

42 WRITERS FOR LIBERTY

www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk/42writers/

Welcome to the *42 Writers for Liberty* web site as a PDF document, part of Liberty's urgent campaign, *Charge or Release*. The campaign opposes the Government's current proposals to extend pre-charge detention in terrorism cases from 28 to 42 days.

The site is constructed as a calendar to illustrate graphically the sheer length of time it is proposed that a person be held without being charged with any offence. Simply click on a day to open up a text from one of the 42 writers who have contributed to the project. You may find a story, an essay, a poem, a statement or even an interview – all a response to the simple question 'What do you think of the proposed extension to 42 Days?'

It is a measure of the unpopularity of the proposed legislation that not a single writer declined to contribute on the grounds that they in fact supported it. Whereas 42 of the best novelists, essayists, memoirists, poets and journalists around sent us the uniquely powerful contributions you will read on this site.

We would like to thank all of the writers involved, as well as the site designer Richard McCoy and the staff of Liberty.

With your help, we can stop this now – please do circulate the site URL as widely as you can and visit www.chargeorrelease.com for more information about the campaign. The more pressure on the Government now, the less likely this unjust proposal is to become law.

Hari Kunzru
Simon Prosser
Anyia Serota

October 2008

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Day 1

42 Days

By Julian Barnes

In 1640 the Star Chamber was abolished, and with it the judicial right to use torture. In 1660, come the Restoration, Charles II felt a renewed royal need to torture various suspected traitors and renegades. But it would have been politically awkward to legalize torture again. Happily, the practice was still legal in Scotland, so the accused were shipped up there, tortured, and the evidence obtained then used in an English court to secure their conviction and execution. Who said the Americans invented extraordinary rendition?

Like most countries, we claim to have a long tradition of liberty and libertarianism. Like most countries, we allow political necessity to be constantly invoked to reduce those liberties. The disjunction between the two is covered by hypocrisy, another long British tradition. And hypocrisy needs language to express itself. America is way ahead of us in this at the moment. Take, for example, that disgusting term 'torture lite'. Or Cheney's jocular description of water-boarding as 'a dunk in water' and 'a no-brainer'. Or the piece of Bushite 'logic' whereby, since 'The United States does not torture,' everything an American torturer does in his nation's defence is, by definition, not torture. Britain is currently lagging behind such turbo-charged hypocrisy, though our exact complicity in extraordinary rendition and torture will, eventually, come out.

But this is not about 42 Days, is it? Certainly it is. The same mental weaselling, the same legal conniving, the same suave hypocrisies apply, in both the high case of torture and the (apparently) more mundane case of adding 14 to 28. We like to say that freedom is indivisible, but this is a piety; or rather, it is true only in the imagination or in Utopia. In the daily, political, hypocritical world, freedom is constantly being divided, chipped into, explained away. How did we so quickly become the country with more surveillance cameras watching us than anywhere else in the world? Claiming to defend British liberty by diminishing British liberty has become a political norm over the last 30 years or so. Digging in the heels and shouting is now more important than ever.

Julian Barnes is the author of many works of fiction and non-fiction, including most recently Arthur and George and Nothing to be Frightened of.

42

By Ian Rankin

So there are these two cops.

They're in a bar half a dozen streets away from the station. There's a place nearer, but they never use it. 'Clients' drink there sometimes. They use this place instead. I'm calling them Jones and Smith. Jones carries the first round to the table in the corner.

'Go on then,' Smith reminds him.

'What?'

'Forty-two. You were going to tell me why.'

'Why what?' Jones is sitting down now.

'Why forty-two days? Why not thirty-nine or fifty-six?'

'Secret of the universe, mate. *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.'

'Yeah, I know, but really...'

Jones wipes a line of foam from his lip. 'Six weeks, innit? Six times seven.'

'So?'

'So we've got them in our tender care for six whole weeks. Time enough to work out what's going on.'

'And what precisely is going on.'

Jones shrugs. 'Whatever it is, it'll be written in Arabic or Katmandi or Sod-Knows-What. Takes time to work out all those squiggles. Then there's the files, computer-disks.' Jones looks up at his colleague. 'Know your way around a hard-drive, do you, Smithy? It all takes time.'

'And you're saying it takes six weeks... max?'

'Powers that be say so. Nothing to do with thee and me.' He leans forward, elbows pressed against the table. 'End of the day, they're ours for six whole weeks. Plenty of time to let them know what we know.'

'And what *do* we know?'

'I'll tell you when the time's up. You drinking that pint or dating it?'

Smith lifts his drink. He does not look satisfied.

It is now eighteen minutes to seven - six forty-two. Detective Sergeant Jones is forty-two years old. There are forty-two steps from the station's reception area to the top floor where the brass live. Twenty-one peanuts in each of the two bags Smith (married) will eventually fetch from the barmaid he fancies. Coincidence, that's all. No rationale behind any of it.

Ian Rankin is the author of the Rebus novels and most recently Doors Open.

Day 3

The non mathematician contemplates day three of 42 days

By Salley Vickers

Day three, and only thirty nine days to go.
Thirty nine steps; or, three time nine is twenty seven.
Compared with forty two days
Twenty seven feels like heaven.
And two and seven is nine.
Only nine days then. That's fine.

But a lot can happen in nine days to my kind.
My wife could go off with that prick who's always eyeing her
bum
(She thinks I don't know);
My kids could be missing school (as well as me);
My old mum might finally die in the night in her home
(which isn't home at all for my old mum);
And me, well even nine days might drive me mad.

Forty two days less three.
Plenty of time to lose my mind –
And all I have, or ever had.

*Salley Vickers is the author of five novels, including
Miss Garnet's Angel and most recently Where Three Roads Meet.*

Day 4

42 Days

By Alain de Botton

The saving grace of powerful people who do bad things is that they can, with a little bit of help, be made to feel guilty. Conscience is a wonderful tool. The lion can be made to feel a touch awkward about his carnivorous destruction. He can even aspire to the condition of a lamb.

What are the tools in Liberty's armament? Only the ability, based on nothing more than language and reason, to provoke a spasm of conscience in the men with the guns and the keys. It's easy to sound bold about 42 days without detention in the daytime; the goal of Liberty is to give the powerful a few bad dreams, which as Hamlet knew, can be very bad news indeed if one's the prince.

Alain de Botton is the author of several books, including most recently The Architecture of Happiness.

Day 5

X

By Daljit Nagra

i knot my tongue
i nail my lips
i zip my lids

& still u say
i say u harm

u hook my arms
u hood my head
u lose my legs

& still u say
i say u harm

Daljit Nagra is the author of Look We Have Coming to Dover!

The Pavement

By Tahmima Anam

Salim's mother was not like the other mothers. She liked to take out her photo album and wave it under his nose the way other mothers showed off curries and milky sweets. She had once, she told him, smothered a Pakistani soldier with a handful of crushed chillies. She didn't try to hide her disappointment when he took an interest in mathematics. "We're living under military rule," she said, "why aren't you on the pavement?"

The pavement was her favorite place. She belonged at the street march, behind a megaphone, hauling banners and shouting at policemen. She intended this to be his inheritance: her readiness for violence, her hoarse voice at the end of a protest, the pavement on which she was thrown, and from which she rose, day after day.

When the call came, she felt that flutter of fear in her heart, the powdery panic that reminded her she was human, but eclipsing it, there was pride—no, relief; he was hers; her history ran through his blood. On her way to the University, she imagined the embrace with which she would greet him. They would pick up some kababs on the way home while he told her the story of how he'd gotten arrested. She would relax into worrying, tell him to be careful next time.

