DAWN POTTER

One Week in Summer

—1868

Mon.— School today, scholars wild as hares. brother Dave plow. Sew &c. Sold my heifer.

Bad Teacher

My school is my skin this forenoon.  
   God is an inefficient spirit,  
And I have been injudicious.  
   I have spoken words visibly with my life.

Tue.— Coughing all night on account of the kitchen fire. Stove-wood enough to last a month tho’ not more. Dave as usual which is not pleasant

Dusting the Parlor

I have nothing to say about anything.

Yet I am my own mistress,  
To myself.

Wed.— quilt a quilt Make pickles. Dave to Rockland with early potatoes. School done for good I shall not say more

Evening Chores

So this day is cleansed of sunshine and our passions.  
   I seem past feeling, I am calloused by results.  
The cows stand on the crest of the bitten hill.  
   It is not pleasant to lie in a dirty place.
Thu.— Wash—sew. Bessy calved, a fine bull. Copied a psalm. Shall not speak of Dave

Hanging Laundry

Keep on the line of reason.

*I think too little.*

*I have no ideas.*

Truth is the mind’s chime.

*I mark the willfulness of the sea.*

*I have no claim on God.*

Fri.— Commence a shirt for Brother, he grows fatter than before. No visitors

Ironing Shirts

Mind-bound, I welcome a fair wind.

May I meet everything that is strange

With calmness.

May my heart be awkward, awakened.

The little children are playing on the common.

I am not a shrewd woman.

I must do right all the time.

Sat.— Dave to Rockland with butter then home with shocking news. Churn &c.

Shelling Peas

There is a little sorrow in my mind this evening.

Thus, I shall make a list of things.
DAWN POTTER

I must keep dark.
The wind shifts slowly to the north.
Discouragement is a wonder like sickness.

Sun.— Church alone

Black Walk

My room is damp.
My intellect
Is dull as a hoe.
In this terrain of night-thoughts I come
Unstrung.

Yet when I start for the sea,
I know where I am going.

Note: This is the first section of a series inspired by the diaries of Isabella Maria Hoffses of Waldoboro, Maine. Spanning the years 1862-1908, an era of national turmoil, the diaries make little mention of external events but provide a record of melancholy, spiritual struggle, and loneliness. Hoffses’s diaries are archived at the Maine Women Writers Collection at the University of New England. The poem also draws from the writing of Emily Hawley Gillespie, an Iowa farmwife who lived during the same period. Her diaries have been published in “A Secret to Be Buried”: The Diary and Life of Emily Hawley Gillespie, 1858-1888, ed. Judy Nolte Lensink (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989).