

Amanda Clayburn a popular, celebrity nurse is murdered. Det. Ridge Kelley and Det. James Tanner rush to find her killer. The only clue to this case is with a missing peridot ring and rich suspects who have their own secrets to hide.

Peridot

by Carla Landreth

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Peridot

**Murder, missing ring and two detectives
on borrowed time.**



Carla Landreth

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ISBN: 978-1-63492-750-5

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

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BookLocker.com, Inc.
2017

First Edition

Chapter 1

All crimes start out the same whether it's murder, rape, theft, intentional, unintentional, and sober or under the influence all crimes are the same. The result; somebody gets hurt, somebody dies, and families are destroyed. However, the tale of crime doesn't end with the act itself but really begins with a phone call...

"You're welcome," Amy replied as she took off her head phones. Her only co-worker Mary came in and sat down at her desk.

Shoving her cigarettes and lighter into the top drawer of her desk, Mary asked, "Did I miss anything good?"

Amy shook her head, "No, unless you count the guy who called about seeing those strange lights in the sky again. I wish he would stop calling us. I know we are 911, but we are for life endangering emergencies. When did floating lights in the sky constitute that?"

Mary giggled, "I guess old man Raymond called again?"

"The man calls every Wednesday night like clock work at 11 pm. Can't they do something about him?" Amy complained.

"Old man Raymond is crazier than bat shit. He's been seeing those lights ever since I was a kid and that's been 50 years. Some blame it on the lightening that hit him when he was on the phone that time; others just say he's crazy."

Just then the switch board rang, Mary quickly put on her head phone set and began the drill as Amy watched.

"911, what's your emergency?"

“Yes, this is Ashley Smither, a nurse here at Comanche County Medical Hospital and we need a welfare check on one of our nurses,” she said, politely.

“Okay, why do you need a welfare check?” Mary asked as she typed in the information.

“One of our nurses hasn’t been to work in two days and we called her home but got no answer. We went by her home and well, her car is in the parking lot. The land lord will not open up her apartment unless the police get involved. She’s always been on shift without fail and she has never had any problems, but we would like a welfare check please,” Smither explained.

“Are you sure she didn’t go visit someone and just forgot to tell you?” Mary asked.

“She has a very strict schedule and she always sticks to it. She’s also pregnant. If something has happened to her-”

Mary glanced over to Amy as she asked, “The address please?”

“The Anthony Apartments on 308 Apache Dr apartment 5B. Her name is Amanda Clayburn,” Smither replied.

Mary quickly covered the microphone and turned to Amy, “Didn’t we get a disturbance call about that apartment from a neighbor last night?”

Amy was already searching the back log and found it. “Yes, police said there was nothing when they got there.”

“Miss Smither’s where are you right now?” Mary asked.

“I’m at her apartment parking lot with the land lord,” she said.

“We’re dispatching police okay,” Mary said, taking note that a call had been made earlier to that same address.

* * *

Ridge Kelley rolled around in his king size bed eventually placing a pillow over his head. It still didn't drown out the noise.

If there was any way he knew when buying this small but quaint home for a single man would have had the late-night owl neighbors moving about like central station, he wouldn't have bought the place. But when he viewed the home which is during the day like all people do, it was a quiet neighborhood.

Now, one year later it had not gotten any better. One neighbor started his diesel pick up every other hour and letting it run for thirty minutes, while the other neighbor fed all the neighborhood cats which multiplied worse than rabbits, leaving this situation with many cat calling nights. The Hispanic neighbor was at least generous enough to turn off his Latin music to the chickens by 9 pm however by 5 am the music was going again.

Every night was loud, and every night was no rest. Not good for a homicide detective who worked most days under major stress to solve crimes.

He thought if he talked with the neighbors or by calling it in, that would deter some of the noise. That was no help at all. Small town life he was finding out wasn't as quiet as he thought it would be.

