

MINORU: Scrape the Sky

Words by Momo Akashi

Music by Ben Ginsberg

Summary:

This story is about a Japanese American architect who designed the most iconic and tragic skyscrapers in the United States.

CHARACTERS

Minoru Yamasaki, 21 (51 in Act 2), Japanese-American architect born and raised in Seattle, Washington; talented and driven (almost to a fault), and at times held back by his inferiority complex and ego

Toki Izumi, 18, Japanese pianist; loves all things Japanese but ever curious about Western culture; MINORU's muse

Katsuji Izumi 50s, TOKI's traditionalist father, radical political journalist, fierce protector of his daughter

Bruno Taut, 50s, German-Jewish Japanophile architect, in exile; Minoru's all-knowing *sensei* (teacher) of architecture, artistry and humanity; strict, haughty and comical

Oji ("Uncle") Tsune, 40s (70s in Act 2), MINORU's enterprising uncle in Kyoto, Japan; owner of the café; shrewd businessman in the coffee industry

Takagi, mid-30s, MINORU's right-hand man/woman, 2nd in charge of the architecture firm

Naomi Goldstein, mid-30s, Port Authority representative; charged with keeping Minoru on task with the World Trade Center design; New Yorker through and through, solely concerned with the future of New York's economy within the world; lesbian/non-binary presenting

John Yamasaki, 40s, MINORU's father

Historic Architects, various ghost architects of New York City's past (Napoleon Lebrun, Cass Gilbert, William Alen, William Lamb, etc.)

Port Authority, board members

Various Ensemble, police officer, "nissei" (2nd generation Japanese immigrant) factory workers, restaurant waiter, cannery employment agent, cannery boss

SETTING

ACT 1 - Kyoto, Japan / ACT 2 - New York

TIME

ACT 1 - 1933 / ACT 2 - 1963 to 2002

Act 1 Scene 1 "Shoot Up To The Sky"

(In 1933, on a boat headed to Manhattan, Older MINORU appears. He's a Japanese-American man in his 50s. He and the audience see Manhattan's skyline in the background.)

OLDER MINORU: (Addressing the audience)

Hello there, folks! My name's Minoru Yamasaki, and I'm a famous architect. (Pause.) Has anyone ever heard of me before?

(MINORU looks into the audience. Few hands go up. It doesn't seem like many people know who he is.)

Hmm. Well, I bet you've all heard of the skyscrapers I designed. A couple of little buildings just called... the Twin Towers! Or, the "World Trade Center", if you will.

*(MINORU puts his hand on his chest and closes his eyes for a moment, **UNDERSCORE in**, as if he's paying tribute to someone.)*

Let's start this journey together. The story behind the Twin Towers. The man behind the Twin Towers.

(A spotlight illuminates Young MINORU, aged 21 (We call him MINORU in act 1) . He's sketching Manhattan's skyline from the deck of a ship.)

MINORU

SHOOT UP TO THE SKY
THE HIGHER, THE STRONGER
BEAT THE RECORD TO BE TALLER

RISE UP TO THE SKY
DESIRE THE POWER
ENGRAVE MY SOUL IN A TOWER

IN EACH GRID, TOWERS GROW
GRAND SHAPES STAND IN EVERY ROW
AND DECORATE TODAY'S SKYLINE

(4 architects appear.)

Architect 1

“KEEP ON MOVING, YOU NEW YORKERS!”
EACH HOUR SINGS MY BELL CHORUS

Architect 2

MY BUILDING’S GOTHIC FAÇADE
DECORATES AND MAKES NEW YORK GORGEOUS

Architect 3

MY METALLIC CROWN ANNOUNCES,
“ YOU SHINE IN ROYAL FASHION”

Architect 4

MILLIONS OF LIGHTS TWINKLE AND BLINK
EVEN IN THE WEE HOURS, NEW YORKERS LIVE WITH PASSION

4 ARCHITECTS

SOAR HIGH TO THE SKY
EACH IN YOUR OWN COLOR
WITH YOUR WONDERS TO DISCOVER

SHOOT UP TO THE SKY
SHOOT UP FROM EACH DIRECTION.
LET’S SHAPE OUR VOICE AND OUR REFLECTIONS

IN EACH GRID, A DIFFERENT VIEW.
THESE TOWERS SHOW THE DREAMS WE DREW.
AND DECORATE TODAY’S SKYLINE

(OLDER MINORU reenters.)

