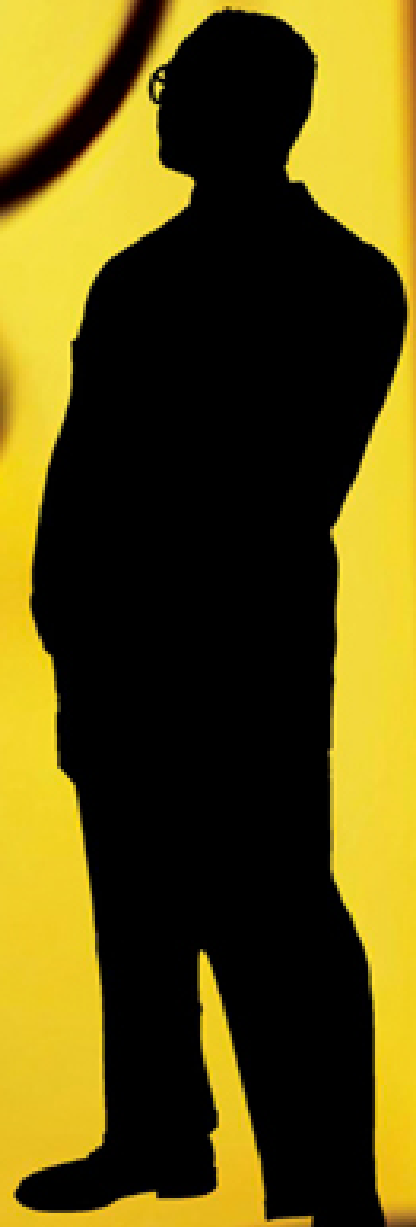


MICHAEL INNES

An Inspector Appleby Mystery

APPLEBY TALKS
AGAIN



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Appleby Talks Again

First published in 1956

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This is a fictional work and all characters are
drawn from the author's imagination.
Any resemblance or similarities to persons either
living or dead are entirely coincidental.

About the Author



Michael Innes is the pseudonym of John Innes Mackintosh Stewart, who was born in Edinburgh in 1906. His father was Director of Education and as was fitting the young Stewart attended Edinburgh Academy before going up to Oriel, Oxford where he obtained a first class degree in English.

After a short interlude travelling with AJP Taylor in Austria, he embarked on an edition of *Florio's* translation of *Montaigne's Essays* and also took up a post teaching English at Leeds University.

By 1935 he was married, Professor of English at the University of Adelaide in Australia, and had completed his first detective novel, *Death at the President's Lodging*. This was an immediate success and part of a long running series centred on his character Inspector Appleby. A second novel, *Hamlet Revenge*, soon followed and overall he managed over fifty under the Innes banner during his career.

After returning to the UK in 1946 he took up a post with Queen's University, Belfast before

finally settling as Tutor in English at Christ Church, Oxford. His writing continued and he published a series of novels under his own name, along with short stories and some major academic contributions, including a major section on modern writers for the *Oxford History of English Literature*.

Whilst not wanting to leave his beloved Oxford permanently, he managed to fit in to his busy schedule a visiting Professorship at the University of Washington and was also honoured by other Universities in the UK.

His wife Margaret, whom he had met and married whilst at Leeds in 1932, had practised medicine in Australia and later in Oxford, died in 1979. They had five children, one of whom (Angus) is also a writer. Stewart himself died in November 1994 in a nursing home in Surrey.

THE MOUSE-TRAP

"Is that Sir John Appleby?" the voice asked. And it added, "Of Scotland Yard?"

"Appleby speaking. But you've been put through to me at my home address."

"I know, I know. And I'm most terribly sorry." The voice – it appeared to be that of a lowland Scot – was quite at ease in its apology. "I hope I haven't fetched you from your dinner."

Appleby, who found that he had brought his table-napkin with him to the telephone, said nothing. He had received this sort of call before.

"My only warrant for breaking in upon your privacy, Sir John, is a common friend. Lord Arthur Spendlove."

"Ah, yes." Appleby didn't precisely kindle. This gambit, too, he was familiar with.

"Arthur has told me how absolutely one can rely upon your discretion. I ought to say that my name is Macrae – Robert Macrae." The voice paused very briefly, as if upon this information Appleby ought decidedly not to have to cast about in his mind. And, in point of fact, the name did ring a bell. Robert Macrae was a very distinguished industrial chemist, and the head of a firm of high scientific repute. "Discretion," the voice went on, "is the essential thing. I want to consult you in the strictest confidence."

“My dear sir, you speak as if I were a family solicitor or a physician or a private inquiry agent. As it happens, I’m an Assistant Commissioner of Police. I can’t possibly undertake to entertain confidential communications.”

“Quite so, quite so.” The voice was now betraying a shade of agitation. “But this is so very difficult a matter. Threats. Menaces. Or can it be a joke? Your experience could advise me. I’d hate to visit disgrace on what may be a mere whim or prank. But there are circumstances that make me...apprehensive. Could you run down?”

