

Kiss My Aster

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It's a Resourceful Life

Amanda Thomsen



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"I owe everything to independent garden centers—help them."

"Help my friends with small businesses, please."

"I love our local plant shop—watch over it tonight."

Three galaxies appear:

"Hello Joseph, what's going on down there?" says the first.

"Looks like we'll have to send someone down. Tonight is their crucial night. Who's turn is it?" says the second, Joseph.

"It's that idiot Clarence again," harrumphs the third. A blinking star appears and Joseph greets him, "Clarence, it's a rough night for small business and we're putting you on the case. Watch this to get up to speed."

"For years people were 'trapped' in their small communities, and as such, could only buy from local shops and vendors so everyone kind of had the same stuff. Since everyone in town knew everyone because they yapped to their dressmaker while getting dresses made and gossiped with the general merchandise guy while buying their seeds for survival. There was a community that loved/had opinions on everyone no matter what. Rarely would they let one of their own fail.

"Eventually, people could purchase through the post, via ads in newspapers or from catalogs. That meant freedom to buy more diversely with less busybodies up in their business. This went on for a while, then some of the catalogs got BIG and started stealing customers from their local businesses. Not because they were faster, but because you could get something DIFFERENT or better or just more privately. Mom-and-pop shops start feeling the pinch from all this living in the future. Are you following, Clarence?"

"Yassss," says Clarence.

"Good because here's where things get weird. The Internet was invented and now everyone is connected, but not in a personal way and they can buy or sell anything. But hey! Let's focus on this one being in the Chicago suburbs, Clarence. Her name is Amanda and she owns a small business, but yet we see her ordering five different mascaras for her teen to try from something called 'Prime' to be dropped at her doorstep at 4:00 a.m."

"What's 'mascara'?" questions Clarence.

“Never you mind. Amanda can’t beat the prices at mega stores called ‘big box stores’ and doesn’t try. She has tons of experience and knowledge about plants and tries to be a hub in her community, but sales were really, really rough for her this last August and though things are fine now she keeps beating herself up over it.”

Clarence asks, “If Amanda is pro small business, why did she order that overnight mascara delivery?”

Joseph rebuffs, “There wasn’t any place to go and talk mascara with someone who cares so she gave up and went for convenience.”

“Do other people shop ‘big boxes’ for convenience as well?” Clarence asks, adding, “What about community? Does that ever come back into style?”

Joseph answers, “In adorable, walkable cities, sometimes, yes. But even entrepreneurs with the BEST ideas struggle these days. That’s why Amanda is threatening to throw herself into the I&M Canal.”

“I better get down there!” Clarence rushes. He appears next to Amanda on the Stephen St. bridge. “Don’t do it! AMANDA! Don’t throw yourself into the I&M Canal!”

Amanda, shocked at hearing her name, figures Clarence is a customer she just doesn’t recognize. “Dude, I wasn’t going to throw myself in. I’m on my way to the post office to ship all these online orders because I had to switch gears REAL HARD in August due to sales that totally stunk.”

Clarence is shooketh. “I was told you were having a crucial moment and were going to throw yourself off the bridge.”

Amanda snorts, “Yeah, I guess I may have said something like ‘Ugh, I hate the post office. I’d rather throw myself in the I&M Canal!’ as I was leaving the shop, but I was being super cynical which—by the way—is the hallmark of owning a small business. Who are you anyway?”

Clarence disappears, Amanda mails the package and gets back to the shop where the door is bedecked with jingle bells. You know what they say, “Every time the door dings in a small business, profit is on the way!” **GP**

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