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Lynley's lonely walk satisfying for mystery fans; Aristocratic detective investigates death on Cornish coastline

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CARELESS IN RED

Elizabeth George

Harper

640 pp., \$29.95

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Careless in Red is Elizabeth's George's latest mystery featuring the charismatic Det. Insp. Thomas Lynley. This time, Lynley is not his normal aristocratic (he's also a lord) self. He's gone on a walk for weeks along the Cornish coast with nothing but the clothes on his back. Readers of the series will know that Lynley suffered a terrible personal tragedy, and his abandonment of job and home is an attempt to deal with his grief.

It's difficult to imagine a filthy, unshaven, long-haired Lynley, but George manages it, and Lynley's appearance reveals only a fraction of the disarray in his mind. But he is still a detective at heart, and when he stumbles upon a body his instincts about possible murder kick in, and he cannot simply walk by.

Complicating the issue is the fact that he becomes a suspect in the death of the deceased, a young man who fell while rock climbing. Several people appear to have the motive and means to have killed Santo Kerne, a notorious lothario who has bedded and dumped numerous women. The father of one of those women is also a suspect.

Sex charges the mystery for many of the characters, including Thomas himself, who is drawn to the first person he speaks to after the discovery of the body, a young woman named Daidre Trahair.

The setting contributes considerably to the plot and tone: the Cornish coast is sparsely settled, but the nearby town becomes a tourist destination in the summer, and two sports dominate: surfing and climbing.

The dead man's family is in the midst of renovating an old hotel into an adventures destination. The Kerne family has lived through its own considerable

disasters even before his death. The mother, Dellen, is psychologically wounded and her sexual behaviour over the years has caused both her children and husband embarrassment and pain.

Typically in a mystery, secrets abound, and *Careless in Red* is no exception. Nothing is as it seems, except for the best character George has ever created -- the splendid Barbara Havers, Lynley's former colleague at New Scotland Yard who resurfaces here to help out with the investigation. Her regard for Lynley and her loyalty to him are palpable, and she is able to understand aspects of humanity that he cannot. Unlike Lynley, Havers is a commoner, with no sense of style, no inheritance and no posh accent, but she is uncommonly intelligent, hard-working and sensitive. Together the two make an excellent team, and while in this novel the teamwork isn't quite what it used to be (Lynley was Havers's boss at Scotland Yard), we see glimmers of it and hopes for the future. Havers understands class distinctions in a way Lynley cannot because of his privilege, and her perspective allows the reader to understand the issues as well.

***Careless in Red* has numerous plot strands, and by the end the author manages -- as she always does -- to reveal them all and their connections. This novel is immensely satisfying for lovers of the genre and for *Elizabeth George* fans in particular.**

Candace Fertile is a freelance reviewer