OLDER MINORU

(To Minoru) See, the essence of skyscrapers is not height, but uniqueness.

MINORU

Uniqueness?

OLDER MINORU

MY ARCHITECTURAL SURPRISES
KEEP THE PEDESTRIANS EXCITED

I GIVE DELIGHT TO THE CITY,
LIGHTS AND SHADOWS: NOW UNITED

YOU FEEL SERENITY IN THE PLAZA
THE HUSTLE AND BUSTLE CALMS INTO QUIET

NOW YOU HEAR THE HARMONY OF THE CITY
FINALLY NEW YORKERS ARE SOOTHED BY IT

SOAR HIGH TO THE SKY
THEY GROW STRAIGHT LIKE FLOWERS
UP ABOVE, YOU'LL BUILD TOWERS.

TOWERS BASK IN THE SUN
BRAND NEW DAY HAS BEGUN
YOU'LL BE A PART OF THE SKYLINE

MINORU

Which skyscraper did you build?

OLDER MINORU

They haven't arrived yet. When you find out who you are, they'll appear.

MINORU

Who are you?

(Older Minoru ignores Minoru's question.)

OLDER MINORU

Let's look for your skyscraper: The tower only you can design.

ALL (except Young Minoru)
SHOOT UP TO THE SKY
LOOK UPWARD, GO HIGHER

ACHIEVE THE GOAL THAT YOU DESIRE.

RISE UP TO THE SKY
WITH YOUR SPIRIT AND YOUR UNIQUENESS
FIND BEAUTY IN YOUR WEAKNESS

WHEN YOU'RE TRUE TO YOURSELF
YOU CAN SCRAPE THE SKY ITSELF.
LET'S GO AND FIND YOUR SKYLINE

SKYLINE

SKYLINE

Act 1 Scene 1a "Arrive in Kyoto"

(a jingle plays over the speakers. The music is old, tinny, and filled with the sounds of traditional Japanese instruments: shakuhachi (flute), taiko (drums), shamisen (Japanese guitar), and the like.)

ANNOUNCEMENT from Older Minoru

みなさま、長らくのご乗船お疲れさまでした。間もなく、船は京都に到着します。

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Japan! Our ship has just arrived in Kyoto.

(MINORU exits the boat and walks into view. Sleepily, he rubs his eyes. OJI-TSUNE, a Japanese man in his 50s, appears.)

OJI-TSUNE

Minoru! How are you? It must have been a long trip from Seattle.

MINORU

(Still bleary-eyed and sleepy.) Yeah, it was.

OJI-TSUNE

It's your first time visiting Japan, is it not? Please enjoy your stay.

(OJI-TSUNE carries one of MINORU's bags and leads MINORU through Kyoto on their way offstage. MINORU looks around the city with curiosity. All the houses are one-story with tiled roofs. It's all very rustic. MINORU stops walking.)

MINORU

Where's my skyline?

Act 1 Scene 2 "Lotus Flower"

(At the café, Osake-Sake, TOKI, age 18, is performing the piano. There are Minoru, Taut and some customers at the café. Minoru sits in one of the seats. He is drawing a lotus flower.)

