**Airlings** *by Rae Howells*

Somebody has wrung them out

two old flannels

two un-eyed rabbits

as if the rain had hooked them from the air

twisted their lives out

wrung them out

two old flannels, loose knots

flung on a heap

flung

on a template of old bracken

and dry grass, moving,

shushing, *shush,*

or are those fierce whispers

urging wake, wake,

remember?

remember how you ran

into the air,

you could hardly keep your feet,

barely pricked the soft pasture

as you leapt, always trying to free yourself,

flinging yourself skyward

your face turned towards light

but dragging the needle’s thread

the heavy gold thread of yourself

you buttoned your soft weight into the rising of the hill,

paused to press down the ploughed soil with your feet,

small brown pin.

I see now, you were the earth’s beat,

her quick blood,

submitting to the arteries of the burrow

only for your dreams of the wind

among warm bodies strung, beads along the vessels,

rows of ears and feet,

each body a stitch in the seam,

you hemmed the earth and the sky.

Shush now, shush, old flannels, wrung out on a heap,

your legs stretched long on the old dry grass,

listen how the wind sings,

her longing fingers in your fur as she whispers –

come little airlings

unbutton yourselves

kick the light with your feet

the earth can hold herself awhile.