

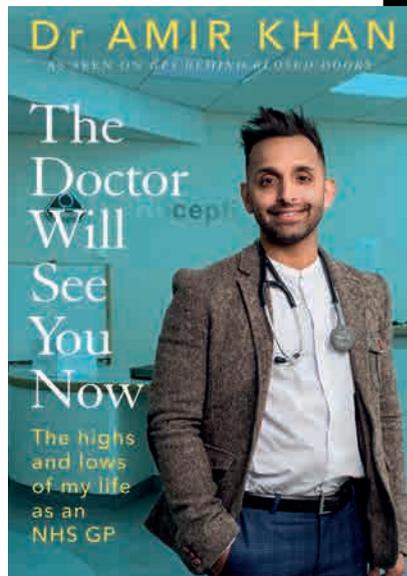
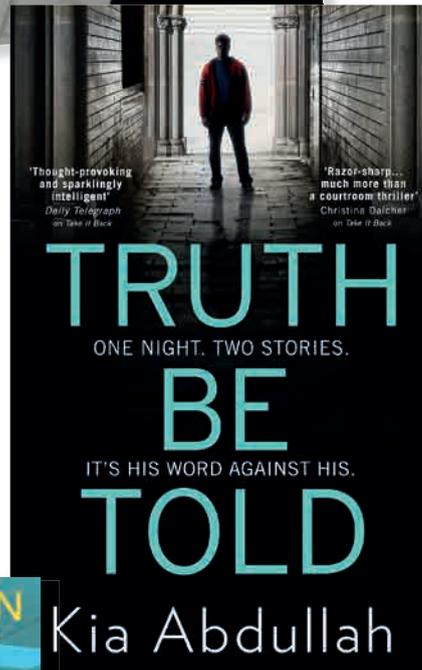
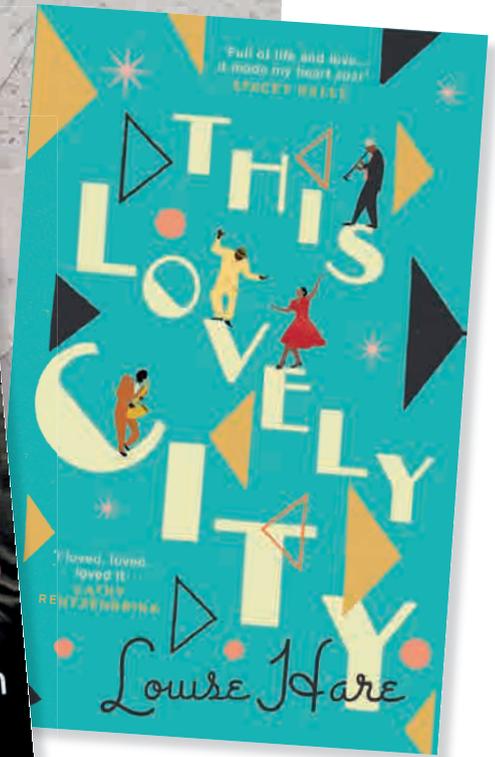
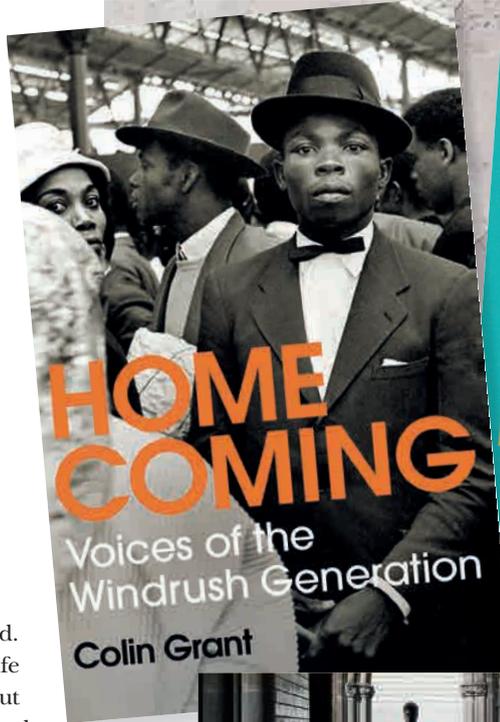
BOOKS

# GOOD READS

Richard Hopton reviews four books by authors of colour

**T**his *Lovely City* (HQ, £12.99), Louise Hare's spirited first novel, tells the story of Lawrie Matthews, a young Jamaican who arrived in Britain in 1948 aboard the *Windrush*, and Evie, the mixed-race London girl with whom he falls in love. The story is set in the war-damaged streets of south London, in shabby lodgings and smoky jazz clubs, a world of post-war gloom where everything is rationed. Against this background, Lawrie settles into a new life as a postman by day and a jazz clarinetist by night, but a malevolent coincidence intervenes to upend his good intentions. The story jumps regularly – and sometimes confusingly – between 1948 and 1950, but it rattles along. Hare brilliantly recreates the ambience of post-war London, presenting a multi-layered view of the reception accorded to the new immigrants in those early years. There was widespread incomprehension and much racism, institutional and personal, spoken and unspoken, but there was also some acceptance and much kindness.

**Homecoming** (Jonathan Cape, £18.99) by Colin Grant, an oral history of the Windrush generation, is the obverse of *This Lovely City*. It records the immigrants' story from their backgrounds and childhoods in the Caribbean, their 'cinnamon-scented' past, to their often-harrowing early experiences of post-war Britain. The Windrush immigrants were young – the average age was 24 – many of them imbued with an idealised view of Britain, born of an Anglo-centric education and a general reverence for the Mother Country. On arrival, however, the Caribbean immigrants found Britain pinched, miserable and frequently hostile. Often forced to live in cramped, expensive housing with inadequate facilities, they faced widespread racism at work and in the wider community. 'To put it bluntly,' said one, speaking of 1949, 'the coloured man is not wanted in British industry.' *Homecoming* is an important book which records the voices of a generation as they fade into history. The treatment meted out to the Windrush generation is a disreputable, shameful episode but here



we can listen to that generation telling its story in its own words.

Kia Abdullah's **Truth Be Told** (HQ, £12.99) is a legal thriller, based on a male rape at an expensive all-boys London boarding school. The victim is Kamran Hadid, 17-year-old son of a wealthy Muslim family. This is not a story set in the more deprived reaches of the British Muslim community: the family live in great comfort in a large house in Belsize Park. The novel's principal actor, Zara Kaleel, is a Muslim of humbler origins, an ex-barrister with a diazepam habit, who works tirelessly to save

Kamran from the law and himself. The story is compelling with an unexpected twist at the end raising interesting questions about race, sex, and cultural identity.

**The Doctor Will See You Now** by Amir Khan (Ebury, £16.99) is a report from general practice, the NHS's frontline. Khan is a GP of 15 years' experience who works in an inner-city practice in the north of England. The book comprises a series of case studies interwoven with much thoughtful comment on the state of the NHS, all recounted anecdotally. It is by turns alarming, sad, uplifting and comic. Khan's first experience of verbal abuse at the hands of a patient was being told to 'fuck off' by a seven-year-old boy during a home visit. The book finishes with an account of the Covid-19 pandemic. 'It was,' Khan writes, 'one of the worst times of my career, but strangely ... I never felt more useful.' ■