TOKI

THE FLOWER SPROUTS UNDER A MOONBEAM
IT'S MY EARLY SUMMER FLEETING DREAM
I SING AND SAVOR THIS TIME, FEELING IT FOREVER

I WANTED TO CATCH A RAINDROP BY MYSELF
SO I TRIED TO STRETCH UP TOWARD THE SKY
"PITTER PATTER" WENT THE RAIN ON MY HANDS
WHEN IT STOPPED, IT WAS ALREADY THE END OF JULY

I'M THE LAST ONE REFLECTING ON THE WATER
BUT TWINKLING FIREFLIES LIFT ME OUT OF MY GLOOM
NOW I KNOW I WAS WAITING FOR YOU
TO SHARE WITH YOU THE MOMENT I BLOOM

I'LL LET THE BREEZE CARRY MY PERFUME
TO YOU
TO YOU
AND I HOPE MY WISH WILL FLY
TO YOU
TO YOU
WHEN I SEE THE SUNRISE, I'LL OPEN MY PETALS TO YOU

I PUT PALE PINK ON MY CHEEKS AND ROUGED MY LIPS.
HAVE I BECOME WHAT YOU WANT ME TO BE?
YOU HAVE NOT LOOKED YET INTO MY EYES
A SWAMP LIES DEEP BETWEEN YOU AND ME

I'LL LET THE BREEZE CARRY MY PERFUME
TO YOU
TO YOU
UNTIL MY PETALS FALL, I'LL COME
TO YOU
TO YOU
I HOPE THE SUN WON'T GO DOWN.

Act 1 Scene 3 "Photo Book"

(From the counter, Oji-Tsune, the owner of the cafe, watches Minoru, who draws a lotus flower. One of the waiters approaches Oji-Tsune.)

WAITER

(To Oji-Tsune) Master!

OJI-TSUNE

Shhh!

WAITER

What happened?

OJI-TSUNE

He's finally drawing something besides buildings. A lotus flower.

WAITER

So, what's the big deal?

(Toki stops playing the piano.)

OJI-TSUNE

Ever since he came here to Kyoto, he's only sketched American skyscrapers.

(Minoru lifts his head, so Oji-Tsune and Waiter look away from Minoru.)

MINORU

(To Toki, he shows his empty iced coffee glass.) Hey, give me another one, please.

TOKI

Etto, A... *(Spoken in Japanese)*

*Um, er...

(TOKI is surprised that MINORU has spoken to her. She also doesn't understand how to answer him, because she isn't a waiter.)

MINORU

Can I get some more iced coffee?

(TOKI notices MINORU's drawing of the lotus flower, which is on his table.)

TOKI

(Whispering.) Hasu no Hana. *(Spoken in Japanese.)*

MINORU

What did you say?

TOKI

The lotus flower. You drew my lotus flower!

MINORU

Oh, sorry. You're the pianist.

TOKI

I'm glad you realized my song was about a lotus flower.

(TOKI picks his drawing up.)

MINORU

Chotto, Sore...*(Spoken in Japanese.)*

*Wait, this is...

TOKI

Nihonjin... desuka? *(Spoken in Japanese.)*

*Are you... Japanese?

MINORU

No, I'm an American. My parents grew up in Japan, so I can speak a little Japanese.

TOKI

So you're from America. That is why I see you here everyday, reading English books.

MINORU

What?

(KATSUJI, TOKI's father, enters the cafe. TOKI notices him.)

TOKI

(to herself, sotto voce) Otoh sama? *(Spoken in Japanese.)*

*Daddy?

(TOKI puts MINORU's drawing on the table, and hides under MINORU's table.)

MINORU

What are you doing?

TOKI

Shh!

(KATSUJI stops beside MINORU's table.)

KATSUJI

(Talking to himself.) Where is the waiter?

(MUSIC starts. KATSUJI passes by MINORU and TOKI, and he sits across from TAUT.)

(TOKI sneaks out from the table, and she takes an English architectural photobook that MINORU had on the table. TOKI hides her face with it. KATSUJI and TAUT talk without noticing TOKI.)

TOKI

Let me borrow this.

