

Asylum – Sample Declaration – Past FGM and Forced Marriage

UNITED STATES CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES
ASYLUM OFFICE
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA 22209

In the Matter of)
Jane Doe)
)
Applicant)
_____)

File No.: A 123456789

**DECLARATION OF JANE DOE IN SUPPORT OF HER APPLICATION FOR ASYLUM,
WITHHOLDING OF REMOVAL, AND CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE RELIEF**

I, Jane Doe, hereby state under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States that the following statements are true and accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief, and that I wish to incorporate the following statements into my application for asylum (Form I-589):

INTRODUCTION

1. My name is Jane Doe and I am

2. I fled Yemen on

I am unwilling and unable to return to Yemen because I would be forced to marry my father's friend, whom I used to consider my uncle. Being forced to marry this man would mean a lifetime of forced sex at the hands of my husband, because in my country spousal rape is not recognized as a crime. I believe these rapes would be extremely painful because I was subject to female genital cutting as a child. I would also lose my liberty as a woman and my career dreams because I would be required to submit to my husband in every way, including by giving up my career and dreams for him. I would be considered my husband's property because he has paid for me with a dowry, and I would not be able to escape him. I think it is likely that John could also hit me, I know that in Yemen most men hit their wives and I have already angered John by trying to escape this marriage.

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3. I do not believe I could successfully resist my father’s efforts or those of my father’s family to force me to marry this man. If I am forced to return to Yemen and I somehow resisted this marriage, I believe that my father and his family would hurt me, limit my freedom, and force me to marry some other man to prevent me from “setting an example” for other women in my family. My father and his family are upset that I have harmed the family’s “reputation,” and I fear for my safety because I think they might physically hurt me to punish me and to set an example for other women and girls in the family. I am the first member of my family to refuse a marriage; many of my cousins have been forced into marriages and suffered rape and other violence by their husbands but I am the first of my cousins to try to resist such a marriage.

MY CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND AND MY VIEWS ON WOMEN’S RIGHTS

4. I was born

█ Although I was born in

6. My family is part of a mixed █ | community in Yemen. Our community includes cultural practices of both groups, although my family identifies strongly with our █ heritage. When my cousins have married pure Yemeni men, the family has disapproved. However, most of the family weddings, even though the bride and groom are both part █ have taken place according to Yemeni tradition in which men and women celebrate separately. Some of the family weddings take place according to █ tradition in which women and men celebrate together. My family eats █ in our house, but we

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- celebrate Eid the same way that the Yemenis do. We do not celebrate national holidays, and my family does not have many friends who are purely .
7. In our mixed - community, the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) or cutting is common. My sister and I went through it, and I believe that most of my cousins have been through it. It is my understanding that our - community adopts the approach to FGM – insisting that women be cut to the maximum extent possible. I believe this based on conversations I have had with my mother and cousins about FGM.
 8. I think in Islam people should choose to marry someone they love, freely. Once they're married, I believe that the husband and wife should be equal. I remember that the Prophet said to his people that you need to pray and take care of the women – I believe this was the Prophet responding to the fact that many people living at the time of the Prophet did not treat their wives properly, and under Islam men should not mistreat their wives. I have never seen a happy marriage, I have only seen women suffer because of the fate they have chosen. I do not want this to happen to me.
 9. In school and my religion I learned different things from what my dad believes. My dad knows a lot about religion and Islam, but when it is time to apply the religion, I do not think he does a good job. The way he treats my mother is not consistent with Islam. I also think that my father is willing to exploit religion so that when it helps him get what he wants, he will use it. One of the things my father wants is for men to be powerful and in charge, and for women to do what the men in their families say.
 10. I do not believe that in Islam, a father can force a daughter to marry anyone he chooses. I find it confusing to see my father do this, what I learned and I believe is one thing and what my father does is another thing.
 11. I went to university in Yemen where I studied English. I even received a post-graduate degree in English. Going to university was important to me because I wanted to have a career and be independent. I liked studying and being able to learn. I think my father allowed me to go to

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university so that I could make money and support our family. I do not think he supported my dreams or believed that women should have a career and an independent life that they find satisfying. My father did not even pay for me to go to university, my cousin on my mother's side, X, paid for me to go to university. I call my cousin X "Uncle X" because he is older than me.

12. After I finished university, I began working to support my family. My father had worked at banks during my whole life, but by the time I finished university, my father was retired and living on a small fixed income. I first worked for a _____ company as a _____, beginning in about _____

13. When I graduated from university, I stopped covering my entire face with the veil as is the custom in Yemen. Instead, I kept my face only partially covered. _____ I had decided not to wear the veil over my face at all. I was at the office and in my post-graduate English program a lot, and I had to take the veil off there because it was a different environment. I realized that I liked not wearing the veil over my face. I believe that wearing the headscarf over my hair is all that the Holy Koran requires. At first, my father and brother did not like that I had stopped wearing the veil over my face. My dad tried to tell me that I had to wear the veil, but somehow later on I think that my mother handled things and my father stopped bothering me about it. My mother still wears the full veil over her face. Eventually, my brother came to support my decision and actually encouraged my sister to stop wearing the veil over her face. My extended family, especially my dad's family, does not like that we do not wear the veils – all of my cousins on my dad's side who live in Yemen wear the full veil to cover their faces.

