Bundled onto a train with numerous other orphans, Rodzina is convinced that she and the others are being sent out west to be sold as slaves. She resents being on the train, resents the younger orphans who keep demanding things from her, but most of all resents the rude and loud Mr. Szprot and the cold, unfeeling "Miss Doctor," the two adults accompanying them. She doesn't want to be placed with someone-she just wants her dead parents back. As the train moves through the sparsely settled territories, Rodzina slowly comes to realize the importance of human connections, and that even the coldest person can have a loving heart.

Cushman's latest novel is a fascinating, personal look at the practice of orphan placing during the mid to late 19th Century. Her characterization of Rodzina is especially effective, following her own precedent in *The Midwife's Apprentice*. Rodzina is bristly and, at times harsh, but it's clear she's also a young girl in search of something to call a family. While the ending was somewhat expected, and the overall plot rather episodic, Rodzina succeeds where it really counts, in deep and meaningful exploration of human relationships.