

## EXTRACT: JENNY BROWNRIGG

*Has she managed to move on from the nocturnal images? Or is it only safe amongst those pages?*

Gradually she is training herself by reading a magazine, the same magazine, familiarising herself with the images, co-opting them into her own existence. Lazily she turns the pages, returning to the same photograph. It is an unusual image. At first she thought it was the depiction of an exterior space, even a landscape, then on closer inspection she realises what has been photographed is the interior of a large room, large enough to contain an ornate but ancient wrought iron balcony high up on the distant wall. Only this and the corner of a table are visible. The huge room or ballroom is apparently filled with smoke but that is what makes it look so odd. It is not the fake smoke of dry ice machines but real smoke, as though a space beneath the stone table is belching it out like an industrial chimney. The closer she looks, the more she realises that there is something else on the table peering out from the smoke. Closer still she sees the structure of a house, an architectural model of some sort but again it appears to be ancient and, by the look of the slight glow at its miniature windows, is lit from within. There is something about the light that she can't quite make out, as though the rooms within are illuminated by candles or lanterns but its doll's house size negates that and now the ambiguities of the image begin to tire her. She nods off and starts to dream. She dreams she is staring down at her own belly, beyond her belly, the empty fold of skin under her stomach and between her thighs. Translucent. A nacreous skinfold. Placing her behind against a great lump of clay, she bends herself up until her belly is above her head, until her eyes see stars. Lying back in the wet clay, forming shapes down there, sculpting with cupped hands a nascent set of genitals.

*Genitals?*

A clay scrotum she cannot see to sculpt, only really feel and topped by a finger-moulded penis. Letting them dry, baking in the hot sun until she peels them all off, the sausage she has rolled, the cracked balls; only to begin again. And again, she plies her fingers between the folds, but working blindly is now impossible. She brings the wet shape up to her eyes and curves out, all delicate, the correct labial crimps and furrows, gently forming with little finger and thumb, then trying to place it back down between her thighs, adhering more of the clay against the edges. Leaving it to harden, to crack and contract and half dry and crumble, only to peel everything off once more with her fingers. Satisfied, or half satisfied. Starting again this third time presents a more complex problem and occupies her seemingly for hours until the clay dries and has to be constantly reapplied, recompressed and wetted, then dried in turn under the moon's burn...working half sleeping, even in the dream, and feeling tired too, nodding in and out as the tide rises, then slack water before the direction of the tidal stream reverses again and she feels that she finally sleeps, waking only moments later to a strange sensation, to reach down and touch the tender spot, still painful, pulsing, reaching down to touch where whatever it is she has made and so subtly formed, has fixed.

*These dreams, this sleeping and doing nothing. Do you all conceive of it as some form of healing? Or a detoxification? Letting the body remove its own waste material simply by allowing it to, removing the toxins that are destroying it?*

Yes, as though the accumulated weight of what she never wanted in her brain in the first place is being sluiced away, overpowered, forced out by the passage of time, replaced by nothing, by a blank space that can be filled on more conducive terms: her own. Conceivably, yes, her sleep can exorcise, her dreams can overcome. She half remembers a conversation with the taxi driver who brought her from the station, though at the time it hadn't registered. She can recall his having questioned her about the camera she placed in the boot. He had said how much he liked photography. Was it that he used to be a photographer in the army? It was not dangerous, he had said, not at all. He only had to take the photographs. She

was sure he had told her that the photos went into secret files so that any soldiers landing in the area would know if they had seen the people in the photographs, know who they really were. Not whom they said they were. He said he still took portraits, if he was out at a party or something. She remembered he'd said how much he had loved the old instamatics. He liked to take was the one he could show to the person there and then, to witness their surprise. Yet he also missed the pauses, he said, the wait that came between clicking and printing. Sometimes years.