At the police station, they told her that bail was out of the question. He was in the lock-up with the other boys. She would have to wait till Sunday, when the courts re-opened. In the meantime, they could detain him for as long as they wanted. She could bring him some food, they said.

She realized, in this instant, that he had been walking past on his way to the library when he was arrested. That he had seen the procession and ambled for awhile alongside; he would have tried the slogans; they would have felt strange in his mouth, those staccato, heavily punctuated sentences; and when the police charged, he would have thought, my mother will be proud, and then he would have dropped his calculator as he elbowed his way to the front. No! She said, too late, his form already vanishing into the police truck, the beating falling hard on his shoulders.

Behind her, the other mothers were waiting, holding tiffin carriers against their chests.

Day 7

42 Days

By A.L. Kennedy

It takes three days to make you insane. We've practised - Cold War exercise, calibrations developed through time—balancing between deaths – all by the book - we do have a book. We know how. You are much more permeable than you think. Lack of sight, sound, touch, sleep. Heat and Cold. We do not need to hurt you, but we might.-

In a week you will tell us what we want to hear. Not facts. Just what we want. We will beguile each other. You will pervert us. We will let you. We will punish you for it.

In a month the fantasy we make will be solid, exhilarating. It is death and vengeance and makes us happy in our fear. The ticking clock has stopped clicking. Reality has left us in Jack Bauer's pocket.

In 42 days we will have made you different. You may be charged, you may be released. You will always be different. We will always be in how you think. We do not need to hurt you. We will steal you from yourself.

A.L. Kennedy is the author of several books, including most recently Day.

Day 8

42 Days

By Stella Duffy

Forty two days:

The time it took to go from liking her to loving her

to travel from Southampton to Wellington on the Shaw Saville Southern Cross in 1968

to write the first six chapters of my first book seventeen years ago

to begin to understand grief (every time) and that they weren't coming back (any of them)

to be a good catholic girl and stop sinning and then start again

to go through two lots of chemo

to make one failed IVF attempt

to grow jalapeno plants from seed

to understand A Level calculus

to write, rehearse, and perform my first solo show

to watch the garden change from summer to autumn

to let a Christmas pudding mature (minimum time)

for the hyacinth to bloom.

Long enough to make an enormous difference or none at all

too long for detention without charge

too long for us to stand by and say nothing.

Stella Duffy is the author of several novels, including most recently The Room of Lost Things.

42 Days

By Andrew O'Hagan

When I was a student, I'm pretty sure I spent too many hours crafting bespoke insults and drinking unspeakable drinks, yet I did have a diligent side and it would often emerge late at night when I could be found in the office of the university newspaper editing copy and messing around with Spray Mount. On one such night a man arrived at the office door looking quite desperate. At first I thought something violent must just have happened to him: he appeared frightened for his life and he wanted my help. It turned out that it wasn't a single event but life itself that had made Michael frightened; in a manner of speaking, he had been, for a long time, on the run from the conditions that determined him. He was always being arrested in Glasgow and accused of crimes he swore he hadn't committed, and he was subject to constant questioning about events of which he had no knowledge. After listening to Michael for an hour, I remember wondering if he hadn't walked straight off the pages of Kafka. I bought him a drink and listened to him. We smoked in the silent office, and I felt, perhaps for the first time, that I was in the presence of someone who felt the world was entirely hostile.

Michael moved in a world where it could be taken for granted that civil liberties and personal security were not rights but luxuries. It's no secret that certain parts of Britain, in those days, were policed by people every bit as criminally-minded as the people they were homing in on. Michael had been interrogated or stood in line-ups several hundred times. 'He has one of those faces,' a friend said to me. 'It has guilt written all over it.' My late-night visitor said it started at school, where he was delinquent, and hadn't stopped in the 30 years since then. He had been in Barlinnie Prison during the rooftop riots and inside the 'cages' at Peterhead and he spoke alarmingly about officer brutality in every institution. Of course, I didn't take Michael's word for it. I spent months looking into his claims, and came to realise, after many travails and several fresh revelations, that there wasn't a single issue he had raised that night that wasn't true.

I published a story about him. It made a difference to me: I knew it would make no difference to Michael. It's not so much that some people have the wrong faces, or that they harbour seemingly implausible stories, but that we live in a state that can show itself too ready to gorge on vulnerability.

Andrew O'Hagan is the author of several books, including most recently The Atlantic Ocean: Essays on Britain and America.

Day 10

Intelligent animals

By Joe Dunthorne

The pigs are happy and we cannot
understand why. We mention China's
industrial explosion but they just shrug
and make a contented sound from deep
inside their rectangular bodies.

What about the media, we ask,
where you are less news-worthy
than dogs. They nuzzle the dirt
and do a little roly-poly.

We show them buckets of antiseptic.
We show them photos of cows on fire.
We show them a documentary
about intensive pig farming.

Joe Dunthorne is the author of the novel Submarine.

42 Days

By Mohsin Hamid

Before moving to Britain in 2001, I had lived in the United States for over a dozen years. I came and went from America with little difficulty. Not long after the events of 9/11, I had my first experience of “secondary inspection.” Although I possessed a green card, I was taken out of the regular immigration line and put in a separate room. There I waited. I was asked whether I had ever been to Afghanistan. I answered in the negative. I was asked whether I had ever had combat training. I answered in the negative. I was told to wait some more. I was not allowed to use my mobile phone. Two hours passed. Eventually I was permitted to proceed into the United States. But two hours of detention without charge was enough time for my imagination to run free.

I wondered if I had been mistaken for someone else. I wondered if that mistake might see me denied entry to the country. I wondered if I might be held incommunicado and questioned before being deported. I wondered if I might be held incommunicado and questioned indefinitely – and have to plead to be deported.

Two hours of detention without charge caused me, an innocent man, to change my behaviour thereafter. I began carrying copies of my books and articles whenever I flew. I found excuses to travel to the United States less often. I became slightly nervous days in advance of my trips there. I ceased to think of myself as an individual at airports and began to think of myself as a suspect.

I have experienced firsthand the toll that one twelfth of a day can take on a man. It is perhaps for this reason that I see in 42 days of detention without charge a horror our society must find the strength to resist.

Mohsin Hamid is the author of Moth Smoke and The Reluctant Fundamentalist.

Day 12

42 Days

By Craig Taylor

(A government official speaks to a child at an asylum seekers screening unit in Croydon)

...An X is not a tick.
Could you please tell them that?
(pause)
Could you tell them that now?
Could you translate that for your parents?
This is important, all right?
An X - can you hear what I'm saying? An X is not a tick.

Craig Taylor is the author of Return to Akenfield and of the Guardian's 'One Million Tiny Plays About Britain'.

What Wikipedia taught me about 42

By Kamila Shamsie

It exists already in law: There are 42 laws of cricket. Law 42 covers fair and unfair play.

It exists also in the realm of terror: In Japanese 4 (shi) and 2 (ni) are together pronounced like “going to death.” Because of that, in Japan, 42 is considered as a disastrous number. This happens in Hong Kong too, as 42 sounds like “easy death” in Cantonese.

If you're going for ‘can you believe someone really proposed that’, it's been done: In 1965, mathematician Paul Cooper theorized that the fastest, most efficient way to travel across continents would be to bore a straight hollow tube directly through the earth, evacuate it (remove the air), and then just fall through. The first half of the journey consists of free-fall acceleration, while the second half consists of an exactly equal deceleration. The time for such a journey works out to be 42 minutes. Remarkably, even if the tube does not pass through the exact center of the earth, the time for a journey powered entirely by gravity always works out to be 42 minutes, as long as the tube remains friction-free.