“Run down?” Appleby was so surprised that he repeated the words mechanically.

“Yes – and at once.” The voice gave an address. “That’s on the river, you know, just short of Bainton. Say forty minutes.” Suddenly the voice spoke on a new queer note. “My God – it may be life or death to me!”

“If you consider yourself to be in some immediate danger, Dr Macrae, you should contact your local police-station at once.”

“No, no – that’s just what I want to avoid. But you’ll come?”

“Yes, I’ll come.” In saying this, Appleby felt fleetingly that he was acting almost as oddly as Macrae was. Without ceremony, he put down the receiver. Five minutes later, he was driving rapidly west.

An estate-agent would have described Dr Macrae’s house as standing in its own grounds. In the deepening summer dusk Appleby could just distinguish that these seemed to consist mostly of shrubberies, together with a tree-shaded lawn

running down to the river at the back. A burglar's paradise, he told himself professionally as he took the last curve of the drive. The house itself was large and gloomy, and from this aspect showed only a single light – a feeble glimmer in a porch before what must be the front door. The effect wasn't welcoming.

Not that the place was at all tumbledown. There was plenty of fresh paint in a forbidding chocolate tone, and through the open doors of a garage Appleby had glimpsed a couple of opulent cars. Their owner was presumably a wealthy man. But there was no sign that he was a particularly cheerful one.

Appleby rang the bell. It was of the antique sort that peals loud and long in some remote kitchen. There was rather a lengthy wait and then the front door opened. An ancient female servant, heavily armoured in starched linen before and on top, peered at the visitor suspiciously. "Who are ye for?" she asked in a strong Scottish accent.

"Good evening. I am Sir John Appleby. I have an appointment with Dr Macrae."

"An appointment?" The old woman seemed to regard this claim as an occasion of increased misgiving. "Come in, then. But ye'll hae to see Miss Hatt."

"My appointment is with Dr Macrae himself."

"Naebody sees the Doctor until Miss Hatt's had a worrd wi' him. This way."

Appleby found himself in a high, dusky hall. The panelled walls were ornamented with enormous oil-paintings of deer and Highland cattle, interspersed with claymores, dirks and the

species of small round shield conventionally associated with Rob Roy Macgregor. It was apparent that Dr Macrae cherished his Caledonian ancestry. They moved down a long corridor and came to a closed door at the end. In the room beyond, a man was talking, fluently and incisively, to the accompaniment of a clattering typewriter. The old woman opened the door and motioned Appleby forward. "A gentleman to see the Doctor," she said.

The typewriter stopped, but the voice – a Scottish voice – continued. It was advancing cogent reasons for being unable to subscribe to a charity organisation. Then the voice stopped too. Miss Hatt had silenced it by turning a switch on her dictaphone. "Your name?" she said.

"Sir John Appleby."

"You have an appointment with Dr Macrae?"

"He made an appointment with me by telephone, just an hour ago."

Miss Hatt, although her speech was quite dauntingly severe, was personable and in early middle-age. She suggested the possession of high professional proficiency, together with certain quite different qualities which might declare themselves upon appropriate occasions. At the moment, she appeared rather at a loss. Appleby guessed that his name had conveyed quite a lot to her. There was nothing surprising about that. But he rather wondered why she was so clearly perplexed by his visit. There might be half a dozen occasions for it, after all. "Then will you wait a moment," she asked, "while I tell Dr Macrae you are here?"

Briskly and competently, Miss Hatt rose and left the room. Her manner was entirely as it

should be; nevertheless Appleby found himself obscurely called upon to notice that her figure was excellent and her complexion really beautiful. He waited in solitude and patience – for he wasn't, as it happened, without something to think about. He waited rather a long time. And then Miss Hatt came in again. She was still brisk and competent – which made it a little odd that the beautiful complexion had vanished. Her face was pale and seemed faintly moist. "Did you *know*?" she asked.

"I beg your pardon?"

"You *are* Sir John Appleby – of the police? When you sent me to find Dr Macrae, you knew that...he was dead?"

The queerness of this question was almost as surprising as the news it conveyed. But it wasn't quite crazy. It was, in fact, just the sort of logic one sometimes gets from persons suffering from severe shock. "Nothing of the sort, madam. Put such an idea out of your head." Appleby walked up to the woman and looked at her searchingly but sympathetically. "You have actually found Dr Macrae dead?" he asked. "You are certain of it?"

She turned and gestured him out of the room. He could hear her taking a deep, gasping breath, as if determined to regain control of herself. "You will be certain yourself in a moment, Sir John. Dr Macrae has been...he has been murdered."

