

Exposure Extract

Extract from **Chapter 11**

‘I wasn’t guilty of anything,’ said Emma Ford

Emma Ford

At the beginning, Bob just wouldn’t leave me alone. I first met him when I went to his studio in Battersea with a friend of mine, Vanessa Upton. I was a make-up artist, Vanessa was going to model, and she took me there as a test. I had just come out of the London College of Fashion and had been working a bit for Trevor Sorbie. Bob kept on saying he wanted to shoot me, but I had never done anything like that before. I was ‘no, no no’, and I think it took him about six months to persuade me. I was 22, so nearly ten years ago.

I had heard of him through other models. He was very charismatic, and on that first day he was all over me, and didn’t really take much notice of Vanessa. He was always talking about my hair, ‘look how fluffy it is, you’re like Picachu’. That was his nickname for me – Picachu. He would comment on your hands, everything you wore, what your style was. He thought I was some sort of little creature, and he wanted to capture that. He kept on saying, ‘oh come on, come over, just a couple of shots,’ and in the end I said okay. Initially I was a bit shy, but he had a make-up artist, and it turned out amazingly. And then I spent about two years with him solidly.

Bob Carlos Clarke

Ideally, for the best pictures, I’d need to live with a subject for three years, or maybe three months would be enough, and really get inside her, both literally and metaphorically. That’s the way to take great erotic photographs. It’s a great

shame in my mind that Naomi Campbell has never lived with a photographer, because that's why Naomi's photos are all surface and no depth.

Lindsey Carlos Clarke

His obsessions would come and go, and we all got used to it. You know, he'd be ranting about how wonderful some girl was, the new muse of his life. You've got to be so sharp about sussing people out, and I'd nudge James, his assistant, in the darkroom and say, 'Have you seen this one!' and he'd say, 'Oh God,' so we'd let it pass. Three or four days would go past and he'd say, 'That girl's a complete nightmare!' and I'd go, 'Oh, you don't say...' Not all of them were like that. Some of them, like Emma, were around for years, and became friends to all of us.

Emma Ford

Even if he wasn't shooting me, he would persuade me to hang around and help out, and pay me £30 or something. We were instantly friends, and he was very funny. He became obsessed with certain things, the way I would walk, and he would shoot a whole series of pictures with lilies all over me, and he would always say things like, 'What knickers are you wearing?' He loved the fact that I was always a bit scruffy and had holes in my knickers. He would say things like, 'I'd love to cut that bit of fat off you and slice it up and serve it as crackling.' I mean, we would shoot all the time. We did private work for him, work for magazines, and commercial work. We did the Urban Stone campaign - that was the poster that was banned. There's a whole cupboard-full of pictures.

Simon Garfield

How did your relationship change over time?

Emma Ford

Everyone thought we were having an affair, but we weren't. We were never lovers. I spent practically every

day with Bob for two years. I lived in the studio for a little bit, in a glass room. Lindsey and I always got on, and I got on particularly well with Scarlett, and I went to stay with them at the beach house, and I felt I was part of the family.

Simon Garfield

I can understand how Lindsey would be jealous – you around all the time, 20 years younger than her.

Emma Ford

I think because nothing ever happened, and I was...I wasn't guilty of anything. But I often did wonder: she must think something's going on. I used to ask Bob, and he said, 'Oh no, Lindsey's fine.'

Simon Garfield

Do you think he wanted it to be more?

Emma Ford

I do, yes.

Simon Garfield

And you resisted that?

Emma Ford

Yes I did.

Simon Garfield

Did he ever use that line about how the only way to really take great photographs was to get to know his model intimately – by sleeping with them?

Emma Ford

He didn't actually, no! But he would say, 'When are you going to sleep with me? I'm going to be dead soon.'

Lindsey Carlos Clarke

The idea of him being with somebody who was nude all the time didn't bother me – that was always part of our life. But the idea that he was obsessed by somebody...I think it came very gradually and a lot of people he was obsessed by were not because he was sexually entranced by them. I think this is where people misunderstood him. In a way it would have been much simpler if, on the odd occasion, he'd gone and bonked the odd model in the studio. That almost would have had a normality to it. But it was much more multi-layered than that. It was much more to do with ownership, he wanted adoration, he wanted love and he wanted to own them and that didn't necessarily involve the sexual act, although the obsession could have just the same implications as if they'd been in a passionate relationship.

We had great fun with Debbie, and Bob loved going out with two girls obviously. We cared about her and we loved her, but then of course it would be over because of the new, new thing. He'd want something else and they'd be dropped in a way that was shocking for them because they didn't know what had happened. For The Dark Summer Charlotte was the big obsession. She's on the cover. She really was a discovery, and he introduced her to the modelling agency and did a great deal for her. But then I always had to pick up the pieces. I used to keep in touch with them and make sure they were okay, and help them with things. I became this great picker-upper of everybody. I said to him once, 'you have to understand, you must be responsible for people. I don't care whether they're a friend or a lover or your postman that you get involved with - you can't be really nice to them for a period and then that's that.'