Perplexing? Beat this: It is a Catalan number. Consequently 42 is the number of non-crossing partitions of a set of five elements; the number of triangulations of a heptagon; the number of rooted ordered binary trees with six leaves; the number of ways in which five pairs of nested parentheses can be arranged; etc.

Transformative?: The first book to be printed with movable type, the famous Gutenberg Bible, is also known as the ‘42-line Bible’, after the number of lines of print on each page.

All in all, 42 is weighed down enough as it is. Leave it alone now, let us remember it as Douglas Adam's answer to Life, The Universe and Everything, or the angle in degrees for which a rainbow appears.

Kamila Shamsie is the author of several novels, including most recently Broken Verses.

42 Days

By Nadeem Aslam

The mosque floating like a collection of vases in the drizzle.

The child's two hands moving along the bookshelf, half deciding on a book before sliding it back in place, as though experimenting with the keys of a piano.

The train passing through three tunnels in the distance like a needle picking up beads to thread a rosary.

Four butterflies in the tree in July, their underwings green. Visible invisible visible invisible – they blink in out of existence as they fly amid the leaves.

The rose shedding five crimson notes onto the grass in the silence of dusk.

Six footprints in snow, a thin sheet of packed ice at the base of each. And through it the flat yellow leaves lying on the ground are visible, as though sealed behind glass.

Three girls up to their waists in the calm lake: the reflection of each making her appear two headed like a queen on a playing card, right side up either way.

A vinyl record with seven songs by Count Basie, his genius so unmistakable the stylus seems to be travelling not through the grooves but the very whorls of his fingerprint.

Condensation on all eight windowpanes freezing into sparkling bird feathers during the night. Into insect wing and leaf skeleton. As though the house contains a magical forest.

THESE ARE THE FORTY-TWO THINGS I DO NOT SEE
BECAUSE MY HEAD IS TURNED TOWARDS THE PATH
ALONG WHICH YOU MIGHT RETURN.

Nadeem Aslam is the author of three novels, including most recently The Wasted Vigil.

42 Days

By Linda Grant

It is not the forty-two days that concern me; I could survive forty days in Holloway, it's the two words: without trial. For what this bill comes down to is two other words, not present, because they are banished: habeas corpus. You know you live in a country governed by the rule of law if you have habeas corpus; if you do not, you're in a police state. The nature of democracy and of basic human liberty rests on the fact that you can't be imprisoned unless you have been charged with a crime and convicted of it in the courts. However imperfect the judicial system is in Britain, the courts remain the places where justice is tested – if you have a case, make a charge.

When I think of 42 days detention without trial I think of a whole literature which has described the individual thrown into this limbo. Bernard Malamud's *The Fixer*, Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*. The person alone. The person without the resources of the law. A law is to be passed which dispenses with the law. It is all we have to defend ourselves with, against the enemies of democracy.

*Linda Grant is the author of several books, including most recently the novel *The Clothes on Her Back*.*

Day 16

The Olden Days

By Monica Ali

'Grandma, is it true,
That in the olden days,
I mean when you were young,
That if the police arrested you
They had to say what you'd done wrong?'

'The olden days!
Well, truth be told,
I feel I've lived for centuries.
And we did have some funny ways
Back then, even trial by jury.'

'I've heard of that,
But I don't understand
How twelve men and women,
Could decide just what
Was right with no legal training.'

'Oh, we've learned
A lot since then,
When charges were filed on arrest.
We know, the accused haven't earned
The knowledge that serves them best.'

'Oh, Grandma, we're safer now,
Don't you think?
With no criminals running free.
Lock 'em all up, 'cos I don't see how
That could ever happen to me.'

Monica Ali is the author of Brick Lane and Alentejo Blue.

Day 17

42 Days

By Rachel North

7/7/05: The Westbound Piccadilly line train was at crush capacity as it pulled away from Kings Cross. To travel on it was to be uncomfortably intimate with strangers; to feel the warmth of their backs, bellies, shoulders pressed into your own body, the smell of rain-damp clothing, the prod of elbows, umbrellas, bump of handbags and rucksacks. When you are so close to your fellow passengers that you can feel their breath on your cheek, it is considered polite not to meet their eyes.

Perhaps that was how he was able to do it; the nineteen year old man with the home-made bomb held close to his body. Perhaps he did not look at the faces of the men and women around him as he set off the detonator.

We will never know because the 26 people closest to him were killed.

The acts which we call most evil are those which display a pitiless lack of empathy towards fellow-humans. In the wake of such acts, anger, outrage and fear follow our shock.

Terrorism is the dark art of wielding fear as a political weapon. To provoke a horrified reaction, to seed fear and hatred and division is the goal of the bomber. He harnesses our nightmares and uses them against us. It gives him power when we deem him our terrible enemy and demand the government respond.

But the unspoken truth is that it is not possible to keep us safe. There is no legislation that can protect us from the man who moves amongst us with a bomb on his back and hate in his heart.

Even if every man and woman and child is watched over and monitored every moment of every day. Even if every conversation, every email, every transaction is recorded; if armed police and sniffer dogs travel on every bus and train and stand guard outside pubs and schools and shops and stadiums. It still would not keep us safe.

Accepting this is hard but it is the price of our freedom.

We walk out of our homes and into the world every day as free men and women. We are protected by ancient liberties that thousands have died to protect. They are to be cherished as much in the age of the suicide bomber as in the age of the threatened enemy invasion.

To give them up is to let terrorists win.

Rachel North is the author of Out of the Tunnel.

Day 18

The Given

By Nick Laird

At first they took the gift of smell. Oh well,
we never used it much though once or twice
it let us know we hadn't lit the gas.
We bit our tongues then said 'Yes, help yourself.'
It is accepted we're losing our senses.

Last year they came, unpeeled each ear. Oh dear,
we couldn't hear the cars come near and once
or twice we got ourselves in accidents.
At night we fingertip each other's breath to check.
We held our tongues then said, 'Here, take the rest.'

On Tuesday laws were passed to snatch our taste.
It's no great waste. Our appetites and cigarettes
had put those tastebuds to the test so as for us
we swallowed tongues then shrugged to say 'Go right ahead'.
As long as they stay, we sit on our hands.

Days diminish. Today they confiscated touch.
We can guess how hot the water is,
and in darkness estimate the distance to the bed.
To accept these losses, we cover our faces,
then scratch 'Be our guest' with a fork on the table.

And then tonight they came for sight. We knew they might.
A minute back they turned into our street.
The door we've blocked with books now shakes.
We play them tapes we had prepared
then hiss and mouth our tongueless chorus.

But of course they cannot see of course.

*Nick Laird is a poet and novelist. His latest collection of poetry is
On Purpose.*

The Other Side of the World

By Jackie Kay

Just before my mum went to the other side of the world for six weeks, our rabbit Harvey went missing. Harvey was an albino rabbit with red eyes who was eleven years old. I was eleven, the same age as Harvey, when my mum went off to New Zealand for 42 days. I followed the route on my Atlas. She was stopping at Singapore and Sydney before arriving in Christchurch nearly three days later. I did the arithmetic: six weeks equals forty two days equals one thousand and eight hours. I tried to divide one thousand and eight by forty two but that was the summer when I struggled with long division. Long multiplication was so much easier. I couldn't understand why. The numbers seemed to hang in the air with long division; I never knew where to put them.

