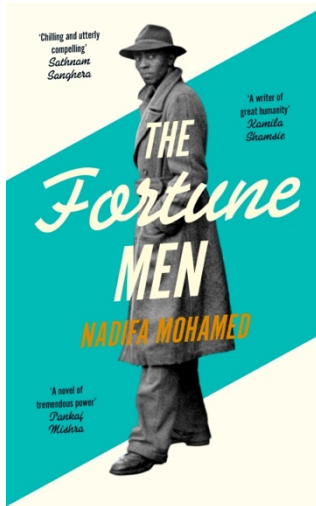


## ***The Fortune Men (2021)***

**By Nadifa Mohamed**



Mahmood Mattan is a fixture in Cardiff's Tiger Bay, 1952, which bustles with Somali and West Indian sailors, Maltese businessmen and Jewish families. He is a father, chancer, some-time petty thief. He is many things, in fact, but he is not a murderer.

So when a shopkeeper is brutally killed and all eyes fall on him, Mahmood isn't too worried. It is true that he has been getting into trouble more often since his Welsh wife Laura left him. But Mahmood is secure in his innocence in a country where, he thinks, justice is served.

It is only in the run-up to the trial, as the prospect of freedom dwindles, that it will dawn on Mahmood that he is in a terrifying fight for his life - against conspiracy, prejudice and the inhumanity of the state. And, under the shadow of the hangman's noose, he begins to realise that the truth may not be enough to save him.

### **Here are some discussion points to think about:**

1. Mahmood is nicknamed the 'shadow' and we learn he carries himself in this way on purpose: "You cannot look like prey here...Mahmood had learnt to do the black man's walk early in Cardiff...to give nothing away apart from his masculinity, a human silhouette in motion." Why might being visible be a problem?
2. Mahmood has been in trouble with the police before he is arrested for Violet's murder. Why do you think the author felt it was important to mention this?
3. There are many references to the different versions of what happened on the night of the crime, different narratives that people say to be the truth. How much of the trial seems driven by the police's desire to push forward a specific narrative?

4. Throughout the novel, Mahmood has faith in the British justice system and that his innocence will shine through to everyone involved. Do you think this naivety contributed to his conviction?
  
5. The author includes Diana's backstory – her time as a Corporal and her husband who fought in the war. Why do you think the author included this?
  
6. Tiger Bay bustles with so many different people – were you surprised by how multicultural and diverse Cardiff was in the 1950s?
  
7. The trial in the novel is based on the actual trial that happened in real life. Were you surprised by the defence's use of language, particularly when they refer to Mahmood as a "half semi-civilised savage"? How much do you think things have changed since the 1950s? What do you think about the fact that Mahmood's name was cleared in 1998 and that the Home Office offered a payout as compensation?
  
8. Mahmood tries, at trial, to speak the English of the court and lawyers but this ultimately backfires. He can speak five languages but he asks: "Why is it that words seem to create such a violence around him?" All he asks after is "simple English." How much does the way he speaks and looks feed into the narrative that he is guilty? Why do you think that is the case?
  
9. Part of the epilogue is a real newspaper cutting about the trial. Why do you think the author wanted to include this?