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Worthy's Town: A Novel

Sharon Rolens
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Novels praising the spirit, friendship, and little triumphs of small town folk are certainly not rare, but seldom is it captured with the kind of easy grace and understanding that Rolens shows in this first novel. In stripped-down prose as beautifully simple as a cornfield at dusk, the author tells the story of small town Old Kane from the Depression to World War II.

At the center of the work, and a roaring force in an otherwise quiet place, is Cappy Giberson, whose grandparents, Worthy and Willa, take him in after the death of their daughter. Cappy is the kind of go-getter all-American boy that advertisers love to photograph and girls love to date. In Old Kane, he's at the center of a distinct cast of characters, from the shadowy Drayton Hunt in his beloved moon car to a pair of daft, mean twins who aren't even twins at all. One of the most fascinating citizens of the town is, appropriately enough when considering the title, Cappy's grandfather Worthy.

At first, Worthy appears an ignorant man, full of discrimination and hatred, but soon it's apparent that he's simply following the old ways, taught to him by his own father. In an exchange with his wife about letting their daughter continue past the eighth grade, Worthy takes an ultra-traditional position: "I ain't arguing but what she's smart, but that don't change my thinking. You know as well as I do that females belong in the home, raising babies and cooking meals. The world would be a sorry state of affairs if females forgot their place."

Cappy, with his tolerance and empathy, represents the changes going on in the town, how a community must bend with the times or it'll break. Through the lives of these interlinked neighbors, Rolens gives a flavor of the heartland during its dark and hopeful times. This is a well-written, sweetly told first work that captures a time and a place worth remembering.

ELIZABETH MILLARD (October 16, 2000)

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