# Altaring Ann

1. Ann is a private person, not over-fond of words, relying rather on gesture, tone and expression to get her point across. She makes herself clear.
2. She is not a delegator. She likes to do things herself and not explain.
3. In caravan, when Bob leads fast, she goes slow. He forgets how frequently Rebecca needs to stop to pee. He doesn’t notice until stopping for lunch finds her not just behind him.
4. Though she will not speed for him, she is devoted to Bob and when he is in hospital she sleeps in the chair beside him.
5. She loves making arrangements: clear plastic reindeer, wiggle sticks, dried lizards. Everything depends on how things are arranged. She sees the beauty and renders it.
6. She embodies elegance. She creates elegance all around her.
7. She loves to dress in bright colors and flash. Eye catching. A kind of swagger and delight.
8. Her favorite color is chartreuse.
9. Her favorite color is orange, from peach to rust.
10. She keeps a drawer full of leather gloves because her hands are always cold. One pair among the others have the name of her grandmother penned just inside the cuff. If lost please return.
11. She loves to dance, beach music and big band, hips and wrists and the cock of her chin. Swagger and joy.
12. Her legs get restless. She is not on easy terms with sleep.
13. She feeds the family enormously, and takes tiny portions on to her own plate.
14. In the middle of the night she sneaks back for oreos or pecan pie.
15. In the middle of the night she can be alone, wander freely.
16. She keeps her feeders full of seed and wages an endless battle with the squirrels. Feeds her blue birds meal worms stored in the fridge beside the butter.
17. Her dogs know her fierce devotion and return it.
18. When the power fails for a week in January she refuses to take refuge at a hotel, sleeping with her dog on the floor in front of the gas fire.
19. She takes in dogs that others have abandoned.
20. She rescues baby rabbits from the jaws of eager dogs.
21. She hides things.
22. She keeps things.
23. She remembers going out on the ocean in her rowboat so far that a fisherman had to bring her back in.
24. She remembers the grand house of her grandmother that has been demolished.
25. She professes not to love cooking — all that measuring, all those instructions — though she is a bountiful provider of deliciousness.
26. She doesn’t appreciate it when Bob puts the jelly knife in the peanut butter. And so, without fail, he does.
27. She tends to burn things, most notoriously toast or english muffins.
28. When the smoke sets off the fire alarm and brings the firemen, she flirts.
29. With the butchers at the back of the market, she flirts.
30. With the roadstand farmers, she flirts.
31. With the lovely mild-voiced caregiver, the one man among all the broad shouldered women, she flirts.
32. Her best friend’s name is Nancy Dooley. They raise their children together. Nancy’s devotion continues as Ann loses the ability to actively reciprocate. Nancy takes her to get her hair done, this restoration of elegance.
33. Ann isn’t afraid of hard work. She likes working in the dirt, digging things up and planting.
34. She has lilies of the valley and daffodils from her grandmother’s garden growing now in her own.
35. She donates boxes and boxes of monkey grass from her yard to ours.
36. She ornaments every nook and cranny, turtles and rabbits and buddhas and frogs. Angels. Everywhere angels.
37. She would rather be in the mountains than the city.
38. She adores the seaside.
39. Her first dog is a dalmation named Sonny who (without her mother’s blessing) sleeps in the bed with her. Sonny keeps the boys from getting too fresh.
40. Her mother’s name is Rebecca, and so is her daughter’s.
41. Her husband’s name is Robert and so is her son’s.
42. She has one great granddaughter among so many boys. That girl child carries her name. Sullivan Ann.
43. She stands at the window watching the neighbor boys beat on her son, thinking it will not do him any good to have his mother interfere.
44. She sews lace on the cuffs of her infant daughter’s socks and builds a christmas dollhouse in the basement that proves too big to pass through the doorway without dismantling.
45. For some 45 years of her adult life, she is shadowed by the constant companionship of her daughter who lingers always at the age of 6. Rebecca is confidante and challenge to her, a slowing pace and fearful. Ann counts out pills and buys matching outfits.
46. When her grandson is born up in Chicago, she packs the station wagon with furniture and Rebecca and drives all the way up to deliver it, drives slow, with frequent bathroom breaks, only losing the way once or twice, each time finding some nice man to set her back on track.
47. She is devoted to her five grandsons and delighted by her 3 great grandchildren.
48. She is devoted to both her daughters in law, first one and then also the other, the both. Loyalty once forged is not broken. Family is inclusive. She teaches us this.
49. And yet, she never gets over the fact that her mother’s silver went to her step-brother’s wife.
50. She brings pieces of old houses with her, integrating them into the new, newel posts and soffits and iron gates. Family things.
51. She declares, without hyperbole, that she would rather just go on and die than have a colonoscopy, this radical notion of preferring her privacy over the intrusion of care, the notion, viking fierce, that there are things to be valued over longevity.
52. When the deterioration of her brain that is stealing language from her noun by noun is diagnosed, they choose not to tell us. Their wagon circle is a circle of two.
53. He believes he can defend her. Can and must and will. Ad infinitum.
54. Or perhaps he believes that if they don’t say it, it won’t actually be true.
55. We will never know what they were thinking because they never tell us. “We’re fine,” he insists. “Thank you. If we need help we’ll be sure to let you know.”
56. When she fails the driving test because the words and signs have ceased to make sense to her and all Bob’s legal arguing can’t make it right, her heart is broken.
57. When Bob retires and fills the den with his boxes of papers, an endless sort that is more of a shuffling than any moving toward clarity, her heart is broken.
58. When Bob decides the mountains are too far for him to go and that she cannot go without him, her heart is broken.
59. When Bob’s own deterioration makes itself known to us and we take the car keys from him, her heart is broken.
60. When we decide that they both require 24 hour attendence, her heart is broken.
61. When the caregivers decide it’s time to bathe, she hits and kicks and bites.
62. When her last rescue dog bites her, not for the first time, but the first time on our watch, and we take him away from her, her heart is broken. For this she never forgives us.
63. She takes to carrying a small stuffed dog in the crook of her arm, preferring his conversation to ours, more taken by him than the food on her plate.
64. When Rebecca visits, Ann’s face lights with joy. She holds the crayons while Rebecca draws.
65. She is mountain lion, ship captain, firefly, blue bird.
66. She is not afraid of anything.