

CHRISTMAS EXCHANGE

By

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FADE IN:

INT. MODEST BOARD ROOM - DAY

AMANDA, 28, shy but pretty, stands in front of a screen, presenting to two BUSINESSMEN and her female boss JANICE, who are seated at the table. Janice is wearing an ugly Christmas sweater and so is Amanda as she presents.

Amanda looks incredibly nervous as she tries to find the right words. On the screen is a picture of a cow wearing an ugly Christmas sweater with a slogan that says, "You can't make our beef ugly". The businessmen are squinting at the screen, confused by the message.

AMANDA

You see, it's a commentary on the, uh, ugly sweater trend. The cows are, well the cows put on the sweaters, so people don't want to eat them...

(wipes sweat off her brow)

...but we still want to. Eat them. Not when they're alive...we want you to kill them so we can eat them. Well not kill them, I mean you do kill them, but it sounds bad when I say it like that.

Janice looks horrified.

BUSINESSMAN 1

The cows are afraid we'll kill them, so they put on ugly sweaters?

AMANDA

Exactly!

BUSINESSMAN 2

Young lady we don't want our customers to think our cows fear death.

AMANDA

Oh no of course not.

BUSINESSMAN 2

Our cows live a good life.

JANICE

Let me step in here. I don't think Amanda is doing this ad campaign justice. You have beautiful cows, beautiful, juicy, delicious cows.

AMANDA

That's why they're wearing sweaters! To make them less appealing.

The Businessmen exchange a glance.

BUSINESSMAN 1

(shaking his head)

It's not a fit for us.

Janice glares at Amanda.

AMANDA

Can I restart? I get a little nervous speaking in front of people. I just need a sip of water.

Amanda reaches for the water pitcher on the boardroom table. Her hands are shaking so much that she spills the water everywhere. Everyone SCREAMS and jumps up.

AMANDA

I'm sorry!

Amanda pulls at her ugly sweater, getting flushed and hot.

AMANDA (CONT'D)

It's really hot in here.

Janice leans down, attempting to clean the spilled water off the table and ends up bumping heads with Businessman 1 who is doing the same thing.

BUSINESSMAN 1

Ow!

Amanda continues to tug at her sweater, getting hotter. Her vision blurs and her eyes roll back into her head. Amanda faints, crashing to the floor. Everyone GASPS.

CUT TO:

INT. JANICE'S OFFICE - DAY

Amanda sits across from Janice, who looks stern sitting behind her large desk. Amanda's head is down, humiliated.

JANICE

I don't think this is working out.

AMANDA

Janice I am so sorry, that will not happen again.

JANICE

Why couldn't you just do it like we practiced?

AMANDA

I tried, but sometimes when I get nervous my mind goes blank.

JANICE

I let you pitch because I thought you were ready. That concept was bullet proof. Cows in sweaters is a good idea!

AMANDA

Yes, Janice it's a great idea!

JANICE

I blame myself. I should have known this would happen. You've never been able to speak in front of people.

AMANDA

Come on, don't bring up the past.

JANICE

Like the fifth-grade spelling bee? When you misspelled 'acquaintance' and then fell off the stage?

AMANDA

One incident from your childhood doesn't have to define your whole life.

JANICE

Or when you had to debate against Felix Hunter in high school? You sweat through your shirt so badly you had to wear your gym clothes for the rest of the day.

Amanda looks dejected.

AMANDA

Come on Janice don't do this. It's Christmas.

JANICE

I can't have someone who faints presenting to my clients. I'm sorry Amanda. You're fired.

EXT. TOM'S HOUSE - DUSK

Amanda pulls her beat up, old sedan into the driveway of Tom's small house. There are Christmas lights strung along the roofline and there's a wreath hanging on the door.

INT. TOM'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DUSK

Amanda walks in the front door carrying a box of her belongings from work. TOM, 28, thin and tall with floppy hair, is sitting on the couch watching TV. He turns it off.

She drops the box and her purse on the floor and sits next to him on the couch. He puts his arm around her.

TOM

I heard the news. Sorry Babe.

Amanda looks up at him with tears in her eyes.

AMANDA

From who?

