

WASABI

Written By

John McCarney

john@jfmwrites.com
661-993-0983

FADE IN:

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

A Black SUV with an Uber sticker in the window pulls up to a sushi restaurant. A well-dressed man, ANDREW (40s) helps a fashionista type, BRITTANY (30s) out of the car.

She SNAPS a selfie of her and Andrew as he sneaks a KISS.

His Rolex and her Chanel purse draw attention from passersby. They playfully argue as they hurry toward the restaurant.

BRITTANY
No... I'm not trying the eel.

ANDREW
Where's your sense of adventure?

BRITTANY
Yuch! Don't waste your money.

Andrew makes the money sign with his fingers.

ANDREW
(cocky)
Babe...

She smiles, grabs his arm and hurries toward the restaurant.

An OLD MAN in tattered clothes, scraggly gray hair, sits in an abandoned doorway. A blue tarp FLAPS in a breeze, exposes a shopping cart with items others discarded as useless...

Brittany STOPS. She notices his worn-out shoes, no socks.

ANDREW
(smiling)
Uh, sushi's getting cold.

She digs in her purse and takes out a twenty-dollar bill.

ANDREW
What are you doing?

BRITTANY
He looks hungry. We just can't turn our backs on these people.

ANDREW
Here you go again. Last week it was the greenhouse gases from my jet.

BRITTANY

It's just a few dollars for a meal.

ANDREW

See, you're part of the problem.
Givin' him money won't help. You
know what he'll do with it, right?

BRITTANY

No, I don't... and neither do you.

ANDREW

I know EXACTLY what he'll do...
That kind will choose gettin'
wasted over food, every time.

Andrew takes the twenty-dollar bill out of Brittany's hand.
He puts it away and pulls out a ten-dollar bill.

ANDREW

Hey, Gramps. Got a ten spot for
you. Or we can buy you some dinner?

The old man, CHET BARKINS (70s), sits on a milk crate. His
tattered shirt collar sticks up, crooked, above the rest of
his disheveled attire. He slowly raises his eyes to Andrew...

CHET

Is that a trick question?

Andrew SMIRKS at Brittany, drops the ten-dollar bill. Chet
picks up the bill, stands up and hands it back to Andrew.

He straightens his clothes, licks his fingers and pats down
his hair. Makes himself as presentable as he can be.

CHET

I'll take that dinner.

He MARCHES right by Andrew and heads to the sushi restaurant.

ANDREW

Hey, wait! I didn't mean dinner
here. I'll-

BRITTANY

(to Andrew)

You're such an ass.

Chet opens the door of the sushi restaurant.

STAFF (O.S.)

Irasshaimase!

INT. SUSHI RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Stuffed blow fish dangle from the ceiling...

An L-shaped sushi bar has three open seats on the short side of the L. A sushi chef, HIRO (40) deep into his craft.

Hiro eyes Chet but doesn't miss a beat as he rolls a sushi roll. His eyes laser focused on Chet in the doorway.

Chet strolls over to the three seats, sits in the middle one. Hiro leans over the sushi bar and looks Chet up and down.

Their eyes meet, Hiro points to the door with a stern look.

Brittany and Andrew RUSH in behind Chet. Brittany glances over to Hiro, then GLARES into Andrew's eyes.

She stands behind Chet and addresses Hiro. Her eyes still glued on Andrew's flustered smirk.

BRITTANY
(feigns elegance)
This... gentleman... will be
joining us this evening....

ANDREW
What do you mean, 'joining us?'

BRITTANY
Own it, Drew. This is on you.

Brittany sits down on one side of Chet, Andrew on the other. The OTHER PATRONS a BLUR of very well-to-do guests.

Brittany tries to fix Chet's collar. He SWATS her hand away.

Hiro takes it all in. His stoic demeanor would never waste words commenting on the situation. He silently prepares three Miso soups for them...

BRITTANY
No soup for me, thank you.

Before Hiro can pull it back, Chet sets it down next to his. He bends over his bowl and SLURPS it as fast as he can.

Chet eyes the sushi Hiro prepares, grimaces.

CHEET
Do you have anything cooked?

Hiro, flustered, gestures to the back. He looks to Andrew.

ANDREW
Three Sapporo beers.

Chet shakes his head no, holds up two fingers.

ANDREW
HEY!... I said I would buy you
dinner, not get you drunk.

CHET
Hey to you too, bub. Make it just
two beers, I don't drink.

Brittany smiles at Andrew. She seems to relish the idea that
Andrew can't get anything right when it comes to Chet.

Brittany tries to straighten the collar on Chet's shirt
again. He PUSHES her hand away... again.

BRITTANY
So, if I may... how'd you get here?

CHET
Like you lady, through that door.

BRITTANY
I mean. How did-

CHET
(cranky)
I know what you mean.... Choices
and circumstances.

ANDREW
I feel a pity-party comin' on.

