My grandmother’s hands, veined with the labour of children, milking cows, kneading bread, and pulling Seneca root nimbly finger the wool. She has warmed nine younger siblings with her knitting. Now, she and three sisters are the last to remember. She twists the unspun wool into the spinning wool.

My hands, chafed with the work of canoes, children, and changing the oil, eagerly card the wool. *The secret, she says, is in the carding.* *If you’re a good carder, then the wool will wear much better.*

I card the wool. Flecks of dust and hay and dung hang on. Like her five babies, four of them dead, like the memories that won’t let go. She feeds the spinning wheel while I card the wool.

The travails of the Depression, dusty poverty, and caring for many children, not all of them her own, have shaped her slippered, arthritic foot, which now
deftly pumps the pedal. At the age of thirteen she went away to work. More bread, more laundry, and more cows, she helped to make the ends meet back home. *Don’t hold too much*, she explains, fingerling the wool, *it goes on better a little at a time.*

*You try,* she tells me, and my clumsy, sweaty hands palm the wool. It goes on in clumps. *Don’t hold the wool too tight,*  
*this part will join that part*  
*if you feed it through your thumb and fingers like this.*

Her brother Bud built her first spinning wheel from a bicycle wheel. He brought it home for her when she was twenty-two. Grandma’s nimble fingers were in demand when she worked that wheel. Her wool was known in the district and people paid for well-spun wool.

My fingers curl under in an inherited gesture. Grandma’s brown hands guide my pale hands; we make the ends meet. The ball of wool grows larger. The unspun wool meets the spun wool.