

Bluebell

Part one of Bluebell opens in 1939, with Willis Jefferson approaching the town of Drewsport. An adult black man, Willis was saved, as a child, by Rowena Kramer, a kindly white woman, just 12 years earlier during a violent storm on the plains of Kansas. Miss Rowena introduced Willis to education, and instilled, in him, a love of life.

As he nears the town's first house, a woman's scream startles him. Realizing it would be suicide to go to her aid, he tries to ignore the sounds of the beating, and hurries on. He is stopped by the memory of Miss Rowena's teachings, and enters the house where he finds a viciously beaten white woman.

A local farmer, bringing the woman's two young daughters home from a visit, finds Willis bathing her wounds. Willis flees, and is later apprehended by the local deputy sheriff.

The following chapters, preceding Willis' seizure by a mob, and eventual death, involve numerous characters, and their stories: The local pastor and wife; an avowed, beastly racist; a black farm hand, chosen by the racist to pay for the crime; the *village idiot*; a misfit Klansman and his equally troubled lover; and Edith and Jeremy, two near adults, for whom the event becomes a bookmark in their romance. The thoughts and actions of these, and several others, form the mechanism that creates the state of anarchy that nearly destroys Drewsport.

With the sheriff's clandestine burial of Willis' charred remains, part one closes, leaving Drewsport, and much of its populace, in chaos.

Part two covers approximately two weeks in July of 1949, when an investigative reporter/novelist comes to Drewsport intent on seeing it pay for its crimes. In the ensuing chapters, we learn some of the impetus for Drewsport's actions, and how they are viewed by many of those we have already met. Although reasons are plentiful, nothing they offer constitutes an excuse.

Carl Schenfield, the writer, learns as much about himself as he does about the town, very little of either offering much hope for humanity.

Bluebell, however, is not a tale of gloom and doom. There are more than enough moments of tenderness, love and actual brotherhood to give the reader reason to search, expectantly, for the tunnel's light. It is there, and Bluebell points to it, but not in a way that all will see.