Those six weeks were the longest time ever. It was a hot, slow summer. Days slipped into days, nights sweated into nights. I couldn't divide them. I tossed and turned in the sheets. We played hide and seek in the street and no one called me in. My brother and I stayed for some time with an old comrade outside Edinburgh, a little old man who made us a fabulous gooseberry pie, who ate a raw egg every morning whisked with milk and who peed into a pint milk jug in the middle of the night. When we got back to Glasgow, my mum had been away for only 21 days. 'We're half way through the time,' I told my brother. He went fishing; that took up some slow days. I can't remember what I did. The clock's face looked innocent sometimes, other times sly. Sometimes the hands sneaked about and stole the minutes. I found a ladybird in the grass and watched it crawl across our back garden like a moving stud earring.

When my mum had been away for just over three weeks, we found Harvey. He was buried in our back garden, barely covered. His neck was snapped. My brother came into the kitchen and said to my Dad, 'I found Harvey, he's been strangled.' My brother's face had turned green. We buried Harvey properly and planted a little wooden cross way down in the wilder part of our back garden.

My mum called a week later. She was living in a different time and we couldn't talk for long. It was the morning where she was. She said, 'I'm missing my family so much, I'm crying myself to sleep at night. It's too long. It's too far.'

Finally, miraculously, the last of the days crawled towards the end of the tunnel. The heavy heat lifted and a breeze came back.

We went to pick up my mum at Glasgow airport. On the way back, she'd stopped in Singapore, got a new stylish haircut, been given half a pineapple filled with exotic fruits, papaya, mango... 'I felt I died and gone to heaven,' she said of her extraordinary fruit bowl.

In the car on the way back home, my brother said, 'We found Harvey. He was strangled.'

'No! When was this?'

'About three weeks ago.'

My mum looked at us as if her children had grown up without her. 'Never again,' she said, clasping me to her chest in front of the three-bar fire that evening, chilly with the travelling. 'Those six weeks were an eternity. I thought it would never end.' My dad put a record on the gramophone and played a twelve bar blues. My mum got up on her feet and they danced a slow dance around the living room. I smiled properly for the first time in forty two days.

Jackie Kay is the author of several books, including the novel Trumpet and the dramatized poem The Lamplighter.

Vaclav Havel

By Toby Litt

Václav Havel is the only political hero I have ever had. This, I'm pretty sure, is because he never wanted to be a politician. And also because – for me – he was truly heroic.

Havel's heroism was very quiet and incremental. He did not act in a critical moment to save imperilled lives. Instead, he allowed his own life to degenerate in order to try and bring about political change. This degeneration, eventually, led to his imprisonment. Havel was heroic in the way he tolerated a mass of minor discomforts. His prison letters to his wife Oglá detail some of these. He was prepared to watch his own health suffer. He was prepared to forgo writing plays. And for what reason?

He believed very straightforwardly in human rights. Freedom of thought and conscience. Freedom from unjust imprisonment.

His method of pursuing his aims was very simple. He went to the Czechoslovak Communist authorities and asked them to abide by their own constitution. He never asked for more than was due him, as a citizen.

In doing this, of course, he knew he was asking the seemingly impossible. But, by asking, he immediately brought it into the realm of the possible. As a citizen, he called his government to account. The reason governments are as they are is because so few citizens do this.

Between 1990 and 1993, I lived in Prague. Václav Havel was the President. Civic Forum – largely comprised of former dissidents – was the party of government. I doubt I will ever again experience such a feeling of social euphoria. The people knew that their rulers had never plotted to be their rulers, and so they could trust them in an entirely euphoric way. The rise of Václav Klaus and a new political class soon put this into the past. Havel, though, remained.

The main reasons for having a hero is that they force you to ask yourself, 'What would they do in the same situation?'

With the threat of the extension of imprisonment without charge to 42 days, I am in no doubt what Václav Havel would do. He would recognise it as an attack upon the freedom of all citizens. He would speak out publicly against the corruption of the law. He would politely call his government to account.

Toby Litt is the author of many works of fiction, including most recently I play the drums in a band called okay.

I'll Say Your Name

By M.J. Hyland

Jimmy lived in a Salford rooming house for sick and indigent men. He slept behind a thin, partition wall, had his own cot, a bowl of hot porridge in the morning, soup for lunch, and some meat and vegetables for tea.

One day, a football coach came to town. The coach was ex-second division and sometimes offered his services for good causes. Even though he didn't much enjoy it, free coaching was a good thing to be seen to do.

To qualify for the football clinic and game (plus a free hot lunch and a pair of boots) the men from the rooming house needed only to be sober on the day.

At the first clinic, in an oval in the middle of an athletics field round the back of Jimmy's rooming house, Jimmy made a mess of the game. He was capable of playing a good game, but every time the ball was passed to Jimmy, he picked it up, held to his chest, smiled, and ran the length of the field.

It didn't matter whether the Coach screamed, 'Drop the ball!' or 'This isn't rugby, you fool', Jimmy clutched the ball and ran as fast as he could. Every Wednesday afternoon for nine weeks it was the same. The other men shouted at Jimmy, but Jimmy wouldn't let go until he was tackled to the ground, and then, when the ball was taken from him, he'd run as fast as he could to see if he could get hold of the ball again.

The Coach lost his patience and, on the tenth Wednesday, he took Jimmy aside with the plan to bar him. The two men stood in the changing room and some of the other men, who had finished showering, listened and hoped that Jimmy (who they otherwise liked) would stop ruining their game.

'Listen,' said The Coach. 'You don't need the rules explained to you again. Why won't you stop running with the ball? Why do you do this every bloody time?'

Jimmy answered: 'It'll be eight years this Christmas, I've been in this rooming house and in seven years I've not heard anybody say my name. When I've got the ball, you all shout my name. I like it. I like hearing it.'

42 Days

By Philip Pullman

Why 42 days?

What they mean is six weeks, of course. Six weeks! Six weeks in prison without being charged! Anything could happen in six weeks. Wars have lasted less than six weeks. In six weeks, Christopher Columbus crossed the Atlantic and discovered the New World. Six weeks was enough time for Mozart to write three of his greatest symphonies. William Faulkner took six whole weeks to write his novel *As I Lay Dying*; John le Carré wrote *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold* in five. In six weeks, on average, each of the 2,710 Liberty Ships were built in the USA during the Second World War to supplement the Allied merchant fleets. Robert Louis Stevenson took three days to write *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, but six weeks to revise and polish it. In six weeks the Wright brothers' mechanic, Charlie Taylor, built from scratch the light and powerful engine that powered their first flight. In one month in 1819 the poet Keats wrote his *Ode to a Nightingale*, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, *Ode on Melancholy*, and *Ode on Indolence*.

I could multiply the examples a hundredfold, taking in every sphere of human activity, but you get the point: people can do complex, extraordinary, profoundly difficult things in 42 days or less. Six weeks is a long time.

And now we learn that among the almost insuperable obstacles needing the full majesty of the human mind to overcome is the task of interrogating a prisoner and gathering enough evidence to bring a conviction. Apparently it's so subtle and complex a process that it too needs no less than six weeks to complete. What makes it even more impressive is that this discovery has only been made in Britain. No other democracy has realised the profound difficulty of this process; some countries appear to think so little of the intellectual challenges of the task that they allow only two days for its completion. 48 hours! Preposterous.

We don't know how lucky we are, to live in a nation where police officers have all of six weeks to discover why they've locked us up. Ask them after 41 days why a prisoner is still behind bars, and they can honestly and innocently say "No idea, mate." But give them that extra day, and they'll crack it, and be up there with Mozart and Christopher Columbus.

Philip Pullman is the author of many books, including the trilogy His Dark Materials.

Waiting

By Hisham Matar

I train my waiting on you. I convince myself of the possibility. I am on the wrong side of a door that keeps me from everything. And I am too uncertain to pound my fist. And even though I am yet to know why I am here, I find it impossible to be myself, to think clearly, to be confident about anything. Who can claim without any doubt to be innocent?