Rolling over he grabbed up his phone and checked the time; 3 am. He made a heavy sigh as he heard the pickup start up again. That's when he was thinking. He didn't have to stay at home, he could go over to his girlfriend's house if he liked. Her neighborhood was quiet.

Ten minutes later he was in his vehicle and was driving through town when his cell phone went off. He knew the ring tone very well—work.

* * *

Ridge drove up to the Anthony Apartment parking lot and got out. Even though his car was clearly marked with lights it was hard to tell from all the other lights that were flashing red and blue also. He snaked his way through the small crowd that had gathered meeting a uniform who stood vigilante by the police tape controlling the gawking crowd.

The officer nodded when Ridge showed him his badge. He glanced around noting more news crew was pulling up and scrambling to get information from anybody who would talk. He scanned even more hoping to see Skylar Benton. A reporter he knew real well, but didn't see her anywhere.

He went on ahead through the maze of CSI personnel and police as he went up the stairs to the only apartment that had people coming in and out. As he walked through the door he was quickly met by a uniform. He was young and looked to be a newbie as he nervously approached.

"You must be Detective Kelly," he said, pointing at Ridge's badge.

"Yes and you are?" Ridge asked, dryly.

"Officer Don Huffman," he replied.

"Were you the one that responded to the call?" Ridge asked.

"Yes, the apartment belongs to thirty-five-year-old Amanda Clayburn, a nurse at Comanche County Medical Hospital. We came to her home after a co-worker Ashley Smither reported her not coming into work. The landlord, Paul Goodner refused to open the apartment without police here," he said.

Ridge shook his head as Beth Ann Pope the medical examiner approached holding up some gloves above her petite body.

“Okay thanks, give me your report please by the end of your shift,” he said, then turned his attention to Beth. “My favorite lady.”

“Oh, don’t go get excited on me, besides don’t you have some girlfriend?” she laughed.

He shook his head smiling, “Yeah, but she doesn’t give me cold bodies to work with. What have we got?”

With a clipboard in hand she walked ahead of him as he followed. “In the kitchen, female, thirties, blonde hair, five three or four, and at least seven months pregnant,” she knelt and pointed. “There was a struggle several of her nails on her right hand are broke, looks like she might have hit the bar with her head at one point. But she has been shot once in the head possibly close range and five times in the stomach one of the shots in her forearm as if she were protecting the baby.”

“Great one of these cases,” Ridge wrote down in his little pad.

“No wedding ring,” she replied as a photographer took pictures as she pointed. “Not even a tan line.”

“Single, pregnant,” Ridged sighed “Why do I think this is a domestic dispute?”

“It’s got it written all over it, but then again, doesn’t mean it is. This day and age anything is possible. I’ll bag her hands and do a rape kit,” she said.

Ridge walked away and began scanning the room. It was a modern apartment and not much was out of place. A few knick knacks were knocked over on the console table behind the sofa as you walked to the kitchen. A newspaper scattered on the small kitchen island as if she had been reading it when she was called to the door. Other than that, the apartment was completely in order. He frowned as he stared and looked at the door and noticed something immediately.

“Not much of struggle other wise,” he said glancing around the room.

Pope said, “Meaning-”

“Meaning she knew the person who killed her,” his partner James Tanner said from the doorway.

Detective James Tanner had been Ridge’s partner for the last eight years and had been in homicide fifteen years. For him each homicide was a puzzle, a unique puzzle and each case always had a different motive, but they all were the same, murder was involved.

“Wondering when you were going to get here?” Ridge said, grinning.

“The question is how did you get here quicker then me? I live two blocks from here, you live across town?” Tanner said as he slipped on gloves.

“You know people should be able to try out their home before they buy it. You know sleep at least one night in the place. See what the nightlife is like before they purchase,” Ridge told him.

“Ah the neighbors must be up and about. Here’s a little advice my friend, the next time you find a cheap home pass it up. There’s a reason it’s cheap,” Tanner replied jokingly, but frowned when he saw the medical examiner. “Wait, why is Pope here? Don’t you only work the day shift?”

“Normally, but tonight I got pulled out of my nice comfy bed to be with you guys. Came from the head,” she replied as she wrote on the clip board.

Ridge shrugged shaking his head as his partner looked at him suspicious. “She was here when I got here,” Ridge replied.

“What have we got?” Tanner asked.

“A young pregnant nurse, who didn’t show up to work and they found her shot once in the head and several times in the

belly,” Ridge pointed as he spoke. “Probably one of those domestic things. I’m banking on the baby daddy had something to do with it.”

By now Tanner was in the kitchen where Amanda laid. The gurney was pulled up next to her as two technicians prepared to load her into the black body bag.

“Perhaps,” Tanner shook his head. “It’s a shame you know, two people have died.”

“We’ll know for sure, soon enough,” Pope said. “I’m guessing the woman is seven months. She could be further along.”

“And if she is?” Tanner asked.

“Then you have two homicides. Now guys I need to load her up and get her back to the office if you are done?” she said.

Ridge nodded giving her the signal to go ahead. A CSI handed a small bag to Ridge. Inside was a shell casing. He frowned and handed it to his partner who did more than frowned. He put on his glasses and squinted at the marking through the bag.

“A 9mm, but look at that casing, would you?” Tanner replied. “Definitely has it own markings.”

“Pope, what do you think of this?” Ridge asked, holding the bag up.

Pope walked over, held her head up and squint her eyes for a moment.

“Not sure, but I’ll put a rush on it at ballistics,” Pope said.

He handed the bag back to the CSI as a, tall stature walked into the room. Lieutenant Howard Yates kept his hands glued into his pocket as he snaked his way around observing every detail as he walked.

“Hey Lieutenant, what are you doing here? Didn’t know you like to come to the crimes scenes,” Tanner greeted.

“I don’t,” he said, smiling. “I like sitting behind the desk, delegating my worker bees.”

Tanner laughed, “Then why are you here if you feel that way?”

“Red Ball,” he said, firmly.

They both turn their heads to their lieutenant.

“Explains why I’m here,” Pope said as the personnel bagged the victim’s hands.

“Red ball?” Ridge asked.

“How is a domestic homicide a red ball?” Tanner inquired.

“IF, it’s a domestic homicide,” Lt. Yates corrected “You two shouldn’t just assume, that is what the case is about.”

“Okay, sorry I judged too quickly,” Tanner said, rolling his eyes.

“How’s it a Red Ball? Is this woman a high-profile person?” Ridge asked.

“No just an ordinary person,” Lt. Yates said, dryly as he looked around the room. “No, it became a Red Ball when uniforms screwed up. Apparently, the night before last, the neighbor downstairs complained about all the noise above her in this apartment. When the uniforms got here the disturbance was over.”

“Wait, are you telling me they didn’t follow up?” Ridge asked.

“Correct. They felt it was the end of their shift and since the disturbance was over-”

“Let’s not get caught up in paper work,” Tanner said, angrily.

“I’ve had them summoned to my office. I thought I would stop by here first to let you know. Press will be all over this. Two cops let a pregnant woman die, it’s going to be a bumpy ride,” he said with a dull tone. “And the mayor is making this a high priority case. So I summoned my two best detectives

who have cleared more cases than any other detectives in my squad.”

Pope with a stern face looked at Lieutenant Yates and crossed her arms. He quickly softened his smile toward the small Asian descendant lady.

“And the best medical examiner in the country,” he said.

“That’s what I thought,” she said.

Ridge looked over to his partner who was rubbing his face in disgust.

“Let’s go question our witnesses,” Ridge said.

Once they were downstairs they were in the apartment of Myra Russell, Amanda’s neighbor and only witness to the upstairs disturbance two nights ago.

With her white hair in sponge curlers and a long bright pink terry night robe and pink fuzzy slippers to match, she pushed her thick glasses up to wipe a few tears she shed with her handkerchief. She then stroked her fat cat that lazily sat on her lap.

“I’m sorry this is just such a shock. Mandy was such a sweet girl,” she said.

“What can you tell us about that disturbance you reported?” Ridge asked.

“Oh, I’m not sure what it was. I mean it could have been the television you know, but then again that could have been her,” she said, sniffing.

“Mrs. Russell, why don’t you start at the beginning?” kindly, Ridge asked.

“Well, Mandy always slept during the day. She is a nurse—was a nurse at Comanche County Medical Hospital. I myself don’t go there I have my own private doctor. She would get up sometime around seven in the evening. She didn’t have to be at work until midnight.”

“When did she start getting loud?”

“Oh, that is easy. I was watching the news in bed, that’s how I and Rambo relax. We watch TV and pass out,” she began to explain. “Anyway, by nine thirty and the television nearly on full blast is when I called her apartment, but she didn’t answer. But who would have been able to hear a phone she was extremely loud. Anyway, I called 911 and told them about her being loud. Rambo and I needed sleep you see. This morning we have doctor appointments,” she said as she smiled at Tanner. “You see we are going on a long trip-”

Tanner smiled and questioned, “When did the commotion stop Miss Russell?”

“While I was on the phone with the 911 girl. I told her the loudness had stopped,” she said, stroking her cat.

“Did you hear anything besides fighting?” Ridge asked.

“What do you mean?” she asked, confused.

“Like glass breaking? Maybe gun fire?” Ridge asked, writing down everything she was stating.

“I might have heard some glass, I certainly didn’t hear any guns going off,” she said firmly. “When it got louder I turned up my TV. Mandy knows I like to watch Steve Eager on the Channel 4 news. I have a thing for him. I met him once the nicest man,” she said, dreamingly.

Ridge made a quiet smirk while Tanner rolled his eyes.

“Are you sure you didn’t hear gun shots?” Tanner asked, snapping her out of her dream state.

“I told you I didn’t hear any guns,” she said sharply, cutting her eyes at Tanner.

“Maybe some fireworks?” Ridge suggested which cause Miss Russell to soften her features.

“No, I didn’t hear anything like a gun or a fire cracker. All I heard was yelling, about what I have no idea and then it got quiet,” she said. “That’s when I could hear Steve clear as a bell.”

“When it got quiet did you get up look out your window?” Ridge asked.

“I told you Steve Eager was on the news. A bomb could have gone off and I would not have left my bed. Isn’t that right Rambo?” Rambo made a loud meow sound as Ridge and Tanner glanced at each other.

Tanner leaned into him, “She’s no help.”

“Miss Russell, did you know that Amanda was pregnant?” Ridge asked.

“Oh, yes. She never came out and said it, but I knew,” she said.

“Did you know who she was seeing?” Tanner inquired.

“No. In fact I think she went to one of those clinics and got turkey basted,” she replied, frowning and shaking her head.

“You mean in vitro?” Ridge suggested.

“I guess if that’s what you want to call it. I never saw a man go to her apartment in all the years she lived here. I saw her go to work every evening and I saw her come in from work every morning like clock work. If she had a social life it was with a turkey baste,” she said.

“Well, we thank you Miss Russell, for helping us, if you think of anything else give us a call immediately,” Ridge handed her a business card.

She quickly smiled and took it as the two turned away.

“She wasn’t any help?” Tanner said.

“Well she was. We know when the last time Amanda was alive, we also know she didn’t have much of a social life and believe me this old lady who is stuck in her home, probably knows everything in this complex,” Ridge explained.

Suddenly there was a small tapping on his shoulder he looked around and there stood Miss Russell.

“Excuse me detectives, would you happen to know if Steve Eager, the news anchor would be out there with all the

press?" She strained to glance out her door at the crowd of news that was lined across the street.

"I don't know Ma'am but if we see him, we'll tell him about you?" Ridge said.

"Oh, you're a sweet heart-"

Just then the uniform Ridge had met earlier Office Don Huffman was at Miss Russell's door.

"Excuse me Detective Kelly, we may have another witness," he said softly.

