

The Hon. Enid Nellish proved hard to track down. Her apartment in Venice was locked and shuttered and, according to a neighbour, it now belongs to a Dutch couple who only visit twice a year. Neither was there any sign of life at the house in Eaton Mews, though the name Nellish is still on the bell-push. I eventually contacted her by email, thanks to her friend Billa Thoresby who has a little antique shop in Chelsea.

It turned out Enid was in the States, so we did the interview via Skype.

LG: First of all, what do I call you these days? Mrs Finch? Lady Enid? Miss Nellish?

EN: Oh, for heaven's sakes, just call me Enid. I was never Lady Enid. That was Bernard's silly embellishment. I was only ever an Hon.

LG: It's been ten years since your husband's 'disappearance' on board the Golden Memories cruise ship. Are you and Bernard back together?

EN: Good Gordon Highlanders no! I divorced Bernard the moment he poked his head out of his hidey-hole. It was quite a shock, I can tell you. One was just getting used to the idea of being a widow when the rat reappeared. But it did save time because with no body being recovered one would have had to wait simply yonks for him to be declared dead.

LG: And where is he now?

EN: As far as one knows, in Marrakesh, freeloading off some old fool. Of course, Bernard himself is no spring chicken but he seems to have found someone willing to support him in exchange for services rendered.

LG: Sexual services?

EN: One prefers not to imagine. More likely nappy changing services, given the age category.

LG: And have you found someone? What about Don Harrington? The two of you seemed to have something going. What was it? Meat and three veg?

EN: Meat and potatoes, actually. Although we did go á la carte a few times. Don and I did a couple of cruises together. He was in his usual Gentleman Host role and I gave talks on the Classical sites people might visit onshore.

One had heard Bernard do it so often one could repeat it in one's sleep, though I did lighten the content considerably.

The only trouble with Don was that the cruise widows could get fiercely proprietorial about him and looked daggers if he took one's arm. We're still friends. Christmas cards, that kind of thing.'

LG: But not lovers?

EN: No, no. He was perfectly adequate as a lover, I now know, but not the best.'

LG: It sounds as though you've broadened your experience. Can you tell us more?

EN: Absolutely not. A lady doesn't tell. Suffice it to say, this old fiddle can still play a good tune.

LG: Would you say you were a late developer?

EN: I would. All those wasted years. You see Bernard was terribly lukewarm about married life and because of one's upbringing, one simply had no idea.

LG: No idea that he was gay?

EN: Yes. A funny word, isn't it? There was nothing gay about Bernard. In the old-fashioned sense.

LG: I discovered that you'd left Venice. What happened?

EN: Yes, it was a darling little flat, but it held too many Bernard memories, and then eventually one became so busy one could hardly find the time to go there.

LG: Your friend Billa tells me you spend a lot of time in America these days.

EN: I do. Nola Gleeson and Cricket McCuddy have become such dear friends. Frankie and Chip have both passed away, so we single ladies cruise together. Nothing educational. We chase the sun. You see, Bernard would never have any truck with such people. He was the most fearful snob.

LG: And you're currently in Florida?

EN: I am. Another great dividend of moving on from Bernard has been the opportunity to get to know my half-brother, Ripley. He and Shelly-Mae

have businesses in Gainesville and Orlando, but they also have a beautiful condominium home in Clearwater where they make me very welcome. The beaches are divine. Like white sugar.

LG: Ripley inherited your father's title, I believe.

EN: He did. He's the 6th Earl Oakhanger, but he never uses his title. He's just an awfully decent sort. He reminds me so much of my father. He's like Poppa, but in leisure-wear instead of tweed.

LG: And what about your mother?'

EN: What indeed! Mumsie now resides in a care home in Carnforth, entirely doolally. She has a type of dementia caused, apparently, by years of smoking Capstan Navy Cut.

LG: And her friend, Bobbie Snape? Is she still at Lowhope Fell Hall?'

EN: Ach, that damned woman! Bobbie has dug in for the duration and refuses to leave. You see, by rights, the Hall should go to my cousin, Andrew, but he too is now doolally. He's at Lune Grange, which is an utter ruin. One gathers he now lives in one room with no electric light and no running water apart from what comes through the roof. Lowhope does still have electricity but the wiring is dangerously ancient, which may, just may be Bobbie's downfall. She has power adapters everywhere, laden with plugs. Any day now there may be an electrical fire and Bobbie Snape will be burned to a crisp. One lives in hope.

LG: So she and your mother didn't marry? When same sex unions became possible?

EN: Did they?

LG: In 2014.

EN: Great heavens. What a lucky escape. Bobbie probably doesn't know about that. She only reads *Terrier World* magazine.

LG: Enid, I have to say, ten years ago you seemed rather a sad, lost soul. Bernard called all the shots. Your old school chums used you. And your mother's attitude to you was hateful. How would you describe your life now?

EN: I'd describe it as perfectly wonderful. Shelly-Mae and I are about to go to a spa. We're having our feet dipped in paraffin wax.

LG: What does that achieve?

EN: I have no idea, but it sounds like enormous fun.