They went down another corridor and through a couple of baize-covered doors. The dead man appeared to have prized seclusion. His study was a book-lined apartment, sombre like everything else in this house, and fronting the lawn that ran down to the river. A french window was open

upon the warm July night, and directly before this the body of Robert Macrae sat at a large desk. Appleby walked round this. "Or perhaps," he heard Miss Hatt say behind him, "it might be suicide?"

It certainly hadn't been that. Macrae had been shot clean through the forehead at just short of point-blank range. His assailant had presumably walked up to the french window out of the darkness, killed his man, and walked away again. Appleby frowned. He didn't like the simplicity of the thing. It is the elaborately conceived murder that it is easier to get a grip on. "Suicide?" he said, and turned to Miss Hatt. He spoke as if with an entirely open mind. "It comes into your head as likely? Was Dr Macrae a sick man, or worried?"

"His arthritis was troubling him, and he found it rather difficult to get about. But I don't think it seriously worried him. Of course, he had been working very hard. He and Mr Ivor – that is his nephew, Ivor Macrae – have been on the verge of some extremely important discovery – a chemical process which would revolutionise man-made fibres."

"I see. Does Mr Ivor Macrae live here?"

"No, not now." Miss Hatt hesitated. "Only Mr Colin lives in the house. He is Mr Ivor's brother."

"And also a chemist?"

"Colin – Mr Colin – is an author."

"Ah, an author." Appleby, intent on examining the body, seemed to repeat the word absently. But he was really wondering if he had been right in detecting a note of warmth in Miss Hatt's voice. "But Mr Ivor too lived here until recently?"

Miss Hatt nodded. She was standing quite still near the door. It wasn't necessary to tell her not to wander about. As well as a good figure she had a good head. "Yes," she said. "But now Mr Ivor has a cottage of his own just up the river. He had a – a dispute with his uncle. It has been a great worry to Dr Macrae, particularly as they work so closely together at the laboratories."

"A professional dispute?"

"No. It has been entirely a family matter. Mr Ivor's father left a peculiar will, giving the control of very considerable property to Dr Macrae during his lifetime. Mr Ivor has felt the position to be increasingly absurd. As a result there was – well, almost a quarrel."

Appleby looked hard at Miss Hatt. "And now" – and he pointed with a certain grimness at the dead man – "Mr Ivor will get what he has wanted?"

"I suppose so."

"And Mr Colin too?"

Just perceptibly, Miss Hatt hesitated. She was still quite startlingly pale. "Oh, certainly. But, of course, he didn't break with his uncle in any way. I don't think property and money mean very much to Mr Colin Macrae. As I've said, he is an author – an artist."

"That makes a difference, no doubt." Permitting himself this fleeting irony, Appleby took a prow around the room. "Is Mr Colin at home now?"

Miss Hatt was about to reply when there was an interruption. Abruptly out of the night, a man had appeared at the French window. "Hullo," he said. "Who's t-t-talking about m-me?"

It couldn't be said, Appleby reflected a few minutes later, that Colin Macrae took his uncle's sudden and shocking death very hard. But then it seemed likely that he didn't take things in general that way. He was easy-going, loquacious despite his pronounced stammer, and possessed of a personal modesty that Appleby didn't seem to recall as a very regular endowment of authors. And there was certainly something between him and Miss Hatt. He would do a lot for her, Appleby guessed. And perhaps she would do even more for him.

"B-b-but doesn't Ivor know?" Colin turned inquiringly to Miss Hatt. "He hasn't b-been over?"

"Certainly he has been over. I came upon him with Dr Macrae in this room half an hour ago." Miss Hatt was now impassive. "So it surprised me that Dr Macrae had made an appointment with Sir John. But when I came to tell Dr Macrae of Sir John's arrival, Mr Ivor, of course, wasn't here. There was only...the body."

A moment's silence succeeded upon this. It was broken by Appleby. "When he came to see his uncle, Mr Ivor was in the habit of simply walking in?"

"Yes. Or sometimes he would drop down the river in his dinghy and walk across the lawn."

"He had that familiar habit, despite the quarrel?"

"I wouldn't c-c-call it a quarrel." Colin Macrae had broken in, suddenly eager. "It's t-t-too strong a word. But Ivor is no good at p-personal relations. Too intellectual and h-h-highly strung. B-brains all the time. Archeology instead of g-g-golf. Chess problems, and competitions in highbrow weeklies, instead of thrillers and the p-

p-pools. The P-p-proceedings of the Royal Society as a b-bed-time book." Colin paused, as if vaguely aware of rambling. "N-n-not quarrelsome – n-n-not really."

"But he *did* quarrel with Dr Macrae, all the same." Miss Hatt's impassivity had hardened.

"Were they quarrelling when you came upon them half an hour ago?" Appleby asked this question gently.

Miss Hatt had one of her moments of fleeting irresolution. "Dr Macrae was denying something. I heard him say, rather hotly, 'I don't know what you're talking about.' I had taken Dr Macrae one or two letters to sign. But it was clearly an awkward moment, and I came away at once."

