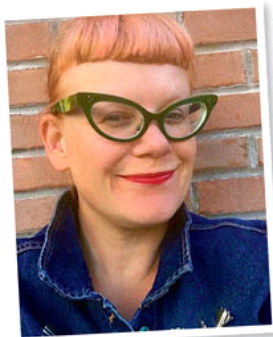


Kiss My Aster

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The Grit of the Magi

Amanda Thomsen



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Eight dollars and eighty-seven cents. That was all. Not counting the untouchable folders in the multitudes of savings accounts that she'd set up after reading "Profit First" by Mike Michalowicz. She'd focused so hard on paying off all her old debt by putting on blinders and barreling through with imputation of parsimony that such close dealings implied.

She checked her account balance once more. Eight dollars and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.

The only thing she could do was flop down on the vintage sofa and howl. So Amanda did.

Tomorrow would be Christmas Day and she had only \$8.87 with which to buy her landlord a present. She had something for everyone in her family, already, of course. But what to get for her landlord? He always heaped wine and chocolates on her each Christmas morning. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only \$8.87 to buy a present for the landlord. She had spent some time planning for something nice for him, like a hammer shaped like a fist or a case of zip ties. Something fine and rare—something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honor of being owned by her landlord, Al.

Suddenly she whirled from the side door of the shop and stood before the outdoor space that so recently held the freshest balsam firs known to humankind; her eyes were shining brilliantly, but her face had lost its color within 20 seconds. Rapidly, she pulled the door open and went outside.

Amanda had decided her gift would be better as a grand gesture rather than material goods—she found it at last. She knew the value of her gift was as generous as she could be. A tear came to her eye.

At 7:00 on Christmas morning the coffee was made and the landlord stopped by to drop off a gracious amount of chocolates and many bottles of wine.

Amanda leaned on the corner of the POS counter. Al stopped inside the door and there was an expression on his face that she couldn't read; he simply stared at her fixedly with that peculiar expression on his face.

"Hey, Al! You're a pretty great landlord and I couldn't do it without you. I almost got through Christmas without giving

you a present. But here it is ... you can have my outdoor sales area/courtyard to build a building on. I know you want it when my original lease is over in two years and that not having a building there is losing you money every second of every day, so you should just take it now. Say 'Merry Christmas!', Al, and let's be happy."

"I can have my lot back right now?" asked Al, laboriously, as if he hadn't arrived at that patent fact, yet even after the hardest mental labor. Out of his trance Al seemed quickly to wake.

To fill the awkward pause—"I'm going to open the card you brought me, Al"—Amanda's fingers tore at the paper. Then an ecstatic scream of joy, and then, alas! A quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails, necessitating flopping down on that old sofa again.

For there on the card ... "You can keep your outdoor sales area/courtyard, Merry Christmas, Amanda!" Her heart had simply craved and yearned over it . And now it was hers.

The magi, as you know, were wise men—wonderfully wise men—who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones, possibly bearing the privilege of exchange in case of duplication. And here I have related to you the uneventful chronicle of two entrepreneurs who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest, exact same treasure. But in a last word to the wise of these days, let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest. O, all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the magi. **GP**

Amanda Thomsen is a funky, punky garden writer and author 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.

Based on the short story "Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry.