

Secrets uncovered in truth quest

By PAUL FIANDER Mysteries

Careless in Red by Elizabeth George (HarperCollins, 623 pages, \$29.95)

Mystery readers accustomed to speeding through terse, action-packed thrillers from the likes of Hammett, McBain and Spillane will find Elizabeth George's novels completely different. Her novels tend to be long, with many characters, and she likes to give detailed descriptions of both people and places. Trying to hurry through a George novel is not a good idea. She takes her time and she is going to tell the story her way.

Troubled families is a major theme of Careless in Red. Det.-Supt. Thomas Lynley, 38, of Scotland Yard attempts to work through the death of his wife Helen by taking a long walking journey along the paths of southern Cornwall.

He comes upon the body of a young man, who appears to have fallen from the cliffs while climbing. When authorities discover that the dead man, Santo Keane, 18, has been murdered, Lynley inevitably gets caught up in the investigation, which involves two dysfunctional families: the Keanes and the Angarracks. Apparently young Santo's exuberance had netted him several sexual encounters but his attitude of "love them and then leave them" had left many unhappy women behind. For a time there are dozens of suspects. The author has a way of leading the reader to think in a certain direction only to have that line of reasoning suddenly declared useless.

The investigation is led by Bea Hannaford, 14 years divorced but still dealing almost daily with her former husband who is also in police work. Her aggressive, no-nonsense approach contrasts sharply with Lynley's patient, sure-handed methods. Sgt. Havers, Lynley's usual partner, is sent out from London to both keep an eye on Lynley and to aid in the murder investigation. Reading how Havers, Lynley and Hannaford attempt to get along is a delight. **Though long novels call for a considerable investment of time, and of concentration, few readers will regret getting started on this latest thriller from Elizabeth George.**

Paul Fiander is a freelance writer who lives in Halifax.