REVERSAL OF EXPECTATIONS

THREE TO FOUR PAGES MAXIMUM

Write a scene in which a character enters expecting a certain, very clear outcome, but the other character in the scene surprises him, and as a consequence he has to reverse his intention and do something else – practically the opposite of what he entered to do.

The character who enters must come in with a lot at stake and a very clear goal. Give him/her plenty of urgency and make his/her expectations clear. Also make sure that the person with the surprise has a good, strong reason for delivering the surprise. Don’t make her just a messenger – involve her!

As in earlier exercises this scene depends upon an entrance that tells us where the characters are coming from. It is essential. What has happened just before the scene starts? What was each character doing? Try to show us this – reveal it without a lot of expository talk.

And as in the Opposites exercise, this scene is about polarity – change! Go for maximum polarity in the scene to achieve maximum dramatic effect. (Think of Chinatown – the scene where Gittes comes to tell Evelyn he’s turning her over to the police, discovers she’s Katherine’s mother, and ends up planning how to help her escape.)

Questions that should be answered by the assignment:

Who are these people?

What does the main character want? What does the person delivering the surprise want? Where are they coming from?

What was the main character expecting?

What is the surprise? When do we know it? (This is very important and will determine the dramatic shape of the scene – choose your moment carefully.)

How have the characters changed? What’s the next scene?