

Nowhere to Run

The worst thing that could ever happen had happened. I wanted to run and run. Out of the house, out of the world.

A few drunken moments at a party and Cass's world is turned upside-down. She has broken all her own resolutions and betrayed her parents' trust. Now she has an agonizing decision to make which will affect all their lives. Amid all the turmoil and heartbreak, there is only one person who seems to understand what Cass is going through—the last person in the world that Cass would have chosen as a friend, the yobbish bully, James Derwent.

But James has problems of his own, and when these reach a crisis can Cass help him as he had helped her? And will she be in time . . . ?

SUE WELFORD was born in Sussex and trained to be a secretary before giving up paid work to bring up her children. When they started school, she had several part-time jobs, and then became an editorial writer with a local newspaper. When she was made redundant, she continued writing at home and had several articles published in magazines. After five rejected novels, her first book for young adults was published in 1989. *Nowhere to Run* is the eighth of her books to be published by Oxford University Press.

Nowhere to Run

Sue Welford



Sun shimmers on water. Trees quiver in the breeze. Shadows dance on the grass. People walk. Prams, wheels squeaking, bump over kerbs. Kids run, yell, trip, cry . . . all these things a blur, like suddenly squinting into light.

Beside me, James is stretched out on the grass, face up to the sun, asleep . . . or pretending.

This moment . . . the sun, the water, James . . . everyone. I decide to write it all down in case, one day, we forget.

1

I knew I'd been stupid. I didn't need Mel to tell me.

When I first told her what I'd done I giggled and laughed like a silly little kid. I just couldn't help it. It was the most momentous, scary thing I'd ever done in my life. I suppose the enormity of it hadn't quite hit me yet.

'You didn't!' Mel squealed, thinking I was having her on. 'Oh, Cass!'

'I did,' I said. 'Honestly. Don't you think he was just the best-looking guy in the room, though.'

'Well . . . not exactly.' Mel had sobered up by now. 'I mean he was cool, but more your type than mine. Long hair and baggy T-shirts and that kind of stuff are not really my scene.'

She was right. The boy I'd met at Emma's party, Steve, was just the type of boy I dreamed about. Laid back, relaxed, easy blue eyes that stare at you and seem to be trying to read your mind. Mel likes boys with short hair and smart clothes, in fact her regular boyfriend, Michael, looks like something out of a fashion mag. Not my cup of tea at all.

It had all started when Emma's parents went away for the weekend and she decided it was a great chance to have a party. She'd invited everyone in our class, me included.

'Come on, Cass,' Mel had said in one of her wheedling kind of voices as we strolled down the school corridor during lunch break. 'It'll do you good to let your hair down. You can't spend your whole life stuck in your room, dreaming.'

'I don't spend my whole life dreaming,' I protested although I knew what she said was true. Well, almost true anyway. I did do *some* other things besides school work and reading and listening to my CDs and, I suppose I *had* to admit it, dreaming about all the things I wanted to do with my life. I liked swimming and walking in the park and going to the movies and watching TV and stuff. I certainly didn't like parties much though. And I didn't go round with a crowd like most other people. I guess being an only child makes you happy with your own company.

My only real friend is Mel. Tall, willowy, dark hair cut short and spiky. Eyes that are quick and darting, she's full of the self-confidence you'd die for. As friends I suppose we balance one another out. I'm quieter, more thoughtful than her. I'm also fairly short with long, straight sort of reddish mousy hair and brown eyes and hateful snub nose with

freckles on. I suppose I calm Mel down, make her stop and think about things a bit. And she livens me up. Persuades me to go swimming when I'm in the middle of reading a great book, or drags me off to see the latest Disney movie when I'd much rather wait for something more serious. And that's why she was trying to persuade me to go to Emma's party. I hadn't been out anywhere for ages and she'd decided it was about time I did.

I was racking my brains for an excuse *not* to go. I'd gone from inventing a visit from a distant relative to needing to finish an essay. I'd just decided to tell her the truth and say I simply didn't fancy it when a crowd of boys from our class came charging in through the double doors. They almost knocked me and Mel for six.

'For God's sake, you maniacs!' She made a dive for her bag that had gone spinning across the corridor.

I'd been luckier, dodging out of the way before one of them, fat slob Derwent, hurtled into me. As it was, he just gave me a gorilla grin and said 'Sorry, Cass . . . I *don't* think,' then burst out laughing and went off with the others, sniggering and making snide remarks over their shoulders. Fatty Derwent and his mates were pigs. They were always in trouble, getting hauled up to the Head for some act of vandalism or other.

Before Mel could get her bag, another of the animals, Nick Mallon, began using it as a football, kicking it along the corridor in front of him while the others cheered. Stuff spilled out. Her Jackie Collins paperback, make-up bag, hairbrush and, horror of horrors, a packet of Tampax. Red with rage she shot off after Nick and grabbed his jacket, pulling him away. He laughed again as she scooped up her things. She came back, still seething, her bag clutched to her chest.

‘God, I hate those animals!’ She stuffed everything back in.

‘Me too.’ I think I would have died if a packet of *my* tampons had fallen out in front of those guys. But Mel didn’t seem particularly bothered now they’d gone. She was always quick to flare up but never stayed mad for long. She linked her arm through mine, forgetting about the boys and carrying on trying to persuade me to go to Emma’s party.