You have always told me I have good instincts. Those instincts now do me no good. The things I imagine horrify me. Memories, images, my name – it is all dissolving in a pit of confusion. And I am horrified at my desire to please. It seems there is nothing to which I am not prepared to yield. I try to only think of myself in the past.

My mind has been returning to the last time I waited for you. We had agreed to meet in the evening. I could not remember whether we had said nine or ten. So I arrived at the cafe just before nine and tried to make myself comfortable, to convey that I was at ease. Keen to disguise any evidence of that most indignant of preoccupations, waiting, I took out a book and pretended to read.

Is waiting a preoccupation?

It is a mute war, a void, emptiness as thick as mud.

This situation had created in me a new nervousness that caused me to turn, almost uncontrollably, whenever I saw anything move in the furthest margins of the field of vision. I fought this by attempting to immerse myself in the text, not in its meanings, but its visual manifestations, until all I saw were small black figures, divorced from one another, marching from nowhere to nowhere. Then a new anxiety took hold: what if your arrival startles me and I jump at the most tender touch on the shoulder, setting the book flying in the air, embarrassing you? I think of how often I have embarrassed you and of how patient you have been with what you call my 'jitters', my 'clumsiness'.

I had already begun to take notice of the couple at the corner table, looking at me and whispering. Who, I wondered, might they be mistaking me for? Someone famous, perhaps, someone they had read about. But when they noticed me looking at them,

they looked away. They seemed both excited and anxious; the way some people are when they rush to the aid of a man who had just collapsed on the pavement. Most people would prefer to witness a calamity take place rather than a beautiful gesture.

I tried to read.

The next time I looked up the woman was on the phone, her eyes on me. She cupped the mouthpiece. Admiration tightening the shoulders of the man sitting opposite her. It was twenty minutes past nine. I faced the book again and was now not only uncertain whether I had got the right time, but the correct day too. This made the likelihood of an exaggerated reaction at seeing you even more likely. I caught two or three sirens coiling in the far off distance. In our unhappy city this is no unusual occurrence. But for some reason my ear remained with them as they rose like water in a sink. Then I saw you approach, bag around your shoulder, hair gently swaying with your gait. It had been raining. There perched on your coat's lapels were tiny crystal pearls. They too seemed to praise you. I felt incapable of doing anything but stand, pull the opposite chair and kiss the cheek you offered. How cool and silken your flesh was against my lips. Under the noisy argument of the sirens I answered each one of your questions, regarding my wellbeing and general affairs, with great poise and a fashioned manner that did not cause in you the faintest suspicion. And I thought, how wonderful you are, how utterly natural.

Now I wonder if I spoke too much, if our brief conversation gave more room to my day than yours. Something about these walls inspires regret. I cannot think of anything I could not have attended to better. I realise too how my clearest, calmest conception of myself has always taken place when you were around. It is untrue what they say; here a man can never know himself.

Hisham Matar is the author of In the Country of Men.

42 Days

By Jenny Diski

I object strongly to the extension of the right to detain prisoners without charge to 42 days, but I object much more to the original 28 day detention law in 2005 and the way in which it was pressured through parliament. More is worse, but it's not only a matter of how much time can be spent in detention: we need to keep in mind the loss of essential rights and liberties that has already happened and permits further erosion. I hope that in objecting to the 42 day extension, we'll also remember that 28 days detention without charge is iniquitous in a country that has had a habeas corpus law for nine centuries. In the eighteenth century the jurist William Blackstone explained habeas corpus: "The King is at all times entitled to have an account, why the liberty of any of his subjects is restrained, wherever that restraint may be inflicted." The loss is a catastrophe for genuine democracy and human rights.

Jenny Diski is the author of several books, including most recently On Trying to Keep Still.

Bombshell

by Michel Faber

The unmistakable scream of baby Beth in a newly soiled nappy filled the room. At the same moment, there was a knock on the front door. Vicki ran to open it. It was a bright-eyed woman in a cream outfit, collecting for charity.

‘Look, we’re kind of hassled...’ began Vicki, but the woman on the doorstep just smiled. She wasn’t the usual downtrodden charity-collector type. She wasn’t going to mumble apologies and back meekly away.

‘Just a minute of your time,’ she said. ‘This is so important. I’m collecting for the War.’

‘What war?’

‘The War on the Dark Evil People.’

‘I’m trying not to think too much about stuff like that. We’ve just had a baby and –’

‘The War will cost British taxpayers 3.5 billion pounds.’

‘I don’t have 3.5 billion pounds.’

‘Every little bit helps. It all adds up. We’re in this together. You can buy an aircraft carrier for only 1.5 billion pounds, which includes crew. Or, for the same money, five frigates.’

Vicki snorted with laughter despite herself. ‘What are frigates?’

‘Never mind. For only half the money again, you can fund an entire armoured division – three hundred tanks and 40,000 people.’

‘Look, this is ridiculous: I’m a housewife...’

‘So am I. But this is everybody’s fight. We’re defending not only our precious freedoms, but also the freedom of people everywhere to live and raise their children free from fear.’

‘Look, I’d like to help, but...’

‘How about we get down to the really small-scale contributions?’ babbled the charity woman, flipping pages on her clipboard. ‘Joint Direct Action Bombs only cost £17,338 each. They’re fantastically effective. I have photos here of what they can do...’

'Look,' said Vicki, gripping the doorjamb. 'This is pointless. We just don't have that kind of money to spare. Please, can you just leave us alone.'

The charity woman leaned closer. She was virtually cheek to cheek with Vicki now.

'Ammunition's only a pound a round,' she said. 'Come on, who can't afford a pound? You probably spend that on chocolate every day, right?'

'That's none of your business,' said Vicki.

'A pound,' persisted the charity woman, cocking her head as if pleading for a glimmer of reason. 'Just one pound, and our brave lads get to defend our freedom for another couple of seconds.'

'Fine,' snapped Vicki, snatching up her purse. 'Here... here's two pounds.'

Michel Faber is the author of several works of fiction, including The Crimson Petal and the White and most recently The Apple.

Day 26

42 Days

By Terence Blacker

In the end, it is a matter of trust and terror.

The government says, 'Trust us. There are people out there who want to use terror to kill innocent people. They threaten our values and our way of life. They are so dangerous that the normal, basic liberties of citizens must be suspended in order to protect you and your family.'

But the lesson of this century has been that the more a government asks you to trust them, the less you should.

The last time we were asked to put our trust in their confidential information, the great secret truth that we were promised turned out to be a convenient lie. By then, the country was at war and thousands died.

A government who tries to frighten its people into giving up hard-won human rights almost always has something to hide.

It is using terror in order to threaten our values and our way of life.

Now why does that sound so familiar?

Terence Blacker is the author of several books, including most recently You Cannot Live As I Have Lived and Not End Up Like This.

42 Days

By Hari Kunzru

What have I done in the last forty two days? I've flown to LA and back, held a baby, taken a boat across a bay, walked through a desert, eaten oysters. I've swum in three swimming pools and an ocean, stood on a roof and looked at the Manhattan skyline, pedalled my bike in the sunshine, been to parties and fashion shows and gallery openings and readings and lectures and concerts and lunches. I've made dates with friends to picnic in the park. I've stayed in bed on my own to watch tv. I've listened to a couple arguing beneath my window and heard a man playing alto saxophone on the subway. How many books have I read? How many times have I had sex? How many breaths, how many moments? How much life?

