I was going through a bit of a dating dry spell – once again. My friends knew it, which is probably why they pushed me into Chad – literally. I mean, we were out at a bar, dancing, when they literally pushed me into him. They justified their moronic behavior when the embarrassing scenario resulted in one date, and then another.

It was the second date. And I was looking forward to it. Mostly because he had told me he would plan something. He did! He said he’d plan something and I didn’t even have to ask him to do it. I figured it was a step in the right direction. I had been a little leery after our first date. He seemed to spend a lot of time trying to convince me he was smart. It was a little strange, actually. But, he had asked me out again and he had offered to plan the date. And, for a girl who hates to make any kind of decision (but could definitely use a date), I was happy to accept.

The day came and he called.

“What do you want to do?” he asked.

Oh geez. “I’m up for anything,” I replied, hoping his opening line was just an attempt at small talk. But, no such luck.

After some useless indecisive discussion, I finally decided we should grab something to eat. Then I decided on Applebee’s, where I decided we should go see a movie, and I picked the film. Honestly, it seemed amazing he was able to choose his own entrée at dinner.

I was ready to go home and relax after the movie. I mean, I had already made three decisions that evening – four if you count deciding to go out with him again in the first place.

“So what now?” he said, as we drove back towards my place. This time, he would have to make a decision; I knew what I was going to do.

“Well, I’m going to go watch the NBA all-star game. You can join me if you want.” Sure, it wasn’t the most welcoming invite, but I didn’t see a reason to make things too easy for him at this point. But he answered easily enough, and soon we were both on my couch watching the game.

It didn’t take long for me to realize he knew little to nothing about basketball. We’ll call this strike two – only because I’m a terrible ump. And, even though I’m much more of a basketball girl than I am a baseball girl, this guy was about to strike out.

Now before you start feeling all bad for him, let me finish. I tried. Really, I did. I’ve made it no secret that I could use a date, so far be it from me to just write the guy off. Instead, I attempted to transition my monologue on the glory of NBA basketball to dialogue on a neutral subject.
“I always wonder what all their tattoos mean,” I said. (I was trying.)

“Oh. I have some tattoos,” he said. (See? It worked.) I decided to run with it.

“Really?” I said, “Let’s see.” This could be good, I thought. Insightful, at least.

So he stood up and, with his back towards me, lifted his shirt. Immediately I began to try and take everything in. There were multiple tattoos spread between both shoulders and down his spine. Near each shoulder blade were tattoos of a circular design, but I was more interested in the letters running the length of his back. As I struggled to focus, he explained.

“There are actually four different tattoos. The first one I got is the one on my spine, because that really defines me. Then I got the one on my shoulder here…”

He went on and I glanced up towards his neck, if only to be polite. But I kept going back to that first one.

As a kid, I had always been easily thrown when my parents used their “secret spelling language” to converse with one another when there were children around. And I now found myself in an oddly familiar predicament as I tried to decipher this vertical arrangement of letters. Something wasn’t quite right. Maybe it was the font. But it wasn’t the font.

Unfortunately, just as I thought I had cracked the code, he put his shirt down.

But that couldn’t be right…

“Wait, let me see again.” He turned back around and lifted his shirt once again.

Yup.

But just to make sure…

“Oh, and what did you say about the one down your spine?”

“That one says ‘determined,’ ‘cause that’s what really defines me,” he said, as I carefully spellchecked one last time.

Sure enough. Determined.

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Strike – and no date – three.
I finally drafted a piece that had been a story in waiting for over a year. And, although I had attempted the feat before, this time it felt good. I am especially pleased with my ability to just jump in. No drawn out introduction here!

This past weekend I word processed my piece. I used my drafting notes to make several changes as I typed – most in the areas of word choice and sentence structure. I look forward to sharing my work with my writing group this week!

I shared with my writing group this afternoon. I got laughs, so that was good. And I also got some suggestions (which was also good)...
- include that you’re an English teacher
- check for repeated phrases/sentences
- add a paragraph for your (narrator’s) reflection
- consider including the feedback from friends when they heard the story
- describe the guy
- try foreshadowing

Today I wrote a revised introduction. I really like the suggestion of foreshadowing, so I tried to add this element. I’m fairly certain the “dry spell” approach isn’t what was suggested, however I can’t remember the specific suggestion. I’ll have to check in with my group members on that one. I’m trying to be very conscious of developing an interesting, yet brief introduction. I think this works, however. It adds a bit more context and a little more humor. And, if the foreshadowing works, it’s worth it.

I asked one of my writing group members to read/review my new introduction. She had been the one to suggest the element of foreshadowing. She reminded me that she had originally suggested including a statement like, “did I have to spell it out?” in reference to his lack of decision making. Although she did like my take on foreshadowing! She also helped me make a few word choice decisions.

I put it all together. I went back and made some changes in regards to phrasing and sentence structure. (Check out the vertical alignment of the punch line at the end!) I did try the suggested foreshadowing element within the piece itself, although I didn’t feel it worked with my established voice. It didn’t seem genuine given my point of view. So I did stick with the foreshadowing in the new introduction. I posted it on e-anthology with a press request.

Well, this is it! Unfortunately, I only received one response on e-anthology and it was (well, it was nice), but it wasn’t pressing. So I took one last look at it – making sure to read it out loud – and then made my final note here. I’m looking forward to sharing it with all the fellows on Thursday, although I’m contemplating making a copy for each participant...I’m not sure the end is as easy to follow when simply listening. I’ll have to practice a bit and maybe find a test audience.