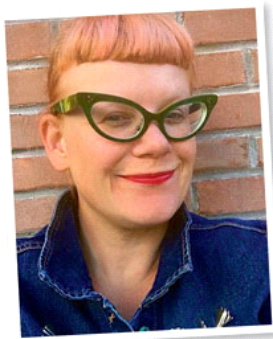


Kiss My Aster

6/30/2025

A Tale of Two Karens

Amanda Thomsen



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To begin with, I don't love the term "Karen." It has its place; for now, it's in the column with apologies to all the Karens.

I have a customer named Karen, she is "Customer of the Year" because she comes in nearly every day. She sits on our sofa to chat, sometimes brings us pickle soup from the Polish deli. When she first came in she called philodendrons "rhododendrons" and didn't know there was ever any difference between the two. Her home and garden are now filled with plants from us and I love that she did it piece by piece (I feel like so many people bite off too much because they want some dramatic reveal like on TV). I made centerpieces for her grandbaby's shower and also a little green pageant sash that said "AG Ambassador." She sits on the couch and tells

customers what to buy; I just get to stand there and smile. It's EVERYTHING I could hope for in a customer; it's a dream.

Karen saw a photo of a gold basket lined with sheet moss and stuffed full of orchids in a magazine and texted me the photo inspo and that she's a little scared but ready to try orchids. Can we replicate this look for her? Yes, absolutely. We do it and she lets me know once a week that the orchid is exceeding her expectations, still growing and flowering and putting out new spikes. It's been over a month now and she's so proud of herself and I'm proud, too. Again, it's what we hope our days are filled with! Fulfilling relationships are just so ... fulfilling? Give me more.

Karen 2: Rewind to the day before Mother's Day. A young woman comes in and buys the prettiest white Cattleya orchid you've ever seen as a gift for her mother. It is COVERED with blooms and buds. She asks for details and Tyler is on the scene. They go over what the orchid needs because there's literally nothing in the world Tyler cares more for on this planet than orchids.

One week after Mother's Day the recipient of the orchid comes in and says she received this as a gift and asks how to take care of it. Tyler is on the scene again. She says she has it in a southern exposure window—he explains how to do it better by moving it to indirect light and he explains watering. He has the enthusiasm of a sugared up toddler. She leaves.

Three days later she calls—the shop isn't open and I'm out doing installs so she texts me that the orchid is failing because she was told to water it incorrectly and she only has northern exposure. I see it for what it is immediately.

She sends pictures, two flowers out of maybe 17 have slight gray around the edges due to aging out. She wants to exchange it. I let her know we only do exchanges within a few days of purchase, very clinically. I know she's not happy.

Her story is changing by the minute because she isn't getting what she wants. I say very little because I know how this is going to go. I'm not going to engage with her because when you wrestle with a pig in mud, you both get dirty, but the pig likes it.

I see the problem as she isn't grateful for the gift her daughter picked out for her. There was no issue with the quality or instruction she's been given. If there was, I'd have bent the rules for her and exchanged or refunded or delivered her the moon.

She posts on Yelp that we don't tell people how to take care of our plants. I snort.

If there'd been a valid criticism? Oh, there's so much in my shop one could pick on that would be a swift, but accurate, dagger to the heart, like the perennials aren't all priced or when I don't hear someone come in because I'm working at my desk, hyperfocused, and greet them or that the music is too loud. (I do that on purpose so people don't talk on the phone in the shop—is that evil?)

Listen, no one likes to hate on me more than I do, Karen 2, just give me a legit reason and I will BURY ME. But this one? Nope. **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](https://www.kissmyaster.com), and you can follow her on Facebook, Twitter, Threads AND Instagram @KissMyAster.