You can see that my forty two days are precious. You have only to look at how well I've spent them, all the good times I've had. My forty two days are certainly more precious than yours, because they belong to me. Losing them would make me angry. Yours are valuable too, I'm sure, but you have to remember there's a principle at stake here. There are questions of security. There is, above all, the need for our leaders to appear tough. Never underestimate the vital national security importance of a tough appearance, leader-wise. Of course it must have been an inconvenience to you to lose so much time. It was a good party. Everyone was there. We went out to eat afterwards.

Look, at least we can agree on one thing: your forty two days are way more precious than hers. After all, we don't know her. We have no idea how she spends her time. Personally, I didn't like the look of her in that picture. Her face was so blank, so grainy and badly lit. She didn't seem like a nice person. What would she have done with all that time, anyway? She probably would have wasted it.

And if we hadn't locked her up? What then? It doesn't bear thinking about. I want to enjoy many more days like the last forty two and I'm in support of any measure that helps me. I want to enjoy all my days as much as I possibly can, because that's my right as a free person. No one's going to take my freedom away from me, least of all some woman I've never met.

Hari Kunzru is the author of three novels, including most recently My Revolutions.

Day 28

42 Days

By Anne Donovan

Forty-two days is six weeks. Six weeks is a long time.

In six weeks you might
learn a new language
meet someone and fall in love
watch leaves turn from green to gold, red, brown.

Six weeks is a long time.

Long enough to
create a garden
cross a continent
read *Paradise Lost* over and over again.

Six weeks is a long time.

Too long to
stare at the same wall
feel scared and alone
wait till they decide.

Six weeks is a long, long time.

Anne Donovan is the author of three works of fiction, including Buddha Da and most recently Being Emily.

42 Days

By Lisa Appignanesi

Like a beacon emitting warnings to our times, Kafka's chilling classic, *The Trial* opens with the words: 'Someone must have been telling lies about Josef K. He knew he had done nothing wrong but, one morning, he was arrested.'

When K. asks his policemen why he is under arrest, they declare: "That's something we're not allowed to tell you. Go into your room and wait there. Proceedings are underway and you'll learn about everything all in good time... Cases like this can last a long time, especially the ones that have been coming up lately."

K. reassures himself with the thought that after all he is 'living in a free country...all laws were decent and were upheld.'

The reassurance is of little avail. After a year of due and undue process during which the charge against him is never clarified, K is marched out one dark night to a quarry. A knife is pushed deep into his heart and twisted twice. He dies 'like a dog'.

We don't know how K felt on day 14 or day 28 or 42 of his arrest. In German and in its new translation, *The Trial* is called *Der Prozess*. It is the process of being arrested without charge, kept under something like a control order, which catapults K into a nightmare where social relations are eroded and humanity is undermined.

...

Tony Blair was the first peace time Prime Minister to eat away at the fundamental British right, older than the Magna Carta, not to be detained without charge or trial. The traditional 24 hours grew - first to seven days, then in the wake of 9/11, to fourteen then doubled to 28. And now, it may be 42.

The escalating numbers carry a symbolic toll as well as an actual one. They ring out the fact of our growing inhumanity and the erosion of our rights. On the streets, it is not just so-called terrorists who are arrested under the anti-terror legislation. Protestors of all kinds are caught within its loose aegis and can be held without charge or trial.

Forty-two days has an added unwished for side-effect: it helps to radicalize rebellious Muslim youngsters and 'glorifies' them into the very terrorists it purports to protect us from.

Far better to go back to calling violence the crime that it is and keep us secure in our historic liberties.

Lisa Appignanesi is the author of many books, including most recently Mad, Bad and Sad: A History of Women and the Mind Doctors from 1800 to the Present.

Day 30

42 Days

By Alexander Masters

‘So,’ I ask him, ‘you’re in the police car, demanding to know why have they brought you here, what have you done wrong? Then what?’

Aaah, then I got scared, to be honest. The main officer says, ‘I’m arresting you under section 41 of the Terrorism Act.’ The drive from the university library to the police station was a mixture of confusion, panic, fear and just sheer astoundment.

I wish I could take pictures to show everyone: the entire second floor was deserted. Everything had been sealed off. Dark green floor, mint green walls, the glass in the doors blacked out. All the cell doors were open and at my cell there was a table, with two chairs and two police officers sat. I’ve been told to sit on the floor in the cell doorway, only I had to crouch, because I couldn’t get down, because I’m a fat git. It was fine for the first hour. I was just annoyed and angry. Do you want a lawyer? No, I’m going to tell the truth, I’m going to get out of here.

The interviews were bizarre. Had I ever visited Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan? They could tell from my passport I hadn’t. Had I ever been paint-balling? Was I planning on going paint-balling? The last guy to take a group paint-balling is now in prison indefinitely, with a minimum of seven and a half years. ‘We’ve found a document on your computer entitled ‘Understanding and Misunderstanding Radical Islam.’ What is this, Rizwaan?’ That’s my PhD proposal.

I enjoyed telling them what I thought of Al-Qaida. No one had ever asked my opinion. Everyone else gets bored and switches off. It was great. I was quoting Chomsky, Jason Burke. But I was thinking, don’t you know this? You’re trying to catch Al-Qaida, and you don’t know the basics? No wonder they want 42 days. It means they don’t have to do proper police work before hand. If I got 42 days for my essays, I’d be lazy too.

At 12.40pm, an officer said, ‘right, we’re going to search your house.’

I broke down at that point, to be honest. I sat there, an absolute wreck. I said, 'can I close the door please?' I didn't want them to see me cry. Approximately ten by ten, the cell was and they were still sitting outside, with the door closed. They sat there for the first 48 hours. Just sitting outside, watching.

Rizwaan Sabir, 22, on being arrested for downloading the Al Qaida training manual from the U.S Department of Justice website, for postgraduate research.

Alexander Masters is the author of Stuart: A Life Backwards.

42 Days

By David Mitchell

General arguments why 42 Days is bad news for liberal democracy have been put by writers and thinkers more authoritatively than I can, and from positions of greater personal experience and historical knowledge: but what alarms me in particular about the proposed bill is the tendency of legislative promises such as 'to be applied only under exceptional circumstances' to evaporate once the legislation is safely in the statute books. Exceptional circumstances mutate into standard practice, and come to be applied in areas other than those for which the legislation was originally drafted. A politician who guarantees 'ringfences' in 2008 is unable to guess what another politician in 2018 might do to those ringfences. I don't want to live in a country where I or my children can be locked up for a month and a half without anyone telling me why. I do want to live in a country whose police force is empowered to protect the public from terrorism; but 42 Days doesn't look like protection to me.

David Mitchell is the author of four novels, including, most recently, Black Swan Green.

42 Days

By Jay Griffiths

“I’ve got cus-tard on my un-der-pants” is probably not a mnemonic Mozart would have used. It was for a rhythm of long long, short short: long short, long short short. Easily memorable, it worked well for a novice player in a Samba band, as I was for a few days, a couple of years ago.

It was a stupendous band, all wigs and wiggles and whistles; tambourines, ribbons, drums and huge shouts of LIBERTY as we circled the walls of Campsfield prison for innocent refugees, just outside Oxford.

Many of the captives tried to smile and wave at us, knowing freedom in any language it speaks, in music, in colour, in word, in sky. From the inside, looking out, sky is the symbol of freedom; the unbowed clouds, birds flying free as the wind. Very little sky was allowed to those inside, uncharged with any crime. Surrounding the prison, the designers used a brick wall so high they stole they sky.

Skylesness could drive you mad. So can deliberate injustice. In detention without charge; it isn’t only the human body which deteriorates in captivity but the human mind.

