

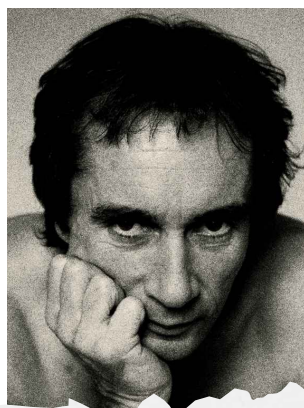
# 'IT WAS AS IF BOB WANTED TO BE A GOD'

As the wife of provocative photographer Bob Carlos Clarke, Lindsey had to live with his control freakery, his obsessions and his infidelities. Then, three years ago, he put an end to them – and himself. Here she tells *Louette Harding* about their tumultuous love affair and what finally drove him to suicide **Main photographs DEBRA HURFORD BROWN**

Sometimes, she feels like changing her name and running away, moving abroad. Sometimes the anger kicks in and she finds herself arguing aloud with her late husband, the brilliant but wayward fashion and portrait photographer Bob Carlos Clarke, who stepped in front of a train three years ago, aged 55. She is 'free' of his domination now, but such

honesty leads to creeping guilt. 'It's all mixed up. I still wake most mornings feeling queasy. I had a terrible desire to set fire to his whole archive,' she says. Instead, Lindsey Carlos Clarke opened a gallery largely to showcase his work, fuelling the legend of his dark genius. She is currently curating a retrospective exhibition, which opens shortly, and is a major contributor to a biography of him by journalist Simon Garfield.

Even their pretty bijou home at the trendier end of London's Chelsea is testimony to Bob's lifelong fascination with the female form. It is carefully designed: ivory with a lilac carpet and one purple wall – all of it an ideal backdrop for his striking black and white images. A Bob Carlos Clarke photo was a study in sinister eroticism: he photographed Rachel Weisz in a latex catsuit, Liz Hurley in a translucent dress,



Did fear of obscurity kill the legend who photographed the world's big names?

2 April 2006

Jodie Kidd at a Venetian masked ball, burlesque artist Dita Von Teese, and numerous models in rubber and stilettos.

For years Lindsey turned a blind eye to his obsessions with models and demeaning infidelities while she ably ran his business, his finances and homes. A psychiatrist at the Priory, the private psychiatric hospital where Bob was an inpatient at the time of his death, told her he had the emotional age of an eight-year-old. 'I said, "Christ! I thought he was 15!" I do miss him,' she adds.

They met in London in the sweltering summer of 1976, when Lindsey was 23 and working as a model: page three one day, *Vogue* the next. Bob's wicked humour immediately appealed. 'We were both with other people. I went to Bob's wedding party.' She cracks up. 'He told me it was a "goodbye" marriage. It was over but he had to do this for her. What a shocking thing to say! Anyway, the theme was Erotic or Neurotic, so my friend and I went in corsets. Bonkers!'

Almost naively, Lindsey began an affair with him. She had rushed into a foolish marriage herself, not long after her father died when she was 17. The husband was placid, passive, nice. The two couples socialised, with Lindsey and Bob staging public rows. 'I remember saying to my husband, "I never want to speak to that Bob Carlos Clarke again." He should have guessed. It was so obsessive.' Lindsey now swapped careers, running Bob's studio, introducing him to her network of



contacts, fuming at his wife Sue's interruptions. 'She'd ring him and say, "Can you collect me from the station?" And I'd think, "How can you disturb him? He's printing!"' How Bob's ego must have lapped it up.

Deceit involved high farce – Lindsey telling her husband she was spending the weekend with her mother in Reading, and him escorting her on to the train at Paddington – and voluble drama. Sue found a strange toothbrush in her bathroom and finally rumbled them. Within days, Bob decided his future lay with Lindsey but where Bob loved, he could be cruel. How long was the relationship good for? 'Probably an awfully long time. He couldn't relax; he was either asleep or awake at 100 miles an hour. He was the most exciting man I've ever met in my life. He had a very dark, dangerous side to him, which clearly appealed to me.' Her fellow page three model Jilly Johnson describes him as 'charisma on legs'.

