



Blue: A Novel

By Danielle Steel

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#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

Ginny Carter was once a rising star in TV news, married to a top anchorman, with a three-year-old son and a full and happy life in Beverly Hills—until her whole world dissolved in a single instant on the freeway two days before Christmas. In the aftermath, she pieces her life back together and tries to find meaning in her existence as a human rights worker in the worst areas around the globe.

Then, on the anniversary of the fateful accident—and wrestling with the lure of death herself—she meets a boy who will cause her life to change forever yet again. Thirteen-year-old Blue Williams has been living on the streets, abandoned by his family, rarely attending school, and utterly alone. Following her instincts, Ginny reaches out to him. Leery of everyone, he runs from her again and again. But he always returns, and each time, their friendship grows.

Blue glows with outsized spirit and an irresistible mix of innocence and wisdom beyond his years. Ginny offers him respect as they form an unusual bond and become the family they each lost. But just as Blue is truly beginning to trust her, she learns of a shocking betrayal that he has been hiding. Is it a wound too deep to heal, or will she be able to fight the battle that will make them both whole again?

Blue is #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Danielle Steel at her finest, a probing and emotionally gripping story of dark secrets revealed, second chances, and the power of love and courage to overcome life's greatest challenges.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Danielle Steel has been hailed as one of the world's most popular authors, with over 650 million copies of her novels sold. Her many international bestsellers include *Precious Gifts*, *Undercover*, *Country*, *Prodigal Son*, *Pegasus*, *A Perfect Life*, *Power Play*, *Winners*, and other highly acclaimed novels. She is also the author of *His Bright Light*, the story of her son Nick Traina's life and death; *A Gift of Hope*, a memoir of her work with the homeless; *Pure Joy*, about the dogs she and her family have loved; and the children's book *Pretty Minnie in Paris*.

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Chapter 1

The trip by jeep from the small village near Luena to Malanje in Angola, in southwest Africa, followed by a train ride to Luanda, the capital, had taken seven hours. The drive from Luena was long and arduous due to unexploded land mines in the area, which required extreme diligence and caution to avoid as they drove.

After forty years of conflict and civil war, the country was still ravaged and in desperate need of all the help outside sources could provide, which was why Ginny Carter had been there, sent by SOS Human Rights.

SOS/HR was a private foundation based in New York that sent human rights workers around the globe. Her assignments were usually two or three months long in any given location, occasionally longer. She was sent in as part of a support team, to address whatever human rights issues were being violated or in question, typically to assist women and children, or even to address the most pressing physical needs in a trouble spot somewhere, like lack of food, water, medicine, or shelter. She frequently got involved in legal issues, visiting women in prisons, interfacing with attorneys, and trying to get the women fair trials. SOS took good care of their workers and was a responsible organization, but the work was dangerous at times. She had taken an in-depth training course before they sent her into the field initially, and had been taught about everything from digging ditches and purifying water, to extensive first aid, but nothing had prepared her for what she had seen since. She had learned a great deal about man's cruelty to man and the plight of people in underdeveloped countries and emerging nations since she'd started working for SOS/HR.

As she cleared customs at JFK airport in New York, Ginny had been traveling for twenty-seven hours, after the flight from Luanda to London, the four-hour layover at Heathrow, and then the flight to New York. She was wearing jeans, hiking boots, and a heavy army surplus parka, her blond hair shoved haphazardly into a rubber band when she woke up on the plane just before they landed. She had been in Africa for four months, since August, longer than usual, and was arriving in New York on December 22. She had hoped to be back out on assignment by now, but her replacement had not gotten to them on time. Ginny had tried to orchestrate her absence from New York at this time, but now she had to face Christmas alone in New York.

She could have gone to Los Angeles to spend the holiday with her father and sister, but that sounded even worse. She had left L.A. nearly three years before, and had no desire to return to the city where she had grown up. Since leaving L.A., she had lived the life of a nomad, as she put it, working for SOS Human

Rights. She loved the work, and the fact that it was all-consuming, and most of the time kept her from thinking about her own life, a life which, in her wildest dreams, she had never imagined she would be living and working in the countries that were familiar to her now. She had helped midwives to deliver babies, or done it herself when there was no one else at hand. She had held dying children in her arms, and comforted their mothers, and cared for orphans in displacement camps. She had been in war-torn areas, lived through two local uprisings and a revolution, and had seen anguish, poverty, and devastation that she would otherwise never have encountered in her lifetime. It put everything else in life into perspective. SOS/HR was grateful for her willingness to travel to some of the worst areas it serviced, no matter how desolate or dangerous, or how rugged conditions were. The more rugged the conditions, and the harder the work, the better she liked it.