TOM

Bobby told me first, then Jesse and then my mom called.

AMANDA

Your mom knows?

TOM

Word travels fast around here, you know that. Everybody knows everybody.

Amanda shakes her head and leans into Tom's chest.

AMANDA

I hate this town.

Tom takes his arm off her and sits up, looking serious.

TOM

Hon, I know the timing of this really stinks, but there's something I've been meaning to tell you.

Amanda wipes the tears out of her eyes and sits up.

AMANDA

What?

TOM

Do you remember Marla Adams from high school?

AMANDA

Yes, I remember her Tom. There's like four hundred people in this town and she was the prom queen. Why are you asking me that?

TOM

Well, she and I have been talking a bit lately and, well, she asked me to go on a date with her.

AMANDA

You're cheating on me?

TOM

No, no, not at all. You think I want a reputation like that? No, I told her I couldn't say yes to the date unless I broke up with you.

AMANDA

So, you said no to the date, right?

Tom hesitates.

AMANDA

Because normally when someone asks someone out who is in a committed relationship, they say no.

TOM

Babe, when we broke up the second time, I made you a promise. I said I would be totally honest with you no matter what. So here goes - I'm sorry Amanda, it's just not working out.

Amanda shakes her head, stunned.

AMANDA

Wow. That's the second time I've heard that line today.

Tom shrugs. Amanda stands up, disoriented.

AMANDA (CONT'D)

I have to pack up my things.

TOM

Yeah, I thought about that. I went to the liquor store to get you some boxes. That's when Bobby told me you lost your job.

Tom stands up and picks up the empty liquor boxes and hands them to Amanda. Amanda stares at him, still in shock.

EXT. AMANDA'S PARENTS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Amanda pulls into the driveway with boxes piled high in her car. The walkway is lit up with flashing holiday lights.

She opens the trunk, pulls out a large box, and heads inside.

INT. AMANDA'S PARENTS' HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

GINNY, 60 and BUD, 60 open the front door, looking upset.

GINNY

Oh honey we heard about Tom.

Bud takes the box from Amanda's hands.

BUD

And your job.

GINNY

What a terrible day you've had!

Ginny throws her arms around Amanda and pulls her into the house. Amanda steps on a doormat in the walkway which triggers the song, "We wish you a Merry Christmas" to chime.

Amanda looks up, not sure where the music is coming from.

GINNY

Sorry about that honey, your father just got that from the Robinsons next door.

BUD

Remember that old sled we had in the back yard? I traded it for the ringer. Cool, right?

Amanda looks frustrated.

AMANDA

Who told you about me and Tom? We literally just broke up.

GINNY

The Robinsons next door when Daddy was trading the sled. I can't believe Marla would treat you like that after you two worked together for a whole summer at the Shop Mart.

BUD

Marla's been blabbing to the whole town.

GINNY

Well good luck to her anyway. That Tom is a serial dumper. How many times has he dumped you honey?

AMANDA

Hopefully that was the last one.

Ginny and Bud look at Amanda with pity.

AMANDA

I guess the Robinson's also told you that I have to live with you for a while, now that I'm homeless and broke.

BUD

No problem Mandy, your old room is waiting for you.

AMANDA

Thanks Dad.

INT. AMANDA'S OLD ROOM - NIGHT

Bud and Amanda bring in the last of her boxes and set them down on the floor. The room is soft pink with a white four-poster bed and a makeup desk pushed into the corner.

BUD

Do you need any help unpacking?

AMANDA

No Dad, I'm fine, thanks.

BUD

Okay, if you do just give a holler.

Bud exits the room and closes the door behind him. Amanda lays onto her bed and SIGHS.

Amanda's cellphone RINGS. She fishes it out of her pocket.

AMANDA

Hi Shelby, I guess you heard the news?

(beat)

Yeah, a drink sounds great.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

The bar is crowded and decorated for Christmas. Amanda is still wearing her ugly Christmas sweater and sits at a table with her friend SHELBY, 28. Shelby has curly hair, red lipstick and lots of cleavage. They are drinking cocktails and snacking on peanuts.