Again there was a silence. This time it was broken by the *purr-purr* of a telephone on the desk. There was something indefinably sinister in this summons addressed to an ear now sealed by death. Appleby brought a handkerchief from his pocket and picked up the receiver gingerly in its folds. He listened for some moments in silence. "Unfortunately not," he said. "I am, in fact, a police officer... I regret to have to tell you of Dr Macrae's sudden death... Yes, death... Yes, I think you very usefully might... At once? But certainly. Come right over now." He put down the receiver and stood motionless for a moment, frowning. He might have been trying to make sense of something he had heard. "Somebody called Cokayne," he said presently. "Declares himself to have rung up Dr Macrae because he felt uneasy."

"Uneasy?" Miss Hatt spoke sharply.

"Yes – but he didn't explain himself further. He's coming along, however, straight away. A colleague, I gather."

"The principal research assistant, working closely with Dr Macrae and Mr Ivor. He lives in the village." Miss Hatt was now composed and once more entirely businesslike. "Ought we not to try to contact Mr Ivor, Sir John?"

"His cottage is on the telephone? Then would you mind, Miss Hatt, going to another instrument, and trying to get him on that? I want this one handled as little as possible. And get the local police-station at the same time, and tell the fellow on duty what's happened. And tell him that I'm here. He'll know how to proceed." Appleby waited until the secretary had left the room, and then turned to Colin Macrae. "Is there – or was there – anything very valuable in this room?"

Colin shook his head. "I d-d-don't think so. All my uncle's things were s-s-solid, but not really good. He had no t-t-taste whatever." Colin paused to glance at the body. "And the s-s-set-up doesn't suggest his coming upon a thief."

"Perfectly true." Appleby was now systematically searching the room. "There's nothing," he said suddenly and sharply, "you ought to tell me?"

"I d-d-don't think so." Colin seemed unperturbed by the abrupt question.

"Do you think Miss Hatt knows anything?"

"It's not my business to speak for her."

"But you might be described as in one another's confidence?"

"That's quite irrelevant. I won't d-discuss it."

Appleby looked curiously at Colin Macrae. "Very well. But we don't yet know what *is* relevant. This is a complicated affair."

"I'd have thought it rather a s-s-simple one."

"That was my way of thinking, until a few minutes ago." Appleby was walking over to the fireplace – in which, despite the mildness of the summer night, a low fire was burning. "But now I've changed my mind." For a moment he stood quite still, staring into the small dull glow. Suddenly he stooped and fished something from a corner of the grate. It was a piece of charred paper.

"Have you found a c-c-clue, Sir John?" Colin Macrae, who a moment before had been reticent and dry, now spoke almost mockingly.

"It looks to be precisely that, doesn't it?" Appleby's reply was in the same tone. Nevertheless it was with an absorbed seriousness that he carried his find to a table, smoothed it out, and studied it. He studied it for a long time. Then he brought a notebook from his pocket, tore out a couple of leaves, and with these covered all but a narrow strip of the paper. "What I have found is part of a letter," he said. "Would you mind coming over and looking at it?"

Colin crossed the room silently and looked. Having done so, he showed no disposition to speak.

"Perhaps you can tell me whose writing this is?"

"It isn't c-c-clear to me that I ought to offer an opinion – or discuss the matter f-further with you at all, Sir John."

"I'm not asking for an opinion. I'm asking for assured knowledge, if you happen to have it."

"V-v-very well. It is my brother's writing – Ivor's writing."

“Thank you. And can you—”

Appleby paused as Miss Hatt entered the room again. They both turned to her expectantly. “I got the police,” she said. “But there was no reply from Mr Ivor. I wonder whether—” Suddenly she broke off with a startled cry. Following her gaze, both men swung round.

Somebody else was now standing in the french window. It was a young woman. She could scarcely have been more than twenty. She was staring at the dead man with a look of transfixed horror. And then she cried out. “Ivor.. Ivor – where are you?” She looked round the brightly lit room helplessly, and began to sway oddly on her feet. Making a dive forward, Appleby caught her as she fainted away.

The local police had come, and with them the police surgeon. Presently there would be detectives and photographers. Appleby had dismissed both Miss Hatt and Colin Macrae for the moment, and had himself withdrawn into another room. The latest arrival had been quickly restored to consciousness. But there seemed to be no reason why she should be interviewed in the presence of the corpse. Her name was Joyce Hereward. Once calmed and reassured, she gave an entirely coherent account of herself. But she remained in a considerable state of anxiety, all the same.

“Ivor Macrae and I are engaged. We are to be married this autumn. I live with my parents just beyond the village. Ivor and I go on the river a lot. He has a dinghy for messing about, and also a small motor-launch. This evening we were

going to take a late picnic out in the launch. So I told my parents, and walked over to the cottage."

