

**Christine Rathbun**  
from *Giant Women*

*(Down center, sitting on cube. Prop: a small BOX OF RAISINS, open and eat.  
Sound cue: car engine humming, indistinct 70's pop music in the background)*

Timestamp 1971. I am 5. On a long car trip to visit my father's mother in Bellows Falls, Vermont. Bellowfallsvermont – the longest word I know – where Momcia lives in her big, big house full of mirrors and polished wood and rooms that I may not enter. A house in which I must be quiet and careful and be nice to my sister. In which I will take a bath in a deep white clawfoot tub and use a fancy sponge and a bar of Ivory soap which, delightfully, floats. I will believe for years that soap only floats in the state of Vermont. I am belted in for the ride – something that only occurs for long, important trips like this one. Carolyn is 2 – still in her car seat. She will get carsick and throw up a box of raisins all over me and my blankie halfway to Vermont. My blankie will disappear on this trip, ostensibly to be cleaned – but really stolen away by my grandmother who deems me too old for such things.

It is not Christmas, but maybe Thanksgiving – just a few leaves on the trees. A cold, gray day.

Daddy is driving and Mama is smoking and doing her crossword. The radio is on and Daddy taps his wedding band against the steering wheel to the tempo of the music, which annoys her. He does this without thinking, and she looks up from her crossword to tell him again and again to cutitoutcharlie.

I am cranky and bored. I don't much like this music, I don't much like the atmosphere in the front seat – or the atmosphere in the house in Vermont, towards which we are traveling in a white Volvo with red interior, which will forever after smell of vomit.

"Take a nap, Chris," Mama tells me. "Look how good and quiet your sister is. Have some raisins."

I am not hungry and I ask again arewethereyetarewethereyet.

Mama sighs and lights another cigarette. An idea occurs to her. "Look for the missing girl," she says brightly.

"A missing girl?" I ask.

"There was a little girl about your age who was kidnapped last week and they're searching for her." She takes a long drag and says, "Look in the woods as we're driving by and see if you can't find her. She was wearing *red* mittens." She goes back to her crossword.

I look out the window, eyes peeled. A lost girl! Out there by the highway! I'll find her! The woods fly by – dense forest beyond the guard rail. Little girl! Show yourself! I will find you!

It has begun to rain – cold drizzle.

"Does she have a raincoat, Mama?"

"No -- she was wearing an old brown coat and a -- umm – a blue hat, I think the paper said," she says absently, from the crossword.

"What does she eat?"

"Oh, probably bugs and things she finds on the ground, or in the trash. Keep looking."

I look so hard. She must be hungry. She must be wet. I bet she's scared. We can pick her up and she can come to bellowsfallsvermont with us. I look and look and look and then – a flash of red! I gasp.

“Her mitten!” I shout – “Mama! I saw a red mitten!”

“No, that was just a leaf, Chris -- keep looking.”

“But – ”

“Keep looking.” Firmness in her voice.

I see several other bits of this child – her brown coat in a heap in a rest area, her blue hat caught on a bare branch, the other mitten snagged on a chain-link fence, her favorite dolly, her blankie -- her face, even, peering out at me from behind a rock.

I tell Mama, who says no it was a shadow a piece of trash a leaf a beer can someone else's coat someone else's hat not these woods maybe those woods up ahead keep looking Chris you'll find her cutitout Charlie and for chrissake slow down.

But I have seen these things: her clothes, her face, her mittens. But --

Her pen fills in another row. Daddy taps. (*cut sound cue, lights begin to dim slowly*)

I spot this girl all the way to Vermont, and back, and on every long trip for years to come.

Even now I look for red mittens in the woods along highways. (*lights dim, now bright spot up on CUBE*)

She's there, Mama. Look. She's lost. Listen to me. Please, listen to me. Make Daddy stop the car. I saw her. She's lost. She's lost.