

## Judith Barrington

### Breakfast with Virginia

*That is why I often think up an imaginary companion to have  
breakfast with*  
—Galway Kinnell

I made her my popular scrambled eggs:  
a little onion, some salsa stirred in  
(the mild kind of course, since Mexican food  
can hardly have reached Monks House back then).  
Good English toast: white bread, chewy,  
cut into triangles, not a crust in sight—  
I even polished the silver rack and the toast  
grew suitably cold and chewy like leather.

But little by little I started to feel  
that she secretly longed for kidneys, their fat  
congealing in the Victorian chafing dish  
under a lid on a polished sideboard—  
or maybe a stinky, yellow kipper.  
The marmalade, I'm sure, was perfectly fine:  
I opened the home-made jar my sister made  
when Seville oranges briefly appeared last year.

Not that my guest remarked on the marmalade;  
by the time we reached the toast she was in full flight  
deploring the mediocrity of the Bookers  
and wondering what happened to Leonard's elm.  
I asked if she minded me asking her over  
at which she frowned and helped herself to butter.  
"I thought it might be interesting," she said  
"to see how things have changed—how people think."

I could tell, as she paused, that she didn't mean to be rude  
which was odd as it never used to bother her.  
"But what I've seen, alas," she said  
"has made it clear that almost no-one thinks—  
I can see it's not easy given this world:  
the noise, the violence, the dreadful machines!  
But still, my dear," (she meant me; I blushed)  
"It's been enlightening but I really must go."