She cared nothing about the potential dangers to herself. She had actually disappeared for three weeks in Afghanistan, and the home office had thought she had been killed. Her family in Los Angeles feared it might be the case, but she had come back to camp weak and sick, having been taken in and cared for by a local family who had nursed her through a high fever. She seemed to welcome and embrace the worst SOS/HR had to offer. And they could always count on her to show up and stick it out. She had been in Afghanistan, several parts of Africa, and Pakistan. Her reports were accurate, insightful, and helpful, and twice she had made presentations to the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at the United Nations, and once to the Human Rights High Commissioner in Geneva. She was impressive in describing, in all its poignancy and pathos, the plight of those she served.

She was worn and tired when she landed in New York. She had been sad to leave the women and children she had been caring for in a refugee camp in Luena, Angola. The human rights workers had been trying to relocate them, despite a web of red tape that prevented them from accomplishing their mission. She would have liked to stay for another six months or a year. Their three-month assignments always seemed too short. They just became familiar with the conditions in the country when they were replaced, but their job was to report accurately on local conditions as much as to change them. They did what they could while they were there, but it was like emptying the ocean with a thimble. There were so many people in desperate need, and so many women and children in dire circumstances around the world.

And yet Ginny was able to find joy in what she did, and couldn't wait to leave again on another assignment. She wanted to spend as little time as possible in New York, and she was dreading the holidays. She would have preferred to spend them working to the point of exhaustion in a place where Christmas didn't exist, as it didn't now to her. It was rotten luck that she had landed in New York three days before Christmas, the worst days of the year for her. All she wanted to do was sleep when she got back to her apartment, and wake up when it was over. The holidays meant nothing to her except pain.

She had nothing to declare in customs except a few small wooden carvings the children in the refugee camp had made for her. Her treasures now were the memories she carried with her everywhere, of the people she met along the way. She had no interest in material possessions, and everything she traveled with was in a small battered suitcase and the backpack she wore. She never had time to look in a mirror when she was working, and didn't care. A hot shower was her greatest luxury and pleasure, when she was able to take one; the rest of the time she took cold showers, using the soap she brought with her. Her jeans and sweatshirts and

T-shirts were clean but never pressed. It was enough that she had clothes to wear, which was more than many of the people she cared for had, and she often gave her clothes away to those who needed them more. Except for a Senate hearing where she spoke eloquently, she hadn't worn a dress, high heels, or makeup in three years. And when she made her presentations to the United Nations or the Human Rights Commission, she did so in a pair of old black slacks, a sweater, and flat shoes. The only thing important to her was what she had to say, the message they needed to hear, and the atrocities she had seen on a daily basis in the course of her work. She had a front-row seat to the cruelties and crimes committed against women and children around the world. And she owed it to them to speak on their behalf when asked to do so when she came home. Her words were always powerful and well chosen and brought tears to the eyes of those who heard her.

She walked out of the terminal and took a deep breath of cold night air. Holiday travelers were rushing to buses and taxis or greeting relatives outside the terminal, as Ginny silently watched them with deep blue eyes the color of a lake. They were almost navy blue. She looked serious for a moment, debating whether to take a shuttle or a cab into the city. She was bone tired, and her body ached from the long trip, and from sleeping in cramped quarters in coach. She felt guilty spending money on herself after what she saw in the course of her missions, but she decided to spoil herself. She walked to the curb and hailed a taxi, which swerved and rapidly approached to pick her up.

She opened the door and put her bag and backpack into the back seat, climbed in, and closed the door, as the young Pakistani driver checked her out and asked where she was going. She saw his name on the license on the partition between them as she gave him her address, and an instant later they took off, darting through the airport traffic, and headed toward the highway. It felt strange to be back in civilization after the desolate area where she'd been living for the past four months. But she always felt that way when she returned, and by the time she got adjusted to it, she left again. She always asked that they reassign her quickly, and most of the time they did. She was one of their most valuable workers in the field, both for her willingness and for her expertise after almost three years.

"Where are you from in Pakistan?" she asked him as they joined the flow of traffic moving toward the city, and he smiled at her in the rearview mirror. He was young and looked pleased that she had guessed.

"How did you know I'm from Pakistan?" he asked her, and she smiled back.

"I was there a year ago." She guessed his region then, and he looked amazed. Few Americans knew anything about his country. "I was in Balochistan for three months."

"What were you doing there?" He was intrigued by her as traffic slowed them down. It was going to be a long, slow ride into the city in holiday traffic, and talking to him kept her awake. He seemed more familiar to her than the people she would meet in New York, who seemed like foreigners to her now.

“I was working,” she said quietly, glancing out the window at what should have been a familiar landscape but no longer was. She felt like a woman without a home, and had felt that way since she left L.A. She sensed now that that would be the last real home she’d ever have, and she preferred it that way. She didn’t need a home anymore—whatever tent or camp she was living in was enough for her.

“Are you a doctor?” He was curious about her.

“No, I work for a human rights organization,” she said vaguely, fighting waves of fatigue as she sat in the warm, comfortable cab. She didn’t want to fall asleep until she got back to her apartment, had a shower, and could climb into her bed. She knew that the fridge would be empty, but she didn’t care, she had eaten on the plane. She didn’t want to eat that night and could buy whatever she needed the next day.

