

CHAPTER SEVEN

1973/4

DAVID CASSIDY, AUSTRALIAN TOUR

NEW CROSS HOTEL, SYDNEY

'Don!! My room's on fire!!' came the panicked voice on the phone. It was David Cassidy, phoning from his penthouse suite. Three floors below in rather more humble accommodation, I shook myself awake and glanced at the clock as I hopped around the room feverishly struggling to get my trousers and pants on, literally getting my knickers in a twist! It was 6 am. Once trousered I raced barefoot up three flights of stairs, arriving breathless and banging at David's door. It opened and WOOF! Out billowed an impenetrable cloud of inky black smoke, through which the slight form of David Cassidy emerged choking and gagging. I lunged for him, caught his arm and dragged him outside, a black and white minstrel figure, naked but for his underpants and a thick coat of soot – in fact the only bare white skin visible was the two white lines traced by the air entering his nostrils. Shutting the door on the black pall, I rushed him down two floors to Gerry Slater's room, where I kicked, police raid style, on the door, my arms being occupied in trying to support the dead weight of David's slumping form. Having instructed Gerry to take care of David, I rushed up to the floor below the penthouse with Billy Francis and a couple of the others and we sprinted up and down the corridors banging on doors yelling 'FIRE!!!' and telling everyone to get out of there sharpish. As the hotel's befuddled and blinking guests peeped mole-like from their doors and were suddenly

galvanised by the look of urgency on our faces, I called down to alert Reception and the emergency services.

We went back down to check on David, my heart pumping with a sickening mix of adrenalin and the awareness that his safety was my responsibility alone – this was a personal security man's worst nightmare! But he was reasonably OK, thank God, although he'd inhaled an awful lot of smoke and had to go to hospital to be cleaned up and given oxygen and what have you. The fire department, on investigation, found that there hadn't in fact been a fire at all. The swimming pool pump had somehow gone into reverse and started pumping noxious fumes directly into David's room – and only David's room. In hindsight it all suddenly made sense. There'd been no sense of heat when he'd opened the door – and I'd seen no sign of flames. Nevertheless, who knew what the fumes could have done to him! He might have died in his sleep from carbon monoxide poisoning, not to mention the hundreds of other guests, many of whom were families with young kids.

The firemen escorted us back to the penthouse. It was like walking into a black hellhole – drifts upon drifts of soot like a negative shot of a white Christmas. Everything in there was coated in soot – including every last thread of David's stage clothes. That morning the big question was whether or not to cancel the day's show. In an ideal world you wouldn't do a major concert after inhaling a chimney's worth of soot – but the schedule of a major international tour's incredibly tight. If we cancelled the gig, it couldn't just be slotted in – it would be ages and thousands and thousands of fans would be disappointed. So in the end the old showbiz adage prevailed: the show must go on! Now there was the problem of stage clothes. I suppose if he'd been The Damned or someone a bit on the Goth side, we could have got away with him going on in clothes covered in pitch black soot – but it wouldn't