

## Walkabout

Extract from *Walkabout* by James Vance Marshall (Puffin, 1979)

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*This novel was written in the 1950s. It describes how three children – two American and one Australian Aborigine – react when they come across something new and unknown.*

survivor – överlevande  
desert – öken  
exhausted – utmattad  
snap – bita ihop  
fear – rädsla  
stretch – sträcka  
ebony – ebenholts (träslag)  
grab – ta tag i  
unarmed – obeväpnad  
attitude – hållning  
threatening – hotfull  
hint – aning  
crinkly – krusigt  
straight – rak

- 5 “Mary!” Peter whispered. “I think there’s someone here!”
- “Someone here! Where?” She turned round. Only by snapping her teeth together did she stop herself from screaming of fear. For there,
- 10 less than four feet away, so close that she could have stretched out an arm and touched him, was a boy. And he was ebony black and quite naked.
- 15 Mary’s first impulse was to grab Peter and run. But as her eyes swept over the stranger, her fear died slowly away. The boy was young – not older than she was; he was unarmed, and his attitude was more surprised than threatening. He wasn’t
- 20 like an African Negro. His skin was black, but with a hint of bronze and almost silk-like. His hair wasn’t crinkly but nearly straight, and his

eyes were blue-black, big, soft and inquiring. In his hand was a dead baby wallaby. All this Mary noticed and accepted. The thing that she couldn’t accept was the fact that the boy was

5 naked.

The three children stood looking at each other in the middle of the Australian desert. Motionless, they stared, and stared, and stared ... Mary had decided not to move. To move would be a sign of weakness. She would stare at the boy until he felt the shame of his nakedness and slunk away. Peter stood waiting, clutching his sister’s hand. He was waiting for something to happen.

10

The Aboriginal was in no hurry. Time had little value to him. He had his next meal – the wallaby. Water was near. For the moment he was content to examine these strange creatures. His eyes moved

15

20 slowly from one to another, examining them from head to foot. They were the first white people a member of his tribe had ever seen...

*Suddenly Peter has to sneeze. This makes the Aboriginal*

25 *laugh and laugh, and then Peter joins in. Mary disapproves...*

inquiring – frågande  
wallaby – känguruart  
motionless – orörlig  
stare – stirra  
weakness – svaghet  
shame – skam  
slink – smyga, slinka (slunk, slunk)  
clutch – hålla tag i  
value – värde  
meal – måltid  
content – nöjd  
examine – undersöka  
creature – varelse  
tribe – stam  
sneeze – nysa  
join in – stämma in  
disapprove – ogilla



“That’s enough, Peter,” she said.

For a moment there was silence, then the bush boy spoke.

“*Worumgala?*” (Where do you come from?)

5 Mary and Peter looked at each other blankly.

The bush boy tried again.

“*Worum mwa?*” (Where are you going?)

It was Peter, not Mary, who answered.

“We don’t know what you’re talking about, darkie.

10 But we’re lost, see. We want to go to Adelaide.

That’s where Uncle Keith lives. Which way do we go?”

The black boy grinned. To him the little one’s voice was comic. Half-gabble, and shrill, like a baby magpie’s. He stepped noiselessly up to Peter, brushed his fingers over the boy’s face, then looked at them. But to his surprise the whiteness hadn’t come off.

15 He ran his fingers through Peter’s hair. Again he was surprised: no powdered clay. He turned to

20 the boy’s clothes. Peter felt flattered and proud.

He understood that the bush boy had never seen anything like him before. He held himself very straight, swelled out his chest, and turned slowly round and round. The bush boy’s fingers plucked gently at his shirt, following the seams and exploring the mystery of the buttonholes. Then he passed from shirt to shorts.

Peter said, “Those are shorts, darkie. Short pants.

30 You ought to have ‘em too. To cover your bottom up. Haven’t you any shops round here?”

The bush boy had found the band of elastic that kept the shorts up.

“That’s elastic,” said Peter. “It keeps your shorts in place. Look!”

35 He stuck his thumbs into the waistband, pulled the elastic away from his hips, then let it fly back.

The smack made the bush boy jump. Pleased with himself, Peter repeated the performance, this time

40 staggering backwards as if had been hit. The black

boy saw the joke. He grinned, but this time he kept his laughter under control; for his examination was a serious business. He ended up with a detailed inspection of Peter’s sandals.

5 Then he turned to Mary. It was the moment she had been fearing. Yet she didn’t draw back. The idea of being touched by a naked black boy scared her. It was terrifying; revolting; obscene. Back in 10 Charleston it would have got the darkie lynched. Yet she didn’t move; not even when the dark fingers ran like spiders up and down her body.

The bush boy’s inspection didn’t take long. The larger 15 of these strange creatures, he saw at once, was much the same as the smaller. His fingers ran over Mary’s face, frock and sandals; then he stepped back, satisfied. There was nothing more he wanted to know.

20 Turning to where the dead wallaby lay in the sand, he picked it up. Some ants had found it, and the boy brushed them off. Then he walked quietly away; away down the valley; soon he was out of sight. The children couldn’t believe it; couldn’t believe that 25 he’d really left them. It was all so sudden.

“Mary!” Peter’s voice was frightened. “He’s gone!”

The girl said nothing. A couple of days ago she’d have known what to do; known what was best; known how to act. But she didn’t know now.

30 Uncertain, she hid her face in her hands.

It was Peter who made the decision. In the bush boy’s laughter he’d found something he liked, something he didn’t want to lose.

35 “Hey, Mary!” he gasped. “Come on! After him!” He went crashing into the bush. Slowly his sister followed.

“Hey, darkie!” Peter’s shrill voice echoed down the valley. “We wanna come too. Wait for us!”

40 “Hey, darkie!” the rocks re-echoed.

**blankly** – uttryckslost  
**to be lost** – vara vilse  
**grin** – flina  
**comic** – lustig  
**gabble** – snatter, kackel  
**shrill** – gäll  
**magpie** – skata  
**noiselessly** – ljudlöst  
**brush** – stryka  
**come off** – gå bort  
**powdered** – pulvriserad  
**clay** – lera  
**flattered** – smickrad  
**swell out** – skjuta ut  
**pluck** – plocka  
**gently** – försiktigt  
**seam** – söm  
**explore** – utforska  
**buttonhole** – knapphål  
**ought to** – borde  
**cover up** – täcka  
**bottom** – ända, bakdel  
**waistband** – linning  
**hip** – höft  
**smack** – smäll  
**performance** – föreställning  
**stagger** – vackla  
**backwards** – baklänges

**joke** – skämt  
**business** – affär  
**fear** – frukta  
**terrifying** – skrämmande  
**revolting** – avskyvärt  
**obscene** – oanständig  
**yet** – ändå  
**frock** – klänning  
**valley** – dal  
**out of sight** – utom synhåll  
**sudden** – plötslig  
**act** – agera  
**uncertain** – osäker  
**decision** – beslut  
**gasp** – flämta  
**rock** – klippa

## Wait for us