MINORU

Wait, I need it for sketching.

TOKI

No, I think

YOU DON'T NEED IT ANYMORE.

MINORU

How do you know that?

TOKI

YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN GLUED TO THIS CURIOUS BOOK
AND YOU PICTURE EACH PAGE WITHOUT TAKING A LOOK

MINORU

It doesn't matter to you.

TOKI

LIKE YOU'RE HIDING INSIDE THIS WORLD,

I NEED IT TO COVER MY FACE

MINORU

You should find another book.

TOKI

AND I WANT TO SEE THE WORLD YOU LIVE IN.

(A beat.)

MINORU

What? How do you know my name?

(TOKI walks back to MINORU. She points out his signature, clearly written on his drawing of the lotus flower.)

TOKI

Your signature. You're MINORU Yamasaki, right?

(Pause.)

TOKI (Cont'd)

Don't worry. I'll bring it back tomorrow.

(TOKI leaves the café. Then the waiter brings MINORU a second glass of iced coffee.)

MINORU

I DON'T HAVE TIME TO WAIT FOR TOMORROW
 I HAVE NO TIME TO LOSE
 RIVALS ARE GETTING THEIR JOBS.
 I MUST SHARPEN MY SKILLS OR I'LL BE A SLOB
 SO I'VE BEEN SKETCHING AND SKETCHING AND SKETCHING
 WHILE LOOKING AT THE PICTURES
 THAT WOULD LET MY TALENT BLOOM

THE PHOTO BOOK, THE ORIGIN OF MY ROMANCE
 THE MOMENT I TURNED THE COVER, I FELL IN LOVE
 WITH PROFILES OF TOWERS THAT HIGHLIGHT THE BLUE SKIES ABOVE
 HISTORY AND MODERN ART ARE INTERTWINED
 MY HEART BELONGS TO THE EPIC WORKS THAT THE LEGENDS DESIGNED.

THE PHOTO BOOK, THE ORIGIN OF MY COURAGE
I'LL HAVE TO PROVE MY TALENT DESPITE MY RACE
PEOPLE WILL GAZE AT MY BUILDING INSTEAD OF MY FACE.
EVEN WITH MY JAPANESE EYES, THEY WON'T MIND
BECAUSE I'LL TRACE THE EPIC WORKS THAT THE LEGENDS DESIGNED

WHEN I BECOME A GREAT ARCHITECT
LIFE WILL BE LIVED MORE BEAUTIFULLY
DELICATELY AND MEANINGFULLY
NO MORE APARTMENTS THAT FEEL LIKE A PRISON CELL
NO MORE BED BUGS THAT MAKE MY ANKLES SWELL
NO MORE FISH FACT'RIES AND THAT DISGUSTING SMELL
SO I DRAW THE SAME LINES THE LEGENDS DREW
BUT NOW I'VE LOST THEIR PICTURES
I'VE LOST MY SCRIPTURES

MY HANDS ARE SHIVERING
IS IT BECAUSE I'M SCARED?
OR BECAUSE I'M ACTUALLY PREPARED
TO DRAW MY OWN DESIGNS
THAT NO ONE HAS EVER CREATED
THAT NO ONE HAS EVER INHABITED
THAT NO ONE COULD EVEN IMAGINE:
BUILDINGS ONLY MY SOUL CAN BUILD

HERE'S MY IDEA BOOK, IT WILL BE THE ORIGIN OF MY TALENT
I'LL FIND MY LINES AND ARCHES TO REWRITE MY FATE
I'LL SHOW MY NEW SENSE OF BEAUTY THROUGH WHAT I'LL PERFECTLY
CREATE

I WILL SAY THAT FAME AND FORTUNE WILL BE MINE
SOMEDAY THE WORLD WILL BE INSPIRED BY MY BUILDINGS,
MY DECORATIONS,
AND THE GLORIOUS LIFE I WILL DESIGN!