

Kiss My Aster

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A Christmas Karen

Amanda Thomsen



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"Personal responsibility is dead to begin with!" complained a bitter Karen Scrooge, the miserly owner of a crusty ol' garden shop in the middle of Victorian London. She's a hard-hearted miser who hates Christmas, exploits her clerk Brayden-Jaden Cratchit and looks down on any attempt to help the poor, the environment or anyone other than herself. She is hostile toward Brayden-Jaden for being late to his shift today even though he depends on rides from friends who can afford cars or public transit. Her only admirable trait is her disdain for poinsettias (in this re-teller's view).

On Christmas Eve, she was visited by the Ghost of Gen Z (they/them). With AirPods in and listening to who-knows-what, they show her scenes of Christmases in her earlier life, reminding her that she was young once, too, and did silly things and used

weird slang and enjoyed music that cheezed off the adults around her. The scenes she witnesses soften her heart as she remembers how she wanted to be heard and valued in her childhood and that her feelings were valid back then, but not often heeded. Karen begins to see the light and feels a wee softening of her heart. Karen decides to spend some time with her inner child and do some healing work.

Next, the Ghost of Millennials appears to Karen, showing up in a jolly shade of pink. She shows Karen the way others in her community are celebrating Christmas with the true Christmas spirit, even if they have limited financial means. This is especially true of Brayden-Jaden, who most certainly cannot afford a home of his own on his minimum wages. Braden-Jaden has a tiny apartment, the size of a closet, big enough just for him and his prized possession—an extraordinarily expensive variegated monstera named Tiny Tim. Brayden-Jaden saved all his wages to afford Tiny Tim and hopes to profit on propagating Tiny Tim someday, but can't keep the heat on high enough to keep the plant alive. It has a debilitating case of spider mites. Brayden-Jaden is concerned the market is going to drop out before the mites go away.

The Ghost of Gen X arrives, silent and aloof, with a boombox blaring "A Very Special Christmas" on cassette. He shows Karen scenes following a death in the neighborhood. Karen sees that the dead woman in the vision died alone, with no one to mourn or miss her. When Karen realizes she is the dead person, she begs the Ghost of Gen X to put down his iced coffee and to tell her that the future can be changed if she changes how she's living dramatically.

Karen then awakens back in her own room, above the garden shop, on Christmas morning. She is filled with delight and gratitude that she's been given the chance to truly change. She becomes a benefactor to Brayden-Jaden and Tiny Tim (the mites went away!) and a generous, well-loved member of the community for the rest of her life. She

always kept the spirit of Christmas in her heart, forever asking Brayden-Jaden for his insights on how to run the shop, reviewing merchandise together before it gets ordered, and most importantly, buying a nice lunch as an appreciative surprise occasionally.

Karen had no further visits with the Spirits, but lived with good vibes only ever afterwards. And it was always said of her that she knew how to keep Christmas cactus alive and thriving, if anyone alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us—all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed (but did not say because it was only a plant): God bless us, every one! **GP**

Amanda Thomsen is a funky, punky garden writer and author now with her own store, Aster Gardens in Lemont, Illinois. Her blog is planted at KissMyAster.com and you can follow her on Facebook, Twitter AND Instagram @KissMyAster.