14. My dad's family believes that my mother raised my sister and I to be too independent. I think this is in part because we choose not to wear the veil, but also because my mother allowed me to travel to Egypt with a friend from school in _____. My father's family believes that a woman should not travel alone like this, and that doing so puts the family's reputation in danger. For most of my life, my father's family's opinions have been negative about my mother and me

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and my sister, but they have not dominated my life because my father was not as close with his family before as he is now.

15. Many of my cousins have been forced by our family to get married as children. I don't think they resisted, but I don't think they could have resisted either because in Yemen girls are required – both culturally and legally – to obey their fathers. My cousins and I sometimes would sit in circles and talk about things. One of my cousins in particular is now married to a Dutch man, and so she talks about everything. Sometimes the rest of us are embarrassed to hear the thing she will say out loud, but through these conversations I heard my cousins talk about how they had to “please” their husbands, no matter what. At the end, their husbands would just call them “cold” and ask whether they had to teach my cousins everything. It seems that their husbands had high expectations to be pleased in bed. It was in these same conversations that I learned that some of my cousins had been beaten.
16. I know that many of my cousins were cut, in addition to being forced to marry and then forced to please their husbands. Here are the cousins that I know about:
 - i. On my mother's side:
 1. My cousin X, who is my mother's age, was cut and was married before 18 to someone she did not choose. I know that her husband has beat her and makes her have sex.
 2. X has three daughters, and all of them were cut. One daughter was forced to get married, and one daughter married her cousin. One daughter is 24, but I believe she will be forced to marry soon.
 3. My cousin X was cut and was forced to get married at age 32. She has been beaten by her husband and forced to have sex.
 4. My cousin X was cut, and I have heard she had the worst cutting ever. She was forced to marry her first husband, and was later divorced which caused the family great shame. My father did not allow her to live with us. Now she is remarried, which is I think the reason she has survived.
 5. My cousin was cut. She has always lived in ■ and is married.

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6. My cousin was cut, she is 25 and not yet married, and has always lived in [REDACTED].
 7. My cousin X is X's twin, and she was cut and is not married yet.
- ii. On my father's side:
1. My cousin X was cut and was forced to get married around 15 or 16 years old. She has been beaten by her husband and forced to have sex with him. She has five children, but I don't really know anything about them.
 2. My cousin X was cut and forced to marry, I'm not sure how old she was at the time. She lives in [REDACTED].
 3. My cousin X was cut and forced to marry, I'm not sure how old she was at the time. She lives in [REDACTED].
 4. Most of my cousins on my father's side are men, so I do not know about the situation of any other women. Among my male cousins, my uncle X's two sons believe they can control everything. They are bullies really. Both are married and it is obvious that they treat their wives and sisters poorly. They always talk about the family's reputation and the example that I am setting for other women in the family, according to my brother.
17. In my family, I know that people are married later than is normal in Yemen. I think this is because the woman in my family are used and useful for many years – we clean the house, cook, wash clothes, and if we have jobs we support the family financially the way that I did. Once we are married, our family loses all of that, so I think they wait as long as they think they can to make us get married and then they want us to get married for the highest dowry they can find.
18. I left my job at the [REDACTED] my contract there ended. I then received a job at [REDACTED]. Working is important to me, I like being able to provide for my family financially and for myself. I also like the independence of having my own career and using my education, and I like knowing that I'm living up to my potential and pursuing my own dreams.

19. I think that women should be allowed to make their own choices about what kind of education they want, whether they want to wear the veil, whether and whom they want to marry, and whether any part of their body should be cut. I believe a woman should have control over her body, and that no one should force a girl to be cut. These views come in part from my religion, I believe men and women are equal in Islam, and in part from my experiences in life which have led me to believe that women's equality is an important goal in all parts of life.

SUFFERING FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION AS A CHILD AND THE CONTINUED EFFECTS OF CUTTING ON MY LIFE

20. When I was about six or seven years old, in _____ my family forced me and my twin sister to undergo female genital mutilation (FGM). Usually FGM is done to girls who are even younger than we were, but my mother had avoided people (my paternal aunt, a woman in my mother's family whom I call an aunt but who was not my blood aunt, and even my mother's own friends) for about two years to try to delay FGM for us. My mother did not oppose FGM at that time, but she had delayed it for as long as possible. My sister and I were both sick and very thin since we were born, and each month we would get sick and the doctors would say that our weight was not right for our age, so I think this might be why my mother wanted to delay having us cut. My mother did not oppose FGM, but she wanted it to happen only once my sister and I were healthy enough for the procedure.
21. Considering how young I was, I remember the night I was cut very well. We had a lot of adults over to our apartment for dinner, I did not know why but it seemed like a happy celebration. Around 6 or 7 in the evening, my mom told me to go next door to our neighbor's apartment. I went there alone, it was a small two room apartment just like ours. Shortly after I got to the apartment, I heard my sister get there and go into the other room. It was a very small apartment, so I could hear her.
22. My mom's two best friends were in the neighboring apartment. One of them stayed with me and one stayed with my sister. That woman put me onto the bed and closed my eyes with her hands.

