



## The 7 1/2 Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle

**Stuart Turton**

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Stuart Turton's *The 7 1/2 Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle* features the basic elements of a classic British mystery: a country estate, lords, ladies, servants, quirky guests, a fox hunt, a ball, and a murder to be solved. Turton's innovative version, however, scrambles these familiarities in a kaleidoscopic manner, transporting his narrator into the minds and bodies of different characters, with each strange incarnation offering new perspectives and challenges.

The novel's reluctant sleuth is Aiden Bishop, who finds himself at a manor known as Blackheath. He is forced to solve the mystery of the death of Evelyn, daughter of Lord and Lady Hardcastle, and must jump in and out of other characters while doing so. If Aiden fails, the surreal time warp of transformation and murder will start again, and he will never be able to return to his true identity—or leave Blackheath alive.

The curiously intriguing premise gives the story a mazelike aspect, with various plot shifts and cul-de-sacs. The novel's success in sustaining Aiden's bizarre metamorphoses comes from the distinct perception of each character: actual physical changes of weight, height, and age, and the confusing conflict of unfamiliar thoughts, flaws, impulses, and memories with Aiden's own psyche. Social status matters as well, with Aiden needing to work within the proper class consciousness expected of his latest persona.

The book also includes a finely depicted backdrop of the troubled Blackheath House, a place full of dark secrets and decay. Its furniture, paintings, and decor are artfully arranged to "hide the cracks in the walls." Evelyn herself is alternately charming or cool and remote, thin and angular as a "shard of glass." Atmospheric and unique, this is a mystery that adds "Who am I?" to the question of whodunit, with existentially suspenseful results.

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