AMANDA

I waited for that job for five years Shelby. There's literally one advertising company for fifty miles and I just blew it. Janice laughed at me when I asked for a reference letter. What am I going to do now?

SHELBY

I'm sure the Shop Rite would take you back.

AMANDA

I should have told Janice the concept was off. Putting sweaters on cows doesn't make people want to buy beef.

SHELBY

Then why didn't you?

AMANDA

Because she's the boss. I was afraid that if I said something, she'd fire me.

SHELBY

Well that happened anyway.

BOBBY, 28, and TIFFANY, 28, walk up to Amanda and Shelby.

BOBBY

Amanda hey, sorry to hear about your job.

TIFFANY

And Tom, such a shame. You two were dating forever. Well I guess on and off forever, with all the breakups. My parents thought for sure you two were going to get married.

SHELBY

They'll get back together again. He'll get tired of Marla and take her back.

AMANDA

(annoyed)

I don't want him to take me back Shelby. We're over for good this time.

SHELBY

I've heard that before.

BOBBY

Yeah it won't last. Tom can't handle a woman like Marla.

TIFFANY

What's that supposed to mean?

BOBBY

You know really...

Bobby moves his hands to mimic the curves of Marla's body. When he catches Tiffany's glare, he realizes his error.

BOBBY

...really smart.

AMANDA

Can you guys stop talking about me like I'm not sitting here?

SHELBY

All right come on you two, move along. Amanda's very upset right now.

Amanda shakes her head.

JESSE, 25, walks up to Amanda with his friend JOHN.

JESSE

Hey Amanda, I heard about your epic meltdown today.

(pointing to her sweater)

Is that the sweater you told them to put on their cows?

Jesse and John LAUGH while Amanda rolls her eyes.

JOHN

It's like the time at Shop Rite when she barfed because she had to make an announcement over the loudspeaker.

JESSE

Dude, she didn't barf today, she fainted.

JOHN

Oh, I thought she barfed.

AMANDA

Would you just get out of here!

JESSE

Jeez.

The men walk off.

SHELBY

Let me get you another drink.

Shelby stands up and walks over to the bar.

MRS. ROBINSON, 50, sits down at the table across from Amanda. She is wearing a sweater set. Amanda SIGHS.

MRS. ROBINSON

I had my heart broken when I was your age. Jimmy Sloan was my first crush until Sissy Waters batted her eyes at him. Oh, how I hated that girl.

AMANDA

Mrs. Robinson, I know you're trying to cheer me up, but do you think you could butt out? It'd be nice if for once I could tell my parents about my life before you do.

Mrs. Robinson looks shocked.

MRS. ROBINSON

Well, I was just trying to be helpful Amanda. Heaven knows it can't be easy for them what with all your "challenges" over the years.

Amanda glares at her. Shelby returns to the table.

SHELBY

Can I have my seat back please?

Mrs. Robinson stands up and walks away. Shelby sits and hands Amanda another drink.

SHELBY

Was she telling you the story about Sissy Waters again?

AMANDA

I'm so sick of living in a place where everyone knows my business. I would love to be able to walk into a bar and have a drink alone without anyone walking up to me and telling me how to live my life.

SHELBY

This town has a lot of opinions, especially about Tom. Remember when I went on a date with him during one of your break-ups? Oh, they were relentless. But there aren't exactly a ton of eligible bachelors around here. That's probably why Marla went for him. I mean look at us, we're twenty-eight years old and still single. We're practically old maids!

AMANDA

This isn't helping.

Behind them, Tom, and MARLA, 28, walk into the bar. Marla is dressed in a skin-tight red velvet dress. The whole bar collectively hushes as they enter.

Amanda spots them and downs the drink Shelby brought her.

Marla and Tom make their way over to Amanda's table.

MARLA

Amanda, hi.

AMANDA

(sarcastic)

Marla, great.

MARLA

I just wanted to say that I'm sorry and I hope we can still be friends. I just needed to follow my heart, you know?

Amanda's eyes Marla and Tom, taking in the new couple.

SHELBY

I love that dress Marla.

MARLA

Oh thanks! I just bought it down at Cleo's. Hey, are you two coming here for the New Year's party?