Maybe the politicians planning this grotesque legislation of 42 days without charge should be locked inside the houses of parliament for the same length of time, during which those of them who are innocent of any crime could consider the unfairness of innocence imprisoned. Some of them, though, it has been argued, are guilty of war crimes, and a few are moral accomplices to genocide. Even they should not have to endure imprisonment without charge, and I’d happily go along and play for them.

Jay Griffiths is the author of the non-fiction books Pip Pip and Wild.

The Witches Coven

By Esther Freud

There's a picnic in the woods. It's an annual event held by the Friends of the Woods and I decide that we will go. I tell my girl, I warn her, we're going to be going out, just five minutes from the house, but she goes pale. 'I don't want to,' she says, 'don't make me. All I want to do is stay at home, forever, and never go out again.' My heart sinks. 'No,' I say, 'I've decided, I'm determined, we've been in long enough.'

Sunday comes. I cook sausages, buy bread and cheese, roast vegetables and pack them into a bowl. I roll up a blanket, fill a water bottle, invite along a friend, but my daughter's eyes are wild. 'Don't make me go,' she pleads.

She clings to me as we walk down the road. The others drift ahead, my boys, fearless, confused, roar off on scooters, using their feet as brakes as they hurtle downhill. 'How long will we stay?' she interrogates me. 'Not long.' I tell her. 'It's alright. You'll be alright. Nothing bad can happen.' Her arm is thin as it clings to mine, her hand light as a claw. There are signs for the picnic pinned to trees, not pinned, but fastened so as not to damage bark. Head to Witches Coven, they direct us. Will there be witches there do you think? I ask her, jolly, but nothing helps.

The witches coven is a clearing ringed by stands, on which are laid activities for children. Cameras to enter a wildlife exhibition, a place to colour in pictures of birds. We lay out our blanket, unpack our food, and for a moment my daughter loses herself, forgets her fear, she's colouring, busily, chatting with another girl, and then I ask if she wants a camera, there are prizes to be won, and she remembers. The colour, newly risen, drains away. 'I have to go home,' the panic is rising. 'I have to go home now.'

We abandon the others and hurry back up the hill, and as soon as we are on the way, really going, she begins to calm. She's going to be alright. She'll be at home. And I will be with her, colouring in birds, watching them fly past the kitchen window.

Esther Freud is the author of several novels including Hideous Kinky and, most recently, Love Falls

42 Days

By Darian Leader

Forced detentions, with no legal justification or framework, take place today in several Western countries that pride themselves on their liberal values and recognition of human rights. Documented generally by independent charities and rarely in the media, these quiet abductions form a dark mirror to the headline-grabbing abductions and kidnappings that tarnish the image of those apparently lawless and dangerous societies that lie outside the Western ambit.

It might seem futile to even try to describe the horror of such incarceration, yet oral and written testimonies are crucial to allow a symbolisation, however rudimentary, of what has happened, and, through the dissemination of such testimony, to undo the dehumanisation of its victims. But how can such a traumatic abyss ever become 'what has happened'? How can it become part of a narrative or take on meaning in any ready sense of the word? A detention can remove a human being not simply from their family, their community and their loved ones, but from meaning, history and narrative itself. When we listen to such testimonies decades after the events, we can sometimes see how they have been situated in a chronology, but at the same time they retain a dimension outside meaning and history.

A young man described to me his incarceration during a visit to his family in Turkey. Snatched brutally from their home, he was kept blindfolded for almost a week and tortured, before, on his release, being told that if he spoke of his abduction his family would pay the price. During that time, certain phrases and expressions of his captors became magnified for him, echoing years later in his mind - "like glass", he said, "going into me". Deprived of vision, his world suddenly became acoustic, and he observed that the pain of the physical tortures he was subjected to was strangely more bearable than the sense of being suspended to the whim of his captors, never knowing when they were going to return to him, never knowing when their voices were to approach him.

Alone in that terrible limbo, he felt no more than an object for a capricious and sadistic Other, never knowing what he was for them, never able to calculate a position for himself, and deprived of the very possibility of responding to them: he knew nothing, in fact, of the outlawed group he was presumed to belong to.

The savage removal of the coordinates of his existence had

another unpredictable effect, which we hear about also in other testimonies. In the periods between the visits of his captors, he was tormented by things heard in his childhood, as if a filter were selecting the words and phrases of every previous traumatic episode in his past. Later, these traces would combine with those of his captors to produce terrifying acoustic nightmares. The detention opened the door to these memories, intensifying and purifying them, as if the sudden emergence of the experience of not knowing what he was for the Other brought all those previous experiences back from amnesia.

Detention is never simply the insertion of a person into a cell. It is both the extraction from their identity and history and their insertion into all the nightmares of their past, and we should not forget this.

Darian Leader is the author of several works of non-fiction including, most recently, The New Black.

Day 35

42 Days

By Bernardine Evaristo

NORMAL

Hardeep
took the Central Line

from Northolt
to Mile End, weekdays,

shuffling through the barriers
in hooded sweatshirt,

rucksack on his back
bulging with books.

He slunk into a seat,
knees splayed out,

Bangra beats
throbbing in his MP3

and glowered
out the window

in an early morning
grump, dreading

a 3 hour lecture
on algorithms at 9 o'clock,

until the train entered
the darkness

at White City
and crowds of commuters

got on
and gobbled him up.

MORAL

Hardeep
likes old school hip hop,

Eastenders, cricket,
(Bollywood classics crack him up),

Big Macs, Adidas (not Nike),
Playstation.

One day he'll
move back up North

where his roots are,
he reckons.

That evening
he was glued to the telly,

appalled:
the burning towers,

the burning people,
his burning heart.

It was like a blockbuster
disaster movie, he thought,

only this time
for real.

DAMAGE

Hardeep
takes the Central Line

later than usual
to avoid the crowds

who avoid the spaces
either side

of him, so that sitting isolated
his face burns.

He carries his books
in a transparent plastic bag,

wears his hood down.
No one does anything

except scowl
but when he gets up

fear shivers through
the carriage

like an electric charge,
grown men shoulder
him
like he's an enemy alien

and he wants to shout out,
'I'm Sikh, you tossers'.

Bernardine Evaristo is the author of four works of fiction including, most recently, Blonde Roots.

42 Days

By Ann Leslie

Cairo's dirt, dust and habitual cacophony was mercifully filtered out by the trees in the flowery hotel garden of my five-star hotel; the terrace was a delightful place to have afternoon tea, and I'd invited an American-born woman called Barbara to share a fancy cake or two with me. But as soon as she arrived she insisted that we must move from the table I'd selected: 'Too many people can eavesdrop on us here'. Barbara was not just some expat chum of mine with whom I was meeting for a gossipy natter.

She was, and is, the wife of Saad Eddin Ibrahim, a famous Egyptian intellectual, whom, of course, I'd very much wanted to meet to discuss the abuse of human rights under the Mubarak regime. Unfortunately I couldn't. Saad was in prison, serving a seven year sentence, after being tried by a military tribunal, under the State of Emergency. What had he done? Was he responsible for trying to murder Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz, had he fired the gun which shot satirist Farog Foda dead? Had he attempted to assassinate Hosni Mubarak? No. He had merely questioned the regime's human rights record.

Egypt's State of Emergency was imposed in 1981 after the assassination of Anwar Sadat. It has remained in force ever since, despite regime promises to 'reform' it. As a foreign correspondent I've worked in over 70 countries so far and have seen how regimes like Egypt institute wide-ranging 'emergency' laws and then use these laws as a catch-all to detain and imprison those like Saad whose worst crime is simply getting on the regime's nerves. Smugly, I used to feel immense pride in the certain knowledge that this couldn't happen in 'Habeas Corpus' Britain.