Joyce Hereward paused. She had felt it important, Appleby thought, to get in that bit about her parents. She was very young, and almost certainly wholly ingenuous. "You had arranged this picnic some time ago?" Appleby asked.

"Yes, indeed. I've been looking forward to it all week!" For the first time Miss Hereward faintly smiled. "But just as we set out, Ivor was brought a telephone message, asking him to call on his uncle. We decided to do it on the way. So we tied up at the landing-stage here, and Ivor walked up to the house. I waited in the launch. We thought he wouldn't be long."

"There was no suggestion that you might come up to the house too?"

"No. Of course I know – I mean I knew – Dr Macrae. But we thought it would just be business. And then there was the fact—" The girl hesitated and fell awkwardly silent.

"You mean the fact that your uncle and your *fiancé*, had ceased to be on very good terms?"

"Yes." She nodded, at once apprehensive and grateful. "So I stopped. But it was quite a long time, after all. And then I thought I heard somebody – a man – cry out for help. It was getting nearly dark. I tried to persuade myself that what I had heard was something quite different – just somebody giving an ordinary sort of shout. So I went on waiting. But Ivor didn't come, and didn't come. Suddenly I became frightened. So I landed and walked up to the house. The light in the study window seemed to – to suggest security, and I made straight for it. I

told myself I'd find Dr Macrae and Ivor just talking away. But you know what I *did* find."

Appleby nodded kindly. "Yes, indeed. And I am very sorry that you had the shock."

Suddenly the girl's lip quivered. "But Ivor! Please, please, what has happened to him?"

It took Appleby a second to know how to meet this appeal. "That," he said gravely, "is something that I think we shall know quite soon."

"He wouldn't be...suspected? Ivor could never do a thing like that."

"I'm afraid that everybody concerned, Miss Hereward, must in some degree be suspected – until we clear the matter up."

"Can I help?" She was suddenly eager.

And once more Appleby produced his crumpled piece of paper. This time he concealed no part of it. "Is this your *fiancé's* handwriting?"

She glanced at it only for a moment. "Yes, it is." She looked pitifully up at him, as if hoping to discover that this was good news. What she saw made her shrink a little. "It can't mean anything bad?"

"Its meaning – or its significance – is obscure to me, Miss Hereward. And that, perhaps, is something. For it ought, you see, to be as damnably clear as daylight."

"You mean–?"

Appleby shook his head. And as he did so, the front doorbell pealed. "At least," he said, "we're making progress. For here, I think, is the last of our *dramatis personae*. Will you go and join Miss Hatt for a little? I must see this fellow on his own."

Charles Cokayne was smooth and featureless. Quite soon after a casual meeting, one would probably recall only that he had a cold grey eye.

"Why was I uneasy?" He made a small restrained gesture. "It is this family quarrel. For months it has been upsetting the relations of Dr Macrae with his nephew Ivor. That has been very bad for our work."

"And the work is very important just now? There is a big discovery pending?"

Cokayne smiled faintly. "That is the sort of story that is always going round. One day – perhaps, yes. But my chiefs, I think, had still rather a long way to go. And the friction between them didn't help."

"I see. And your uneasiness—"

"What I have feared is the secretary here, Miss Hatt. She is secretly passionate on Colin Macrae's behalf. And I believe her to be very unscrupulous. Yesterday I heard from Ivor Macrae that she had betrayed herself in a flash of temper as keyed up to any mischief. So I have been worried. And this evening I thought I would ring up Dr Macrae, and then come across and have a serious word with him about the situation."

"You were on terms with him that made that an appropriate course? He would have welcomed your intervention and counsel?"

Cokayne made his small gesture again. "I could only hope so, Sir John."

"You had no worries, no suspicions, about Ivor Macrae?"

“But certainly not!” Cokayne was emphatic. “Ivor is rash, and he had this open break with his uncle. But I have worked for him and with him for years, and I would never believe ill of him.”

“That is very gratifying.” And once again Appleby fished the enigmatic scrap of paper from his pocket. “You would agree that this fragment of a letter is in Ivor Macrae’s hand? I wonder, Mr Cokayne, if you would oblige me by reading it – aloud?”

Cokayne raised his eyebrows – as he well might at this slightly strange request. Appleby wondered whether the action didn’t reveal in the eyes themselves some glint of excitement. In Cokayne’s hand, however, there was no tremor as he took the charred and crumpled paper. And what he read was in an even, carefully expressionless voice:

“My dear Uncle,

“You have twenty-four hours. If this surprises you, the fault is mine for hesitating as I have done. But if you have come to think of me as a man who cannot make up his mind, then you are, believe me, fatally wrong. Give up what you have unjustly taken, or you will not live to enjoy even what is rightfully yours. And decide within, I say, twenty...”

There was a moment’s silence when Cokayne had finished reading the fragment. Then Appleby, who had been listening with a curiously strained attention, took back the paper. “Well,” he asked,

"does this sound as if it's Miss Hatt who's for the Old Bailey?"