SHELBY

Every year.

MARLA

Great then we'll see you then.

The din of the crowd resumes as Marla and Tom walk away.

SHELBY

New years is a great time for a fresh start. Forget all the bad stuff.

AMANDA

Maybe you're right. Maybe I do need a change.

Amanda tries to sip her drink but it's empty.

AMANDA

I'm going to the bar.

Amanda's vision is a little blurry as she heads to the bar.

ANGLE - BAR

The BARTENDER hands her a drink when she arrives.

BARTENDER

I had one already made for you Amanda. I figured you'd want a steady flow tonight. How you holding up?

Amanda takes the drink but ignores the question. She sips it as she turns to look around the room.

On the back wall of the bar there is a large map glued to the wall of the state and the neighboring states as well.

ANGLE - MAP WALL

Amanda walks over to the map, unsteady on her feet. She notices the red "You are here" star over the town of Stenson. She traces her hand along the map, moving to the right across the state line. She stops on a town named "Possibilities". She stares at it for a moment, thinking.

Shelby walks over to Amanda.

SHELBY

Amanda, are you okay? People are saying you're behaving strangely.

AMANDA

Shelby look at this town, have you ever heard of it?

SHELBY

Possibilities? No, I don't think so.

AMANDA

It's destiny, don't you think? You were right, with a new year comes a new start.

SHELBY

Wait, what do you mean?

AMANDA

How many times have I said I wanted to move out of this place?

SHELBY

Probably a million.

AMANDA

Well this time I mean it. I'm really gonna do it.

Amanda raises her hands excitedly.

AMANDA

I'm leaving Shelby. I'm leaving Stenson with its stupid memories and its stupid gossip.

Some of the patrons at the bar start to look at Amanda.

AMANDA

I'm going to a place where people don't remember when I backed my car into a tree when I was taking my driver's test or that I got caught cheating on a French test.

More people take notice of Amanda as she rants.

AMANDA

A place where I can do the things I've always wanted to do like learn to ski or play the guitar.

SHELBY

Amanda you're making a scene.

AMANDA

I don't care anymore.

(addressing the crowd)

That's right everyone, I'm getting out of this town and away from all of you!

Amanda grabs her coat and heads towards the door. She turns back and faces her audience.

AMANDA

I'm leaving now so you can spend the rest of the night gossiping behind my back. You're welcome!

Amanda SLAMS the door as she storms out of the bar.

INT. AMANDA'S PARENTS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - THE NEXT MORNING

Amanda sits across from her mother at the breakfast table. Her father walks over and pours each of them some coffee.

GINNY

That was some scene last night at the pub. Everyone's talking about it.

BUD

The Robinson's said you insulted everyone.

Amanda sips her coffee.

AMANDA

I'm sorry if I embarrassed you, but I meant what I said. I can't live here anymore.

GINNY

The whole town is going to be talking about this. It might even make the paper. 'Amanda Biehl goes on a rant at local bar'.

Amanda notices the Christmas mugs everyone is drinking from.

AMANDA

Are these new?

GINNY

Yes. I traded our Christmas mugs with Mrs. Jenkins for hers.

(shakes her head)

Stop trying to change the subject.

BUD

Mandy are you serious about moving away?

AMANDA

Dead serious Dad.

GINNY

Honey you've grown up in a small town, city life is very different.

AMANDA

It's not a big city Mom, it's a town called Possibilities about two hundred miles east of here. Have you heard of it?

GINNY

No.

Bud sits down at the table.

BUD

Have you ever even been there?

AMANDA

No. But I looked at some pictures online last night. It's a cute town. Big enough that I can stay anonymous but small enough that it won't be too much of a change.

GINNY

But what about Christmas? It's three weeks away.

AMANDA

I know the timing is bad, but this feels right. I can't get the idea out of my head that I need to do something different. Mom I don't just want to move to a new town, I want to change who I am. I am tired of the 'old Amanda' holding me back. I'm going to become 'new Amanda' - someone who takes risks.

Bud and Ginny glance at each other and exchange a nod.

GINNY

We knew this day would come eventually.

