.

I remember being the class clown.
I remember how I deflected
the hurt of cruel remarks.
How I laughed at them.

Cheap soap burns me
red and raw.
My skin flakes.
I hide my hands in shame.

I remember that the kids were all little.
I remember it was snowing.
The washing machine broke.
I remember I was scared.

Hunger pains win out
over wash day.
I need to eat, would like to wash.
Being dirty – it's next to nothingness.

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