The Carlos Clarkes were a gilded 1980s couple, whose friends ranged from Marco Pierre White to Patrick Lichfield. In Mustique, a swimsuited Lindsey found herself curtsying to Princess Margaret. 'That night, we went to a huge party. Princess Margaret appeared dressed in gold and ►

**Opposite: Bob in 2005 – the photo was taken by his daughter Scarlett. Above: Lindsey today. Clockwise from right: Bob's photographs of Dita Von Teese, Marco Pierre White and Rachel Weisz**





◀ headed straight for Bob. He said, “I’m frightfully sorry, ma’am, I’ve had too many rum punches.” “How many?” “Two.” “Two? It takes eight to bring me to my knees!”

Bob’s background was Anglo-Irish, borderline aristocratic – elderly, ex-military father, depressive mother – with the miseries of boarding school at age eight thrown in for good measure. A disdain for Irish provincial prudery fuelled the eroticism of his work as well as his cavalier seductions of models. ‘I wasn’t stupid... I didn’t take him on thinking he was going to be sexually driven only by me. But I always knew the affairs didn’t mean anything. Sometimes he would be obsessed with people he wasn’t having sex with. We were very close to Mandy Smith [the child bride of Rolling Stone Bill Wyman] and I can assure you nothing ever happened between him and Mandy, but the obsession was almost too much to live with.’ Lindsey would sit at a restaurant with him and his latest inamorata and find herself ignored; he would rush off down the road, his mind elsewhere, leaving her to run behind. Much later, when she retaliated with a brief, half-hearted affair of her own, he was – predictably – outraged.

As his reputation soared, with shoots for Levi’s, Smirnoff and Pirelli, and an extraordinary set of photos of Marco Pierre White in his white-hot kitchens, Lindsey helped Bob upgrade to bigger and bigger premises. ‘I hoped it would be like a ship and I could finally launch it and say, “You’ve got two assistants, this team...”’ but I found it difficult disentangling myself. ‘She wanted a child, he did not. In her late-30s, she lost a baby. ‘He stood at the end of my hospital bed and said, “I’m not designed to cope with women having miscarriages,” and went.’ Today, her reaction is to hoot with laughter at his brazen selfishness. ‘He did a lot of emotion by proxy,’ she continues. ‘Someone we knew had a miscarriage and he went all emotional about that.’

By the time Scarlett was born in 1992 even Bob realised that Lindsey, then 39, had been through the wringer and he bucked up, at least as a father. ‘Then he was obsessed. He only wanted to be with Scarlett. He didn’t want “us”, we couldn’t go out as a family. He used to carry her around as if she were a jewel. Scarlett is now 17 and she’s wonderful,

‘I once asked him to see a therapist and he said, “But I like being a s\*\*\*.” So I felt I was behind thick glass, waving at him’

with a dark, black humour, and I think, “How could you miss this?” He was very frightened of her growing up, becoming a woman. All photographers are control freaks. We shot someone quite young and he said to me, “We took these pictures three days ago and she is already older, but I have her for ever in my camera.”

It was parenthood that belatedly pushed them into marrying in 1997, five years after Scarlett’s birth. ‘We went to St Vincent and were married in this tiny room with a notice that said, Do Not Urinate. Oh Gawd! I was so scared of becoming Mrs Carlos Clarke because then I would become The Wife and not The Mistress.’ Did it happen? ‘I don’t know.’ But at some stage she evolved into a mother figure for him. There was a telling incident when she bought some Shalimar perfume. ‘He said, “You can’t wear that.” “Why not?” “Because that’s a sexy smell.”’