They drove on in silence then, and she watched the skyline of New York come into view. It was undeniably beautiful, but it looked like a movie set to her and not a place where real people lived. The people she knew lived in old military barracks, refugee stations, and tents, not brightly lit cities with skyscrapers and apartment buildings. With the passing years, she felt more and more separate from this way of life each time she returned, but the organization she worked for was based in New York, and it made sense for her to keep an apartment here. It was a shell she crawled into briefly once every few months, like a hermit crab needing a place to stay. She had no attachment to it, and had never considered it home. The only personal things she had were still in boxes she had never bothered to unpack. Her sister, Rebecca, had packed them for her when Ginny sold her house and left L.A., and shipped them to her in New York. Ginny didn’t even know what was in them, and didn’t care.

It took them just over an hour to reach her apartment, and she paid the driver with a generous tip. He smiled at her again and thanked her, as she looked for her keys in a pocket of her backpack, then stepped out into the frigid air. It felt like it was going to snow. She stood fumbling with the lock to her building for a moment, with her bags on the pavement beside her. The facade looked faintly battered, and there was a chill wind coming from the East River a block away. She lived in the upper eighties near East End, and she had rented the apartment because she liked walking along the river in warmer weather, and watching the boats drift by. After living in a house in L.A. for years, living in an apartment seemed less oppressive and more impersonal, which she preferred.

She let herself into the building and pressed the button of the elevator to the sixth floor. Everything in the building had a dreary look to it. She noticed that several of her neighbors had Christmas wreaths on their doors. She didn’t bother with Christmas decorations anymore, and this was only the second time she’d been there for Christmas since she’d moved to New York. There were so many more important things to think about in the world than putting up a tree or a wreath on the door. She was anxious to get to the office, but knew that it would be closed for the next several days. She was planning to do some reading, work on her latest report, summing up her mission, and catch up on sleep. The report would keep her busy for the next

week, and all she had to do was pretend that it wasn't the holidays.

She turned on the lights when she walked in, and saw that nothing had changed. The beaten-up old couch she had gotten at a garage sale in Brooklyn looked as tired as it had before. She had bought a well-used, secondhand leather recliner, and it was the most comfortable chair she'd ever owned. She often fell asleep in it while she was reading. There was another large chair facing the couch in case she had a guest, which she never did. But if so, she was prepared. Her coffee table was an old metal trunk with travel stickers on it that she had bought when she got the couch. There was a small dining table and four unmatched chairs, and a dead plant on the windowsill that she had meant to throw away in July, had forgotten, and it had become part of the decor. The person who cleaned her apartment once a month didn't dare throw it away. She had a few old lamps that cast a warm light around the room, and a television she almost never used. She read the news on the Internet, which she preferred. And the décor in her bedroom consisted of the bed, a chest she had also bought secondhand, and a chair. There was nothing on the walls. It wasn't a cozy place to come home to, but it was a place to sleep and keep her clothes. She had a cleaning woman who came once a month when she was away, and once a week when she was there.

She dropped her suitcase and backpack in her bedroom, came back to the living room, and sat down on the couch, which was welcoming, despite the way it looked. She leaned her head back, thinking about how far she'd come in the past twenty-eight hours. She felt as though she had been on another planet, and had just returned to Earth. She was still thinking about it when her cell phone rang. She couldn't imagine who it was since the SOS/HR office was closed, and it was ten o'clock at night. She fished it out of the pocket of her parka and answered it. She had turned it on in customs, but there was no one she wanted to call.

"You're back! Or are you still on the road?" the voice said in a cheerful tone. It was her sister, Rebecca, in L.A.

"I just walked in," Ginny said with a smile. They sent each other text messages regularly, but hadn't spoken in a month. And she had forgotten that she'd told her when she was coming back.

"You must be exhausted," Becky said, sounding sympathetic. She was the family nurturer, and the older sister Ginny had relied on all her life, although she hadn't seen her now in three years. But talking to each other, email when it was possible, and texting kept them close. Becky had just turned forty, and was four years older than Ginny. Becky was married, with three kids, and lived in Pasadena, and their father, with slowly but steadily developing Alzheimer's, had lived with her for two years. Her father couldn't live alone anymore, but neither Becky nor Ginny wanted to put him in a home. Their mother had been dead for ten years. He was seventy-two years old, but Becky said he looked a decade older since he got sick. He had worked in a bank, and retired when their mother died. He had lost his lust for life after that.

"I'm tired," Ginny admitted, "and I hate coming back this time of year. I was hoping to be here before this

and out again by now, but my replacement showed up late," she said, closing her eyes, and fighting not to fall asleep as she listened to her sister's voice. "I'm hoping they send me out again pretty soon, but I haven't heard anything yet." It cheered her up thinking that she wouldn't be in New York for long. It wasn't the apartment that depressed her, it was having nothing to do between assignments, and being useful to no one in New York. There was nothing she wanted to do, except leave again.

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