**On Routines and a Combination of Questions I’d Always Meant to Ask**

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The payphone to the right of the Chinese restaurant rang rarely. We’d been regulars at the restaurant for twelve years and had yet to see anyone make use of the phone. We’d go for the combination plate, prepared daily from twelve to three. He’d order lo mein and an egg roll. I’d opt for sweet and sour. His jokes as regular as the menu, “I hope it’s always more sweet than sour.” After he passed, I passed on my daily routines – lunch included. No combination the same. Last week I had a craving. Fried rice and wonton soup always welcome. Mostly, I longed for routine. I walked to the restaurant and the phone rang. “Hello?” I said, the chipped handset cradled against my shoulder. Nothing. I pressed on the phone’s hook switch and dialed his cell. As my fingers circled, years of memories swirled. Without waiting for the voicemail to end, I rambled a string of questions I’d always wanted to ask. “Thank you for watching all Stars Wars and Terminator movies with me. Five times. Were they really your favorite movies, too? Who was your favorite Phillies player? Was my meatloaf as good as you made it seem? Did you ever let me win at checkers? Do you know where we put the sweater I handknit for you our first Christmas? Did you really lose the keys that night we camped out back? Do I snore? Were my jokes, especially the knock-knocks, funny? Do you remember who coined our secret knock, the one we used to let the other know we were home? Did you really get seasick on motorboats, or did you not know how to swim? Do you remember what you said to me on the day we met? Do you remember the name of the flower you picked then placed in my hair? Were you happy?” and then dropped the handle. A soft wind blew, and an acorn dropped. I looked down and a perfect pansy – a bright yellow and red flower, the same one he had picked then placed in my hair on the day we met, lay next to my shoe. I startled, then heard his voice in the echo. I smiled then opened the door to the restaurant and asked for our regular booth.