

Cecil Morris

this is not and yet it is

this is not pelican bay or san quentin or folsom
or even the california institution for women in chino

there are no rows of razor wire atop twelve foot fences,
no towers, no steel bars, no toilet in the corner
by the iron rack, no concrete thicker than her own head

there is no hour of exercise, no walk in the guarded yard

this is no security housing unit
there is no dark windowless box under blazing sun
or down and down and down into basement damp and cold

but there is solitary, a sequestering close and silent and chilling
and there are rules and consequences and bartering
an unacknowledged, never-mentioned secret economy
she has had to learn by trial and error, by furtive timid offerings

there are educational programs for skill development
a sewing machine and piano she has mastered
and a repetitive thumping sound like a train leaving town

there is an unpredictable guard that she obeys
and a big dog, watchful and quick,

and there are children