Bob Carlos Clarke

I met Kadamba at a Vivienne Westwood show. She was dark and petite and radiantly beautiful, and her

irrepressible charisma magnetised everyone. She joked that she'd arrived from another galaxy, and wasn't staying long. She said she'd die young, and made me promise I'd be there to immortalise her like Marilyn'.

So it was a shock but not a surprise to hear that, on a summer afternoon in June '98, she was murdered by an insanely possessive lover. Her mother asked me to take her final portrait at a funeral parlour in Notting Hill, but I was committed to some advertising shoot. Looking back, I think I missed something very special, and let Kadamba down.

Lindsey Carlos Clarke

We used to get wonderful invitations to things, and I'd always know if he sat next to anyone well known because they'd take a picture. I'd be on the other side, but I knew that I'd be cut off and it would just be a picture of him and Koo, or him and whoever it was. I didn't mind any of that, it seemed like common sense. I don't think I wanted the light on me at all - I quite liked being in the background.

Bob Carlos Clarke

One Sunday afternoon in March '97, a friend dropped by the studio unexpectedly, and with him was Princess Diana. Mischievously, he skulked in the shadow, so that when I opened my front door, I was immediately face to face with this Living Goddess in a white cotton shirt and faded blue jeans. I was dishevelled and paint-splattered from painting a backdrop, and it felt quite surreal as she sat in the kitchen while I struggled to make tea.

'Who is that?' Diana asked, pointing to a frame photograph of a model's bottom and legs.

I told her who it was.

'Oh! I was at school with her. I must have recognised her bum'. Then she noticed a shot I'd taken of the model Paula Hamilton doing a very plausible Diana impersonation.

'Sooo naughty!' she exclaimed, 'but much prettier than me.' As she left, she suggested we meet up again soon, but

the closest I ever came to her again was following the route of her funeral cortege.

Whatever she may have been, Princess Diana most purely symbolises the popular ideal of Mother, Mistress and Martyr – Love, Sex and Death.

Lindsey Carlos Clarke

But then at other times...we didn't really have arguments...it was really a problem of being invisible and being not cared for in any way. The classic thing, he would say, 'look I really want this model to work for us, let's take her to the restaurant down the road and we'll talk about it.' But his focus was only ever directed at this person, so I might as well not have been sitting there, I might as well have been the waitress. And as he went out of the restaurant he would walk off down the road with me running behind. I used to think he was focussing on his work and he can't see anything else, so I would let him off that. But it keeps happening, and what happens is that it chips away at you and you start to feel worthless as a person: 'I'm obviously a piece of junk,' and that's not a great feeling.

Philippe Garner

His craft is something that many of his peers - all of his peers - will acknowledge. They may not find it easy to come to terms with the subject matter, but they will all admire his absolute commitment to the medium and his phenomenal craft. I mean, he could coax things out of a negative, he had a unique touch, and it's very rare among photographers to have that degree of engagement with the process. I guess that the darkroom was again a metaphor for the place he liked to inhabit, so Bob could lose track of time and I guess lose himself, it was another universe.

That last darkroom he created is where I took the picture of him. It was an extraordinary space and place. If I compare it with the darkroom of the guys who do my printing, which is just a kind of scruffy hole in the wall; they keep it as clean as it needs to be but it sort of smells of chemicals and there's stuff splashed and stained, you wonder how a beautiful print can come out of it. But Bob's was like an extraordinary science fiction operating theatre and you knew that every pipe, every tap, every steel surface, everything that he'd constructed for that darkroom - it was the architecture of his whole world. It really symbolised so much more than being a practical work place and I remember being very struck by that, just another world. I wonder where that's all gone. I guess it has gone now, hasn't it?

Simon Garfield

One Sunday afternoon I went round to Philippe Garner's house in West Hampstead, which was a sensitively decorated, predominantly white place with many photographs on the walls, including some fine vintage sixties prints by Bailey, Lichfield, Donovan and Parkinson. One wall displayed a picture of Marianne Faithfull on the first day of a Mick and Keith drugs trial. Close by was a photo of David Hemmings as Thomas in Blow-Up holding his Nikon F up to his eye, the kind of image that inspired so many fantasies. Just as interesting were photographs PHILIPPE had taken himself, which he kept in those large Ilford boxes that once contained just plain paper.

Philippe Garner

I'll show you if you're curious to see. Albert Watson...Bruce Bernard...Annie Leibowitz...Eve Arnold. Here is Bob. Gosh, that's pretty dark, isn't it? And this was taken 26 April 1995. That was in the new dark room and I just wanted to get a sense of the taps and stuff; those dark brooding shadows around his eyes.

Then there's Richard Avedon, Peter Beard, Andrew Douglas. Over the years they go on and on. But you see I have to be very careful with these photographers, I'd never dream of showing them my pictures. I get my camera out and pretend I'm just a bumbling little old lady asking if I can take a snap of them and I do it very quickly but I know what I'm doing.

God, poor old Bob, eh, when one thinks about it. I don't feel guilty about it, because I feel I gave him plenty, but I wish I had sensed how dangerous a path he was on. I might have tried to give him more. But then again I might also, out of sheer instinctive self preservation, have backed off him precisely in order not to be dragged into the vortex.