Tanner shook his head, "Hopefully not another elderly lonely lady."

At the next apartment complex was an older Hispanic man in his early fifties. Standing by the door with a uniform he pushed his steel rimmed glasses up on his face as Ridge and Tanner approached.

"Hello Mr.?" Ridge greeted.

"Sanchez, Diablo Sanchez," he held out his hand in greeting.

"Did you know the young woman next door here?" Ridge asked.

Sanchez shook his head, "I use to, but now I've only met her a few times in passing. You see usually when she's going to work I'm coming home. I work at the pipe plant and she's a night nurse. I did see her on weekends. She was nice."

"Do you know something about the night before last when Miss Clayburn was killed? Like maybe a fight? Arguing?"

"Well, I don't know anything about any fighting or arguing or anything like that, but when I was walking up the sidewalk, nearly at my apartment I heard a door slam. I saw a stranger coming from the stairs of Amanda's apartment. In fact the person was so nervous they were so busy looking around they bumped into me. Didn't say excuse me or anything, quickly ran off."

“What time was this?” Ridge asked.

“Well I get off at seven, but my daughter and her kids picked me up and I had supper with them. By the time I got home it was nine forty-five close to ten. Somewhere around there.”

“Did you get a look at this person?”

“No it was dark. They did have dark hair though like dread locks, it swept their face when they turned. I can tell you they were dressed in all black or navy blue including the tennis shoes and they had a hoodie, which I thought was odd since it’s the dead heat of summer.”

“Did you get a look at their face?”

He shook his head, “No, but when they bumped into me, I sort of startled them. Before I could say anything, they were gone.”

“Can you tell how tall or anything about this person?” Tanner asked.

Sanchez scratched his head, “Well, they weren’t much taller than me, thin.”

“Could you get an indication if it was male or female?” Ridge asked.

“Well when the person bumped into me, you know how you put your hands up and excusing yourself even though it was their fault. I could feel through their jacket they had some muscles about themselves. So, if I was guessing I’d say a man possibly a teenager.”

“Nothing else stood out about this person?” Ridge inquired.

“Like I said, I heard the door slam, that’s what made me look up while I was walking to my apartment. The person was in a real big hurry and was looking around, afraid they would get caught, they bumped into me because they turned back to

see if anyone was behind them. They did get into a dark colored Lexus,”

“Plate number?” Ridge asked.

“Uh, I don’t remember all of it, but I do know it had HN, I believe. Sorry.”

“Do you know if Amanda had any particular boyfriend you saw come over?”

He thought for a moment, “No, I can’t recall any boyfriend, her friend Trina came over at least once a week.”

“Does Trina have a last name?” Tanner asked.

“Sorry, I never got the last name. Amanda and Trina always like to use the complex pool in the summer time. Trina was over more, but lately I haven’t seen Trina. Of course, being pregnant doesn’t exactly drive women to the pool, they prefer the ac. At least my wife did,” he replied.

“What about your wife, did she see or even hear anything?” Tanner questioned.

“No, detective, my wife died about three years ago of cancer. That was when Amanda was a home health nurse. She took care of my wife. That’s how I met her. Like I said, once my wife was gone and getting that job at the hospital I didn’t see Amanda as often, but she did talk to me when she did. I can’t believe anybody would want to hurt her.”

“Sorry about your wife Mr. Sanchez,” Ridge said as he handed him a card. “If anything, else comes up give us a call.”

“Sure will.”

They both walked away as they saw the body being loaded into the medical examiners wagon.

“We have one more witness we need to talk to,” Ridge said.

“The co-worker who called all of this in,” Tanner replied, pointing to a young blonde-haired woman in scrubs who turned her head when the gurney walked passed them.

Ridge motioned for the uniform to bring her over which he did.

“You must be Ashley Smithers,” Ridge greeted.

“Yes. I worked with Amanda or Mandy we called her at Comanche County Medical Hospital. She was a nurse and worked the surgical wing.”

“Before this happened was Amanda having any trouble with anybody?” Tanner asked.