During the 90s and later, Bob grew disillusioned with photography, with the meretricious pomp of modern celebrity, with his own self. He felt beached by the new tide of digital technology. A dinosaur from the age of dark rooms. Where was his lasting legacy? ‘He didn’t like the idea that he wasn’t the in-fashion thing. He didn’t like being older. I said, “Bob, we have a lovely house, another by the sea, a lovely daughter, a huge studio, money in the bank.” It was as if he wanted to be a god. Get yourself in perspective. If you want to be legendary, don’t become a photographer.’ When they moved to Chelsea, Bob announced he was sleeping in the basement flat Lindsey had designed for guests. ‘He said I was sucking all the oxygen out of the bedroom. It is a well-known fact this is what I do.’ To her credit, she is more amused than bitter in recollection. ‘I felt depressed and then an enormous sense of relief came over me.’

Friends assumed that Lindsey was bailing out of the marriage. Was it really over? ‘No. It would never have been

**Top, from left: two award-winning images taken by Bob for a Wallis advertising campaign; Bob retouches photographs in his studio in 1980**

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over. I was just putting up the flag, saying, "You have to change." I once asked him to see a therapist and he said, "But I like being a s\*\*\*." So I felt I was behind thick glass, waving at him. People told me, "Bob does love you," and I thought, "That's emotion by proxy." By the autumn of 2005, he was preoccupied, then began to behave oddly. In the morning, he would go missing and she would find him parked up in his van, just sitting. One Sunday evening, after the drive to her weekly boarding school, Scarlett told her mother, 'Drive carefully. Don't just leave me with Daddy.'

Lindsey cajoled him into the Priory. In the event, it probably reminded him of the abandonment of boarding school. 'Doing himself in was always an option, I knew that,' she says. 'I feel as if I've failed. I think every decision I made was wrong.' By the time he left – he was a voluntary patient – and walked the mile to Barnes station on 25 March 2006, he had deteriorated and was suffering psychotic episodes.

When the police knocked at the door, Lindsey quickly twigged – she tried to force them to leave again, determined not to hear their news. They buried Bob in a jet-black coffin nodding with vermilion roses in Brompton Cemetery, where he often photographed. 'And then we did lots of running away, lots of travelling, and lots of retail therapy – anything, anything.' The judgmental found this unseemly and the sympathetic worrying. 'A friend said, "Your problem is that you haven't grieved properly." I said, "Oh, really? Have you been there when I've woken at 5am, my heart pounding? Have you been there when I think something nice and immediately have a horrible thought to go with it?" At one point, I shook like jelly inside all the time. I couldn't control it. It was the most extraordinary and frightening sensation.' The big surprise has been a new relationship with a man of 39. 'I find it difficult because he is younger, and I know that's ridiculous, but I feel I'm borrowing him. I can't have another life. I can't put the clock back.'

And she adds, 'I went to the cemetery once and lay on Bob's grave and thought, "Would it be easier inside?"' She isn't suicidal, just wearied by the tedious plod of grief. 'The thing is, it doesn't go away. Time doesn't heal. You learn to remove it but it's still there, it's never going to be fine. It's terribly difficult saying that to Scarlett, that it's always going



'I wasn't stupid... I didn't take him on thinking he was going to be sexually driven only by me. But I always knew the affairs didn't mean anything'

to be before and after, as it was for me with my father.' In a further sad development, Bob's younger brother, Andrew, died last year. 'It was terrible for Scarlett. She had bonded with her uncle. They both loved and hated Bob.

'My fear is what impact this will have long-term on her. The impact on me is not the point. And I don't want her to be burdened with the archive, so I may get to the point where I donate it to a museum. I want her to do what she wants to do.' **V**

**Below, from left: Bob features in his photograph of the model Vanessa Upton; a typically erotic image by Bob entitled Adult Females Attack Without Provocation**

Exposure: The Unusual Life and Violent Death of Bob Carlos Clarke by Simon Garfield will be published on Thursday by Ebury, £18.99. To order a copy for £17.10, post-free, call the YOU Bookshop, tel: 0845 155 0711; you-bookshop.co.uk. The Bob Carlos Clarke retrospective, Wall to Wall, is at the Little Black Gallery, London, until 3 July, [thelittleblackgallery.com](http://thelittleblackgallery.com)