"No...it doesn't." Cokayne spoke hesitantly, as if his mind were groping its way into a new situation. "It sounds like something quite different."

"And that is?"

"Insanity!" Cokayne came out with the word vehemently. "Ivor Macrae could never turn into a calculating criminal – but he might, I suppose, turn into a madman. We can all testify that he is an intensely highly-strung intellectual type, who might conceivably—"

"Quite so." Appleby cut this short almost harshly. "The question is, where are we now? What happens to a man who writes this" – and he tapped the paper – "proceeds to act on it lethally, and then, on retrieving it, tosses it carelessly to the side of a feeble fire?"

Cokayne produced a handkerchief and nervously dabbed at his lips and forehead. "It's too horrible. It's an abomination. And that poor girl to whom he's engaged! But there's only one answer to your question. A man in that position has no future. And he'd be very mad indeed if he didn't know it."

"But you'd call this whole notion of Dr Macrae's wrongfully holding on to family property a bit crazy?"

"I know nothing about the rights and wrongs of the matter. But, looking at it in the light of what's happened, I can see that Ivor has been quite irrationally obsessed with it... I suppose a search is being organised?"

"Not yet. But it will be, within the next ten minutes." Appleby spoke grimly. "And I think that – dead or alive – we'll find Ivor Macrae quite soon."

"If I can give any help, I'll be glad. Miss Hatt has my telephone number."

"Thank you." Appleby, as if he had lost interest in Charles Cokayne, was already moving towards the door, with the charred letter held slightly out before him. It was almost as if he felt it to be in the strictest sense a clue, which his hand must follow if he was to gain the heart of the labyrinth.

Colin Macrae, Miss Hatt and Joyce Hereward were together in a large, bleak drawing-room at the front of the house. If it wasn't cheerful, at least it didn't harbour a corpse. The two women were conversing in low tones, and Colin was moodily turning the pages of a weekly paper. The young girl sprang to her feet as soon as Appleby entered. "Is there any news?"

"No – but it isn't news that's needed, Miss Hereward. It's some piece of logical inference – probably perfectly simple in itself – that I just haven't got round to." As he made this candid report, Appleby moved restlessly across the room. "Mr Macrae, what do you think of that fellow Cokayne?"

"I d-d-don't like him." The answer was prompt.

"Then you'll be glad to know I've discovered something he may have difficulty in accounting for. Unfortunately it seems inconsequent. It just doesn't fit in with...this." And Appleby tossed his letter on the table. "By the way, you'd better read the whole of it."

Colin Macrae threw down his weekly and moved over to read the letter. "I c-c-can't believe it," he said.

For a moment the two men looked at the fragmentary letter in silence. And then Appleby stiffened. "I can!" he exclaimed. "I believe I can – at last."

"You mean you know what h-happened?"

"I think I do. I think the explanation may have been – well, under your very nose not long ago. Just let me take a look—" Appleby broke off as the door opened and a police sergeant came hurriedly into the room. "Yes?"

"We've lost our man, sir." The sergeant was rueful. "He was on the drive, and must have tumbled to what was happening, and taken alarm at it. We think he slipped into the shrubbery and doubled back towards the river. One of our constables says he heard someone trying to start up a motor-launch there."

"That's bad." Appleby wasted no further time in recrimination, but turned to Colin Macrae. "You keep a launch here yourselves?"

"Yes – and it's in g-g-good order. I w-was out in it this afternoon."

"If we can get it moving within three or four minutes, we've some chance of averting a tragedy. Lead the way."

And they all tumbled from the room. But Appleby – rather surprisingly – spared seconds to sweep up a pile of newspapers and periodicals that lay on a window-seat. He was still clutching these as he doubled across the lawn.

Ivor Macrae's launch had vanished; it seemed plain that somebody had made his escape in it. But there appeared to be a chance that he was not yet far away, since the sound of an engine could just be heard fading down the river. The fugitive – Appleby thought grimly as he watched Colin unlock a boathouse – was doing rather more than just bolting. In fact he was still out to win. And that had meant an operation – at which Appleby could at last pretty confidently guess – by which his departure had been hazardously delayed. But if he now succeeded in doing what he was minded to do, he might yet get away with a lot. For it mightn't be very easy to prove – Colin's launch glided to the landing-stage and Appleby jumped in. Joyce Hereward did the same, and there was no time to expostulate. The engine roared and the vessel leapt forward. In the same instant Colin switched on a powerful searchlight in its bow, and a long reach of the river before them flashed into view. Here and there were the dim lights of vessels moored or anchored, and a few craft were still cruising through the soft summer night. Their own speed increased; a long curling wake was flying out from their stern; now and then Appleby thought he could hear indignant shouts. No doubt they were causing a sort of disturbance that the Thames Conservancy Board wouldn't much care for. But it wasn't a moment for worrying about that.