BUD

I don't like the idea of you going to a strange place all by yourself. Can we drive you there at least?

Amanda smiles and puts her hand over her father's hand.

AMANDA

No, but thanks Daddy.

EXT. AMANDA'S PARENTS' HOUSE - THE NEXT DAY

Bud carries two boxes and Amanda loads them in her trunk.

BUD

It feels like you just moved back in.

AMANDA

(LAUGHS)

Well at least I didn't unpack.

Ginny walks out and hands Amanda a brown lunch sack.

GINNY

Just some food for the road.

Bud hands her some money.

BUD

And some gas money.

GINNY

Oh Amanda, are you sure about this?

AMANDA

I'm sure.

Ginny hugs her daughter.

GINNY

We're going to miss you honey.

AMANDA

Me too.

Amanda hugs her dad and gets in her car. Amanda rolls down the window and waves at them.

AMANDA

Goodbye old Amanda, hello new!

She pulls out of the driveway as her parents wave goodbye.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Amanda drives along the highway. She passes a sign that says "Possibilities - 15 miles".

EXT. POSSIBILITIES - DOWNTOWN MAIN STREET - DAY

Amanda drives her car through town. The street is decorated for Christmas with tinsel and holly running up the streetlights and wreaths hanging from the stop lights.

There's a bank, a bakery, a pet store, a butcher's shop and numerous other shops lining the street. PEOPLE are walking around bundled up in their winter coats carrying shopping bags and walking their DOGS.

INT. AMANDA'S CAR - DAY

Amanda looks around as she drives through town, smiling.

EXT. MOTEL - DUSK

Amanda pulls her car into the motel's parking lot. The building is modest with a few units across two floors.

INT. MOTEL - LOBBY - DUSK

Amanda walks into the lobby and up to the front desk. There is a CLERK, 50, standing behind the desk.

AMANDA

Hi, I'd like a room please.

CLERK

Name?

AMANDA

Amanda Biehl.

CLERK

Do you have ID?

Amanda smiles and reaches her for wallet and hands the man her driver's license.

AMANDA

It's funny, I'm not used to people not knowing who I am.

CLERK

Are you a celebrity?

AMANDA

No.

CLERK

How long are you staying?

AMANDA

I don't know, hopefully for a while.

CLERK

How many nights do you want to pay for?

AMANDA

Can we keep it open ended for now? I'm going to look for an apartment in the morning.

CLERK

What brings you to town?

AMANDA

The possibilities.

Amanda smiles proudly while the clerk rolls his eyes.

CLERK

I've heard that one before.

INT. MOTEL - AMANDA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Amanda carries her suitcase into her room. It's a small room with a queen bed in the center. She places her suitcase down and walks over to the window.

She pulls back the curtain and looks out over the town.

AMANDA

Home sweet home.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOTEL - THE NEXT MORNING

Amanda walks out of the building wearing her jacket and hat. She breathes in the cold air and walks down the street.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Amanda is all smiles as she regards her new town.

As she walks, she sees fliers for the annual Possibilities Christmas Eve Festival located in the city square. It notes that there will be ice skating, music, food and more.

Amanda walks past a STRANGER on the street and greets him.

AMANDA

Hi.

The stranger looks at Amanda, wondering if he knows her, confused why she said hi. He ignores her and moves on.

Amanda is pleased by this reaction.

EXT. BAKERY - DAY

Amanda passes the Sweet Street Bakery and notices a sign in the window that says: *Apartment for Rent - Inquire Within.*

Amanda opens the door and walks inside.

INT. BAKERY - DAY

The bakery is decorated in red and green and filled with beautiful Christmas cookies and cakes. Amanda marvels at all the amazing desserts.

She walks up to the counter where TINA, 30, thin with a pixie haircut, greets her.

TINA

Can I get you something?

AMANDA

I'd love one of everything, it all looks so good. But actually, I wanted to ask about the apartment. Is the landlord here?

TINA

That's me. I own the building. Tina Reynolds.

Tina extends a hand. Amanda shakes it.

AMANDA

Amanda Biehl.

TINA

Come on, I'll show it to you.

Want to read more? Select the reward on the kick starter page for a copy of the full script!