Andrew grabs the soy sauce and Wasabi and mixes it up.

ANDREW
There's gotta' be places that would
take you in.

CHET
Don't wanna be taken in.

ANDREW
Now that's a stupid choice, Gramps.

Hiro hands Chet a plate of Teriyaki chicken.

CHET
Do you have a fork?

Hiro SIGHS. Brittany stabs a piece of sushi with chopsticks.

BRITTANY
Why won't you go to a shelter?

CHET
Won't help with my circumstance.

BRITTANY
What circumstance?

CHET
You know, circumstance. Your
circumstance is like... you both
eat expensive raw fish. Fancy
clothes and all. My circumstance is
just different...

ANDREW
Should have made better choices not
to be in this circumstance...

BRITTANY
Do you have any family?

Chet doesn't respond. He fidgets in his seat, irritated.

ANDREW
(terse)
Did you leave... or did they?

Chet now obviously flustered, catches Hiro's attention.

CHET
Do you have any ketchup?

Hiro won't even dignify the question with a response. Andrew
puts some Wasabi paste on Chet's plate.

ANDREW
Mix it with the soy sauce. It'll
clear your head.

CHET
I don't want to clear my head.

ANDREW
Of course, not. You'd see your
circumstance is from your choices.

BRITTANY
Andrew, stop!

ANDREW
He wants us to feel sorry for him-

CHET

I don't want anything from you. You came up to me, remember?

ANDREW

(eyes Brittany)

That wasn't my choice.

BRITTANY

Maybe if you talk about it, we can-

ANDREW

Hey, don't be writing checks I'm not going to cash.

Brittany's glare bores a hole right through Andrew.

ANDREW

(sarcastic)

So, what terrible thing made you end up out on the street?

Chet stares at the Wasabi on his plate, takes a DEEP breath. He picks up the Wasabi with his fork, puts it in his mouth.

BRITTANY

What are you doing!

Chet's eyes water and he SHAKES his head. He EXHALES as if he lets out all the air that's ever entered his lungs...

Brittany hands him a glass of water and he GUZZLES it. Chet grabs Andrew's water and GUZZLES it also. He gathers himself.

The combination of Wasabi and company makes him drift back to a not so forgotten time. He stares up at the blow fish...

CHET

I was in Nam during the Tet Offensive-

ANDREW

Whose side were we on again, the North or South?

Chet, used to the indifference, focuses on the memory.

CHET

Got pinned down. One by one we were picked off. Some ran for it. Booby-traps blew 'em to bits.

BRITTANY
(troubled)
You don't have to talk about it-

CHET
A chopper finally got me out...
(beat)
My buddies weren't so lucky...
(beat)
... body parts scattered all over
that rice paddy.

Brittany, Andrew and Hiro hang on every word.

CHET
(moist eyes)
Came home, got married. Had a
little baby girl... Then the
nightmares came...
(beat)
... My wife would find me curled up
in a ball in the closet...

BRITTANY
Couldn't the V.A. help?

Chet stares out to nowhere... his eyes, distant and hollow.

CHET
Something was stuck in my head they
couldn't get out.

Chet pauses... He pulls off the rest of his emotional scab.

CHET
Lost my... job... wife...

A few other patrons close by CRANE their necks to listen.

CHET
Started drinking heavy...
Got a small apartment with a pool
with one' them Vet vouchers.

A storm of buried emotion swirls up in front of him.

CHET
My ex showed up. Needed me to
babysit my daughter. Some job
thing. Got drunk, passed out...

Chet's tortured face can't stop reliving the memory.

CHET

Woke up to 'em pounding on my door.

Chet gets up from his stool. The tears drip onto his cheeks.

CHET

My little girl... drowned.

Chet grabs the Teriyaki chicken, CRAMS it in his pockets. He pauses... turns toward the moist eyed Brittany and Andrew.

CHET

(sobs)

All 'us out there... dealin' with
some sorta'... circumstance.

Chet starts to make his way out the front door. Brittany and Andrew can't take their moist eyes off him... Hiro, moved, fidgets with picking up Chet's empty plate.

EXT. SUSHI RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Chet, teary eyed, SHUFFLES away toward his makeshift abode. He is STARTLED when the sushi restaurant door SWINGS open...

Chet stops, slowly TURNS back around. Brittany and Andrew RUSH over toward him...

Andrew apologetically raises his eyes up to Chet's eyes, sheepishly nods toward the restaurant.

ANDREW

Uh, your dinner comes with ginger
ice cream...

Chet stares out at the lonely night as he listens.

ANDREW

It'll soothe the pain of your circ-
(beat)
... uh, of the Wasabi.

They ruminate in the awkwardness of the moment.

Finally... Chet wipes his tears...

CHET

Do they have any chocolate?

Andrew and Brittany gently escort Chet back inside... he lets Brittany fix the collar on his shirt...

FADE OUT.