“Ten minutes!” Bending slightly forward, Colin was shouting in Appleby's ear. “We'll b-b-be up with him inside that.”

Appleby nodded, and felt in his pocket for a torch. Switching it on, and wedging himself securely against a thwart, he began rapidly to

sort through his bundle of papers and journals. He caught Joyce Hereward staring at him in astonishment. "All right!" he called to her. "I'm pretty sure. But I just want to be certain... Ah!" He had found what he wanted, and within a couple of seconds he appeared to be satisfied. "Really simple – as all truly devilish plans are." He glanced at her with compassion. "I'm afraid there's – well, a crisis ahead. It will come when that launch passes under the first bridge."

"But that's almost at once! The railway–"

Colin Macrae gave a shout. "There he is! But he's crazy. He'll k-kill himself and–"

"The bridge!" Joyce Hereward was pointing forward. Appleby could now see, first, the fugitive launch, leaping and swerving madly on the surface of the river; and then, dimly and uncertainly beyond, two stone arches. A moment later the leading launch had plunged beneath one of them, seeming to miss by a hair's breadth the massive central pier. And in the same instant something could be seen hurled overboard.

Colin had cut out his engine, and their own speed was slackening. Appleby got to his feet, scanning the surface of the water. "There!" he cried – and dived. And even as he hit the water, he knew that the girl – as if prompted by some flash of intuition – had dived too.

When Colin Macrae, having lost sufficient speed to turn, swept back up river, it was to find Appleby and Joyce Hereward supporting in the water the inert body of a young man. With a good deal of difficulty, they were all got on board.

"Is he–?" The girl, kneeling in a puddle in the launch, looked imploringly at Appleby as he

presently knelt beside the unconscious figure of Ivor Macrae.

And Appleby smiled. "A little the worse for wear, Miss Hereward. But he's decidedly alive – and a perfectly innocent and honourable man."

Miss Hatt, not having been in at what was so nearly the death of Ivor, had to be given explanations next day.

"You remember the charred letter?" Appleby asked. "In it, the writer described himself as a man who couldn't make up his mind. Now, who is famous for just that?"

"Hamlet." Miss Hatt answered without a moment's hesitation.

"Precisely. And the simple explanation of the whole thing ought to have jumped at me at once. But it didn't – until, in the drawing-room last night, I saw Colin happening to turn over a copy of a weekly paper: *The New Spokesman*. And then I remembered. Ivor was in the habit of doing the competitions in that sort of paper. So I grabbed a pile of recent ones as I ran for that launch. And this is what I found, in the last *Spokesman* but one. Listen." And Appleby read:

"Prince Hamlet, having set the players to present *The Murder of Gonzago* and thus neatly caught the conscience of the king, unfortunately falls a prey to hysteria and loses his grip of the situation. A prize of two guineas is offered for a letter addressed by the Prince to his uncle at this point, cogently arguing that the game is up and he had better abdicate quietly."

Miss Hatt needed only a second to consider. "Cokayne found Ivor's unfinished attempt at the

competition?"

"Just that. And he saw that it could be passed off as an incriminating letter from Ivor to *his* uncle, which would fit neatly into this bit of trouble about family property. That gave him his idea."

"I see. But what was his motive?"

"You set me on the track of that yourself. Dr Macrae and Ivor were on the verge of perfecting a valuable chemical process, and Cokayne was their chief assistant. If he could liquidate both of them he would be able, after a discreet interval, to come forward with it as his own. I noticed that when I mentioned this piece of research to him, he at once played it down. His cunning was notable all the way through. He professed that it was you he suspected, and he gave Ivor a high character – while at the same time starting the notion that he might be subject to serious mental disturbance. But his real flair was for timing. His mouse-trap was a much more intricate affair than Hamlet's. And it almost came off pat."

Miss Hatt considered. "His first job was to get Ivor and yourself on stage at just the right moment?"

"Precisely... And while getting Ivor with a false message was comparatively easy, the getting me out here was tricky. The request was so queer – so cool, you might say – that I rather surprised myself by agreeing to it."

"Why did he have to have you at all, Sir John?"

"He wanted an expert who wouldn't miss that letter planted in the fireplace. And, of course, the notion of Dr Macrae's sending an alarmed appeal to the police was a useful one. What he didn't

reckon on was my hearing Dr Macrae's real voice on your dictaphone. I felt at once it didn't square with the voice on the telephone. There was a moment when I thought of Colin Macrae as having conceivably sent that, but I at once realised that his stammer ruled him out as impersonating his uncle. Then when Cokayne rang up and I took the call, I had an obscure feeling that here the actual voice might be. But it was only when I'd got Cokayne to read the letter aloud that I was certain. It was my first important discovery. Cokayne was deeply, although still quite obscurely, implicated.