She shrugged, “She never said she was having any trouble. She was happy.”

“What about the father of the baby?”

Ashley suddenly looked nervous, “I don’t know who the father is or was. She never told us. In fact, you could have blown me down with a feather when she announced she was pregnant.”

“I take it she didn’t have much of a social life?” Ridge replied.

“We at work only knew she worked. She didn’t discuss her social life. She took her job very serious. She was never late even with the morning sickness and she covered people’s shifts all the time. She worked as far as we knew. She never discussed her private life.”

“Surely, she might have said something,” Tanner said.

“Nope not Mandy she made it clear her life was private. I don’t even know if she had parents or siblings, but I did know she came to work, the patients loved her, doctors adored her, and the nurses wanted to be her,” Smithers replied.

“Was she close to anyone at the hospital?” Ridge asked, crossing his arms.

“You can try the doctors she worked with. Many of them wanted her on their team when they did surgery. Usually she always ended up on Dr. Kingston’s team. He’s a renowned

surgeon and only certain people can be on his team. Mandy was the top nurse.”

“You claimed you didn’t know her very well, but you knew where she lived,” Tanner questioned.

Ashley began to explain, “When she didn’t show up to work that first night we called her home several times and got the answering machine. We just assumed she might needed some time off. I mean she was pregnant and working like a dog and did go home tired more than usual in that condition. But when she didn’t show up tonight and we hadn’t heard from her we knew something was wrong. We looked it up on her file that’s how we knew where she lived.”

“Did you ever witness any harassment from anyone, maybe a jealous co-worker?”

“No. God no. We are a family when we work. Usually jealousy is stemmed from our personal life. Since we didn’t know Mandy’s, nobody argued with her, she was liked by everybody. If anything, people fought to be on her team.”

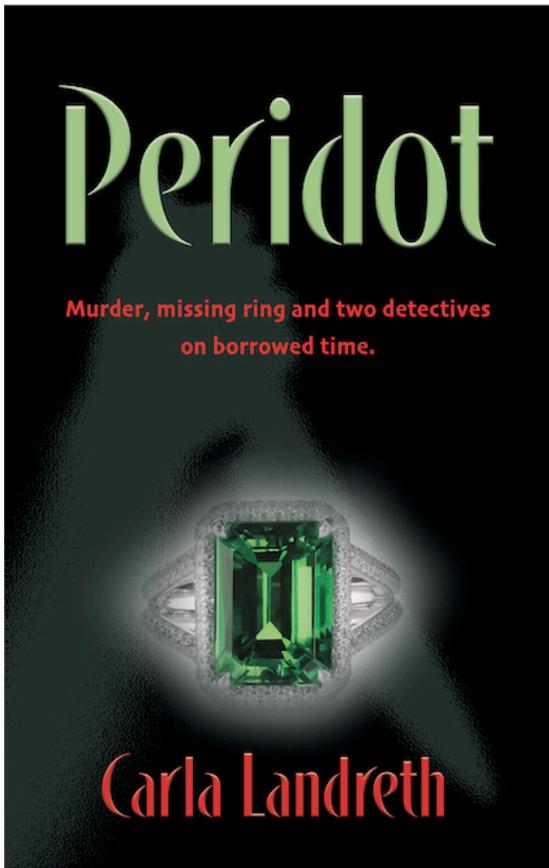
Tanner sighed and handed her a card, “If you think of anything else.”

She snatched the card, but turned to them, “Mandy was a good person, she didn’t do anything to anybody and everybody liked her. Who would want to do such?”

They both said nothing as Ashley Smither rushed away.

“This girl has a squeaky-clean reputation, everybody liked her yet,” Tanner said.

“Somebody wanted her dead,” Ridge replied.



Amanda Clayburn a popular, celebrity nurse is murdered. Det. Ridge Kelley and Det. James Tanner rush to find her killer. The only clue to this case is with a missing peridot ring and rich suspects who have their own secrets to hide.

Peridot

by Carla Landreth

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