Alas, I was wrong. Our anti-terrorism laws are now being used and abused quite flagrantly for reasons wholly unconnected with terrorism. Worse still, as Liberty points out, citing chapter and verse (including the opposition to the 42-day detention by, among others, two former heads of M15) these myriad new laws do nothing to deter terrorists. In the cause of 'defending our civil liberties', the authorities themselves are now busily destroying them. As they say in Egypt: 'Kifaya!' Enough!

Day 37

42 Days

By Hardeep Singh Kohli

Anoushka is ten years old now. Daft as a box of frogs, bright as a button, my daughter is the beginning, middle and end of my everything. She was born 42 days before she was due, 42 days early. We worried. We panicked. We feared the worst. 42 days. Six weeks. A month and a half. Those 42 days were so hugely important in my daughter's life. And in mine. 42 days.

Hardeep Singh Kohli is the author of Indian Takeaway: One Man's Attempt to Cook His Way Home.

Day 38

TWO BLOODS

By Nikita Lalwani

I am dressed in two bloods
like two women fighting over my body,
the loser to love me, the winner to die.
It has began the way all hurt begins -
inside a voice clogged in the heart.

People speak of words as though
They have such meaning:
Tight clusters of multi-lettered
Truth. I know otherwise, I
Have known it since my youth.

Unable to live in my many selves
I jump from one branch of me
to another like monkey in the deep jungle
without settling for one tree with ripe berries.

Climate, water, soil. These are
The clean, visible, markers
For living, if you are a plant.
When I came here I did not want
Something more. I was silent.

But burned like a bushfire,
yet nobody heard my mute-screams.
Should I cut my veins and ask the blood rivers
to dampen down the spirit of the fire?

If you know your place,
You can mark your territory.
For years I waited, listened,
Breathed heavily through
A thick seam of stitching,
So I could tell this story.

How I waited with a tune in my throat.
Here the air was thin as an icicle.
When the water had dripped from its tip
I'd find a note to sharpen a wider blossom in a feeling
turned out to be my voice that rose for rain.

Now I feel the same rain
On my face as you. I take
Part in the same ritual receipt
And delivery of the shared space
We inhabit. Geography.

We grew in a landscape hardy
like its climate
galloped along the mountain valleys
shaped by the spirit of the thick forest.

I live on a plot of land, an
Undertaking of square
Feet. I speak now, through
A fissure in the air, it
Allows me to complete

My thoughts. Now and then.

Become my burden.
My tongue feels heavy as iron.
It utters not a word out of my mouth.
The flag in my throat lost its nationality.

A cube of sorts, this place.
A perspex box from which to
Watch the world. Framed
By lines of equal length.

How long do I stand voiceless?
Silence has its own strength.
It can make the world quiver.
But I want to come home to myself.

This is an extract from 'Two Bloods', by Mir Mahfuz Ali and Nikita Lalwani, commissioned by the Refugee Council and the Celebrating Sanctuary Festival. Nikita Lalwani is the author of the novel Gifted.

42 Days

By Sadie Jones

In every war, each side asserts its higher morality, and under this banner of righteousness, countries, armies and individuals are released from the laws that normally bind them. They can destroy one another with extravagance and impunity. It is a precarious starting point for any code of behaviour, and yet the wily human race, endlessly arguing the sections, sub-sections and minute clauses of morality, so as not to be utterly damned, has found ways to enshrine even warfare in respectability. We have made conventions: 'A prisoner of war must be afforded the dignity of his rank', 'Prisoners of war may not be tortured...'

How quaint that all seems now.

With this new war, this 'War on Terror' it seems the rule book for both military and civil justice is being hurriedly rewritten.

The definition of the word 'terror', in any dictionary published in the centuries prior to 9/11, is "extreme fear, terrifying person or thing"; terrorism being "systematic intimidation as a method of governing or securing other ends."

This not pedantry, this distinction between a war on terror, and a war on terrorism; this warping of the language is significant. Terrorism can be investigated and prevented, terror itself is amorphous. It is gigantic and spreading, cannot be contained by normal means. If we are to fight terror we must break the rules.

It has been compellingly argued - by better informed and equipped minds than my own - that increasing the length of detention without charge for terrorist suspects would make no practical gains in our national security. It would be very effective in other ways though; it would place in the public mind the idea that the sacrificing of human rights is essential to our safety, that, in short, we must be terrified, fighting fire with fire and terror with terror.

These suspects, whose detention without charge may be extended, are potential prisoners of a war that has been placed beyond the laws of all other wars by its very name.

The moral and the practical are inseparable, and essential to what it is to be human; we cannot sacrifice the one without the destruction of the other, and doing away with our human rights would be a fast degradation indeed.

Sadie Jones is the author of the novel The Outcast.

Day 40

42 Days

By John Berger

Your clock, which they confiscate, goes haywire.

Something like this:

$24 \times 42 = \infty$

John Berger is the author of many works of fiction and non-fiction, including G, Ways of Seeing and, most recently, From A to X.

42 Days

By Shami Chakrabarti

Time is a strange thing. There is no doubt that I have felt its passage speed up, slow down and resume normal service at various times in my 38 years. Increasingly, I remember notable events from my own childhood more vividly than those of yesterday and wonder with increasing concern which memories of five-year-old life will provide the cabin luggage for my son's thirties.

There are many arguments in favour of our evolved notions of justice, but simple human fallibility has long been my favourite. Individual frailty that becomes systemic imperfection and that requires prompt charges, defence lawyers, presumed innocence and reasonable doubt to redress it. In England these essentials are older than running water and should be undeniable. But the fear of terrorism has been more about effect than effectiveness.

Now they say that 28 days is too short a period between arresting a terror suspect and charging him with a criminal offence. They say that the instinct for protection and revenge is stronger and simpler than the instinct for justice, so ripping up Magna Carta ought to play well with the public. I turn to my very own five-year-old focus group, my son, and try the question on him. I ask him how he would feel if people thought he had committed a terrible crime and arrested him for 42 days without telling him exactly what he had done. He replied that this would be unfair. I asked him why. "Because they didn't give you the chance to really say anything and what if you didn't even do it?"

Not exactly a controlled experiment when a human-rights' campaigner talks to her son this way. He's a smart kid who might well have predicted the right answer for his niche audience. The comment has the ring of poignant truth about it nonetheless. Six weeks is a very long time indeed to my little boy—too many meals, sleeps and stories even to contemplate. But how much shorter would it really be to the small child, elderly parent or impatient employer of a suspect from Bradford who might, in the end, turn out to be the wrong Mr Khan? Would it be any shorter to the extremists and recruiters who would surely make hay from the umpteen injustices that such modernised medievalism would bring? Time is a strange thing.

Shami Chakrabarti is the Director of Liberty.

Instructions For Understanding 42 Days Detention

By Ali Smith

Sit quietly in a place that's not of your choosing.
Set the stopwatch to keep time for one minute.
Right.
You're guilty.
It doesn't matter that you aren't or mightn't be, you just are.
For just one second, imagine it.
For two seconds, imagine it.
For three consecutive seconds, imagine it.
You're presumed guilty
Though there's no evidence against you.
Repeat presumption until the sixtieth second.
There. The minute's up.
Take a deep breath.
Sixty minutes in an hour.
One thousand four hundred and forty minutes in a day.
Ten thousand and eighty minutes in a week.
Sixty thousand, four hundred and eighty minutes in forty two
days.
The difference between August and October.
The difference between May and March.
Three million, six hundred and twenty eight thousand, eight
hundred seconds.
Now, are you sitting comfortably?
No, you can't leave.
No, you can't go.
You've no right. It's the law.

*Ali Smith is the author of several books, including The Accidental and
most recently The First Person and Other Stories.*

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