

Not real words about a not real place

by Brendan Garbee

I'm going up and down elevators all over the Financial District and I have no office. The city where I don't know any street names is a pretty blue color from the windows of the buildings where I go to meet with the representatives of clients. From the sidewalk, the city is either pastel or grey. The Pacific Ocean looks the way the edge of the world would look, if there was one. I write in emails to my New York clients, "I've relocated to San Francisco to help organize J & L Associates' West Coast Branch!" and everyone sends congratulations.

This place isn't real. New York isn't real. My supervisor in New York emails and tells me that nothing is real. She thinks that J & L has gone out of business, but that they haven't told anyone yet. She tells me that the only thing real is the relationship with the client, but that it's a relationship founded on nothing real. She tells me that once, years ago, a representative of an important client got her pregnant and then nothing happened. She takes pregnancy tests sometimes to see if she is not pregnant anymore, but she still is. Her doctor tells her that any day she might start showing signs. She's pregnant. It isn't real.

I'm getting in and out of taxi cabs all around the city. I take representatives of clients out to lunch at restaurants and put the expense on J & L's possibly not real credit card. I'm shaking hands and I'm asking about people's children. I'm nodding as they talk about how nothing is real. We are communicating through our eyes our mutual understanding. We are united by our terror and confusion. We talk nothing and we order distractedly from the menu. We reach agreements, or fail to. We look at papers full of numbers,

or promise to look at them later, and though we know that the numbers mean nothing, we agree that they are essential.

