

ARIGATO, TOKYO (EXTRACT 1)

Daniel MacIvor

CARL: "I love you" is a lie. No one loves anyone that way. Certainly not as we're told we're supposed to, not as we wish we did, not like the poets pretend it. There are those "I love yous" that do mean something. But even then it's not like in the movies. There's the "I love you" of the parent to the child. But that's not "love," that's just, "Show me myself, what good I've done, how you love me." Then there's the "I love you" of the child to the parent, which is at first pure survival and later a plea for favours and finally a method of assuaging guilt. There's the "I love you" from spouse to spouse, which is actually question and answer, more call and response: "I love you," "I love you."

The problem is the three words. They kill the feeling, making it meaningless, turning it towards what we selfishly want. Closer to truth would be the feeling that rises up in us as we skim the pages of the Living section of the weekend edition—the starving wide-eyed child, a story of selfless sacrifice, a donated kidney, a dog walking a thousand miles to find its owner. But that's not "love," that's simply the pebble of narrative rippling the pool of humanity. Nothing like the love that sells a tidal wave of chocolate kisses and oceans of mouthwash and freighters of cologne. Nothing like romance.

No, truly and deeply that feeling we dream of exists only in its unspoken moment with the new body in the strange bed, skin against skin, eyelash to eyelash, and between fresh kisses.

Shadows obscuring features, maybe some moonlight, cradled there in your arms, faces so close it's not the air you're breathing but the exhaled breath of your...

And you can think it, and you do. And it wells up in you, the words, forward in your brain, almost on your tongue, not to be spoken. Only felt, only known, like you know the beginning of the beginning of time before time.

This silence is "I love you." This "I love you" is the closest we come to Divine. This purest connection through all experience and from heart to heart we can really only feel for the perfect stranger. Everything after that is compromise and companionship.

But the lie of those three words is kept alive by the mere possibility of the distant hope for the faint memory of another beloved stranger. Looking for looking for looking for another beloved stranger.