"And now, consider the sequence of events. Ivor arrived by launch and went up to his uncle's study, where you saw him. The uncle and nephew were at cross-purposes – and what you heard, of course, was Dr Macrae denying that he had sent any summons. But before they got any further, Cokayne, lurking in the garden, gave his dramatic shout for help. Ivor dashed out, while Dr Macrae, being crippled, stayed put. Cokayne stunned Ivor, returned to the study, shot Dr Macrae, and planted the letter. Then he returned to Ivor, and hauled him down to the river. His plan was to take him away in his own craft and stage a suicide by drowning. But it had to be near a bridge."

"A bridge?" Miss Hatt, although so acute, was at a loss here.

"Because of that blow on Ivor's head. It must appear that he had thrown himself down from a height, and hit a pier or buttress. And now there was a first hitch: Joyce Hereward. Her presence in the haunch was the unexpected factor. So Cokayne hauled Ivor into shadow, tied him up, and waited. And the wait was his undoing. He

became nervous and felt – as criminals so often do – that he must have a look at the scene of the crime and make sure that all was going according to plan there. So he hurried home and made that odd call about being uneasy. He certainly *was* uneasy. Then he waited a little longer, and came up to the house. The discovery that the girl was now there, and the launch therefore deserted, gave him fresh confidence. So he played his part very well.”

“He certainly did. But he must have been on tenterhooks to get away.”

“Quite so. And he must have made a shrewd guess that he’d be watched, and that the position was pretty desperate. But if he could just get Ivor where he still wanted him, he had a chance of pulling the thing off even now. There was still that damning letter. But he failed.”

Miss Hatt was silent for a moment. “We are to be faced with the horrors of a murder trial?”

“No.” Appleby shook his head seriously. “You haven’t heard the end. After hurling Ivor overboard, Cokayne lost his nerve completely. As a result, he smashed the launch to matchwood against the next bridge, and was drowned. The engineer – as Hamlet, once more, has it – was hoisted with his own petard.”

Note on Inspector (later, Sir John) Appleby Series

John Appleby first appears in *Death at the President's Lodging*, by which time he has risen to the rank of Inspector in the police force. A cerebral detective, with ready wit, charm and good manners, he rose from humble origins to being educated at 'St Anthony's College', Oxford, prior to joining the police as an ordinary constable.

Having decided to take early retirement just after World War II, he nonetheless continued his police career at a later stage and is subsequently appointed an Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police at Scotland Yard, where his crime solving talents are put to good use, despite the lofty administrative position. Final retirement from the police force (as Commissioner and Sir John Appleby) does not, however, diminish Appleby's taste for solving crime and he continues to be active, *Appleby and the Ospreys* marking his final appearance in the late 1980's.

In *Appleby's End* he meets Judith Raven, whom he marries and who has an involvement in many subsequent cases, as does their son Bobby and other members of his family.

Appleby Titles in order of first publication

These titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

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|-----|----------------------------------|------------------------------|------|
| 1. | Death at the President's Lodging | Also as: Seven Suspects | 1936 |
| 2. | Hamlet! Revenge | | 1937 |
| 3. | Lament for a Maker | | 1938 |
| 4. | Stop Press | Also as: The Spider Strikes | 1939 |
| 5. | The Secret Vanguard | | 1940 |
| 6. | Their Came Both Mist and Snow | Also as: A Comedy of Terrors | 1940 |
| 7. | Appleby on Ararat | | 1941 |
| 8. | The Daffodil Affair | | 1942 |
| 9. | The Weight of the Evidence | | 1943 |
| 10. | Appleby's End | | 1945 |
| 11. | A Night of Errors | | 1947 |

12.	Operation Pax	Also as: The Paper Thunderbolt	1951
13.	A Private View	Also as: One Man Show and Murder is an Art	1952
14.	Appleby Talking	Also as: Dead Man's Shoes	1954
15.	Appleby Talks Again		1956
16.	Appleby Plays Chicken	Also as: Death on a Quiet Day	1957
17.	The Long Farewell		1958
18.	Hare Sitting Up		1959
19.	Silence Observed		1961
20.	A Connoisseur's Case	Also as: The Crabtree Affair	1962
21.	The Bloody Wood		1966
22.	Appleby at Allington	Also as: Death by Water	1968
23.	A Family Affair	Also as: Picture of Guilt	1969
24.	Death at the Chase		1970
25.	An Awkward Lie		1971
26.	The Open House		1972
27.	Appleby's Answer		1973
28.	Appleby's Other Story		1974
29.	The Appleby File		1975

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| 30. | The Gay
Phoenix | 1976 |
| 31. | The Ampersand
Papers | 1978 |
| 32. | Shieks and
Adders | 1982 |
| 33. | Appleby and
Honeybath | 1983 |
| 34. | Carson's
Conspiracy | 1984 |
| 35. | Appleby and
the Ospreys | 1986 |