‘Please come, Cass,’ she said. ‘It’ll be great, I know it will.’

And I couldn’t come up with an excuse quick enough, so I said yes.

Later, when I told my mum, she seemed pleased.

‘You really do spend too much time in your room, Cass,’ she said. ‘I know you’ve got a lot of studying to do and it’s great you’re

getting on so well at school but you've got to have *some* fun.'

I sighed. 'Yeah, I suppose so.' I was perched on the kitchen stool while she peeled the spuds for the evening meal. I hadn't told her Emma's parents were going away. And, strangely, she didn't ask. Maybe she'd just taken it for granted that they would be at home. I wondered afterwards, when the damage was done, if she'd have been so keen for me to go if she'd known they weren't going to be there.

'I'll come and pick you up,' she said. 'Midnight, OK?'

I grinned. 'Is that when my dress turns to rags?'

She turned from the sink, grinning back. 'That'll be the day,' she said.

'What?' I said. 'My dress turning to rags?'

She laughed. 'No . . . when you wear a dress instead of those tatty old jeans.'

'You know, to be honest, I was pretty surprised to see you slink off with Steve,' Mel said the morning after the party.

'I didn't *slink* off,' I protested.

'Well . . . you know what I mean,' she said. 'You'd only just met him. Don't you think it was a bit risky?'

I shrugged. I knew she was right. ‘Yeah,’ I said with another sigh. ‘I guess it was.’

I was sitting on the bottom stair, talking to her on the phone. I’d got a terrible headache. A hangover, I suppose. I’d caught sight of myself as I stumbled down to pick up the receiver. I looked as if I’d got the starring role in a horror movie. Hair sticking up like straw, pale skin, eyes bleary with lack of sleep. My mouth felt like the bottom of the parrot’s cage and I ached all over. People say you forget what happens when you’ve had too much to drink. It’s a lie. You don’t. At least, I didn’t. I remembered it all. Before, during . . . and after.

Steve was a friend of Emma’s brother, visiting them from California. He was taking a year out to travel round Europe before going to college. Blond hair, tanned skin. I could hardly take my eyes off him. We’d danced so close you couldn’t have got a pin between us. And when he whispered in my ear, I’d staggered upstairs without a second thought. I couldn’t help myself. I wasn’t able to say no. I didn’t want to say a single word. I only wanted to drown in the glow of his eyes, the feel of his hands, the smell of his aftershave. The way he groaned into my hair.

‘Oh, Cass . . . Cass . . . Cass . . .’ My whole body went soft as if I was made of cotton wool.

Mel wasn't the only one who was surprised I'd gone upstairs with Steve. I was too. Me, Cass Andrews, who was saving herself for someone she had been going out with for ages and ages and who she really loved. Cass, whose first experience of sex was going to be the most romantic and beautiful thing ever. The thing I hadn't bargained for was being so knocked out Steve had even asked me I hadn't even thought of saying no.

I hadn't kept count of how many drinks I'd had. You don't after the first two or three. Especially those alcopops, so yummy you don't realize how drunk you're getting. How stupid you're starting to behave, as if someone else had invaded your body and taken over. How reality is getting further and further away and you haven't even noticed.

But it hadn't only been the booze . . . it had been everything. The music, the heat, couples twined round one another. Nothing in the world could have stopped me.

'Did he use anything?' Mel's question brought me back to earth with a crash.

My stomach turned over. It was something I'd avoided thinking about. Locking it away in that corner of my mind I keep for things I want to forget.

'I'm not sure,' I admitted.

‘Cass . . . you’re joking!’ I knew she was horrified.

‘It was all so quick . . . and dark,’ I said pathetically.

My heart lurched when I thought about it. The way we had locked the door then sunk down on the pile of coats on Emma’s parents’ bed. Already glued together as if nothing could prise us apart.

Giggling, laughing, sighing, groaning.

Boring old me. He wanted *me*. No one like him had ever fancied me before. Boys I did like generally fancied someone else. Because I didn’t hang out with a crowd they thought I was stuck up and didn’t bother about me. It’s not true. I’m *not* stuck up. It’s just the way I am.

I’d been sitting on the floor watching everyone else enjoying themselves when Steve had come in from the kitchen and sat down beside me. He started talking to me as if I was the most attractive girl in the room.

‘You have got something, haven’t you?’ I’d mumbled later when it all turned deadly serious and it was far too late to turn back. Even if I’d wanted to.

He told me he had and I believed him. I was dizzy, drunk not only on alcopop but on him. His mourn, his hands, his skin, his urgency . . . dizzy, dizzy, dizzy. Being with

him sent me soft and spinning into a tornado of feelings I didn't know I'd got.

Only afterwards I wasn't *really* sure whether he'd used a condom or not.

Mel had lapsed into silence. She was obviously gobsmacked. Speechless with my stupidity. I could almost read her thoughts. She couldn't even bear to put them into words. Surely not me . . . how could sensible old me have been that silly? My thoughts were like frantic fishes swimming in the whirlpool of my mind. Maybe I'd wake up in a minute and find it was all some terrible drowning dream.

'Well, don't worry, Cass,' Mel said in a softer voice, sorry she'd been critical. 'It'll probably be all right.'

But she was wrong.

It wasn't.