Tom glanced down the path ahead. It rolled uphill and around a curve. Guzzled the last of his water and wiped his sweaty forehead with a trembling hand. Legs fatigued, and certain he'd fall, Tom collapsed on the hot blacktop.

"I'm down for the count. Not gonna make it, but I've had a good run. Go on without me. Tell them I tried."

Janice glanced over her shoulder and rolled her eyes. "You gonna do this our entire walk? We haven't even reached the end of the driveway yet!"

"It's too hot. I'm going back inside."

"Tom!"

The door closed.

Many years ago, when we lived on the island, we were in the habit of going for a daily walk. Rain or shine, we were out on the beach having our daily walk. After I injured my knee, the physical therapist demanded I rest. This put our daily walks on hold, and during that time, we had an unusually wild storms roll through. Living with the ocean in our front yard, we often saw storms out at sea, but the intenseness of them rarely hit land.

The wildness of one particular storm really stressed out one of our kids, and forever after, he never wanted to do anything without checking the weather. The habit became a frustrating obsession, and one day desperate for a walk and fresh air, I assured him the sky was blue, the waves were normal, and the sun was shining.

"Come on, let's go for a walk. Nothing bad will happen."

He gave me that sidelong glance tweens master in short time. The one that declares all parental advice questionable. I kept smiling. The dog started herding us. Yes, herding us. Closer and closer together until the lone decenter gave a frustrated sigh and joined us. We set off down the path that ran parallel to the beach. Dog in his happy place, checking now and again to be sure we were all still following him, occasionally ducking into the underbrush to rustle up a rabbit.

We hit the midway point of the path and the child looked at the sky and shook his head. “It’s gonna rain. We need to go back.”

Delirious with the briny air of the ocean wind in my face, I disagreed. “Come on, it’s fine. We can go a little farther. Maybe to the bench?”

Farther we went, and then certain I couldn’t stretch his patience any longer, we turned and headed home. On the final stretch of the trail, the sky clouded over and things got dark. Darker than a passing cloud blocking the sun for one blissful moment. The kind of dark that makes you look up and access how far you are from shelter.

Being the only adult on this hike, I tried to boost morale. “Ignore the clouds. We only have to make it around the bend and we’re home free. And with these clouds, the nasty little lapwings won’t attack us either!”

It’s true. The plovers ignored us, the seagulls had fallen silent, and the waves were rising.

“It’ll be fine,” I said.

Within seconds, the sky opened, and hail rained down. Not tiny pellet hail, which makes those little pinging noises. I’m talking ping-pong ball sized hail falling from the sky. Even the dog stopped his gallop and stared at me. The dog! I grabbed kids and shoved them under the nearest wattle bush, and ordered the dog to join them. By then, drenched, shivering, and wondering how many bruises I might be sporting, the chaos stopped. The sun returned and birds started singing again.

Kids, now muddy, crawled out from under the bush. One tween giving us the side eye

marched towards home muttering, “Let’s go for a walk she said. It’ll be fine, she said. It won’t rain, she said. I got hailed on and all she can say is just hide under the bush while I catch you a piece of hail. We’re on the verge of death and the woman is trying to run a science experiment!”

It’s been eight years since that eventful walk, and occasionally he still reminds me of: *The time we nearly died because Mom thought it’d be great if we went for a stupid walk.*