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Her role in the FGM process is called the “mother of your eyes.” She kept her hands over my eyes while I was being cut so that I did not see the knife.

23. They did not give me any kind of medicine to put me to sleep or to dull the pain while I was being cut. I felt every single thing when our neighbor, a Sudanese lady, cut the outside of my vagina area. I bled a lot. I don't remember if I actually fainted or just felt faint, but I was laying on the bed just bleeding and bleeding. After she finished cutting me, the “mother of my eyes” moved away so my eyes were open. I had about twenty or thirty minutes to lay there and recover, and during that time the Sudanese lady was cleaning me and finishing with the process, so I knew that she was the one who cut me.
24. After it was over, my older cousin (who's is about my mother's age) came and took me back to my family's own apartment, and there she helped me to go to the bathroom. She gave me a special tea without sugar to wash the area that had been cut and to stop the bleeding and kill the pain. It did not kill the pain, however, the pain was horrible.
25. For about a month or two after I was cut, it hurt me very much to go to the bathroom. For a couple of months, it also hurt whenever I sat down. I hated going to the bathroom and I hated showering, because in the shower I saw what had been done to me. I remember that for both me and my sister, going to the bathroom was the worst thing. It wasn't just the pain, it was also the fear. I don't know whether there were any other health problems for my sister because of the cutting. We never talked about what happened to us as children, we never even cried together about it.
26. I felt very sad after this happened, I wondered why this had to happen to me, why my family had to believe in such a thing. I felt like I had lost something after being cut, that this part of me was supposed to be private and personal, and that I was the one who should make decisions about what happened to such a private part of me – and this ability to make decisions for myself was completely taken away from me when I was cut.

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27. To this day, it physically hurts me a great deal when I get my period. I have the normal cramps that I understand most women have, but I also have intense pain where I was cut that I believe is related to my FGM. I am also afraid to be in crowds because it makes me remember the dinner party that my mom had that night, and then it brings back all the other fear and stress that I felt that night.
28. When I was teenager, I asked my mother some about FGM. I heard my cousins sometimes talking about how sex really hurt them, and I believe this is because they had been cut.
29. One of my cousins on my mother's side of the family married a man from the _____ and he opposed this practice and did not want it for his daughter. This man's opinions about FGM sparked some conversation in my mother's family, and now many of them have stopped practicing FGM on their daughters. My mom now opposes FGM. Once, one of my cousins mentioned FGM to my mother, and my mom said that she didn't want her future granddaughter to be cut. We did not go into detail about why she has changed her mind about FGM.
30. I also oppose FGM and think it is wrong. It's hard for me to put into words exactly why I believe that FGM is wrong. I think that every girl and woman should have the power to make decisions about her own body. This right was taken away from me, but I believe that it is a right that all people should have. My father still believes that all girls and women should be subjected to FGM.
31. I believe my family forced to be cut because they think FGM is necessary to make sure that women do not have sexual desire and cannot act outside of the family morals. They think FGM is a tool to control women and make sure that they do what the family wants.
32. My cousins also talk about how their husbands think they are "cold." I believe this is because FGM makes sex painful for them and also reduces their desire to have sex. I assume that because of FGM, sex will be very painful for me. I have never had sex, so I do not know for sure. I dread the first time I will have sex because I fear the pain I will feel because of having undergone FGM, because I think my cousins have had problems with this. I believe I had a different kind of

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cutting than my cousins, so I do not know for sure what I will feel physically, but I am very afraid to ever have sex.

33. I know that I can see a doctor to show that I have suffered FGM, but I am too embarrassed and afraid to see a doctor for such an exam. I have never in my life shown that part of my body to anyone other than the night that I was cut. The idea of showing that part of my body to a doctor and having that doctor provide information as part of my case is terrifying and shameful to me. Even the idea of showing a female doctor that part of my body is impossible to me. Even talking to my lawyer about this is very difficult and very shameful to me. I do not like to talk about it at all.
34. My lawyer told me that I could also see a doctor to discuss the way I feel and my memories and fears, and have that doctor submit evidence as part of my application. I cannot imagine sharing every detail of what has happened to me and what I am afraid of with one more person. I have no other choice but to share it with my lawyer and the asylum officer, because I know that if I do not I will never be safe. However, I cannot imagine adding someone else to that list.
35. I am seeing a counselor, even though it is very uncomfortable for me. The first day, I spoke with her some about being cut, but since that day I have not been able to talk about that with her. I don't like going to see her; it makes me feel embarrassed and ashamed. I feel weak for needing help. Still, I go to see her and talk about my stress and try to learn ways to manage my stress and my worries, like my fears about telling my story. I can't bear to tell her the details of what I have already survived and what I am afraid of though. In part, even though I know my father and his family want to hurt me, I do not feel that it is ok for me to dishonor my family even further than they think I already have by talking about our family with strangers. I feel very guilty all the time, and I am afraid that by fleeing I have caused my mom and siblings even more problems.
36. I feel ashamed that I was cut. I know Yemeni and Egyptian girls are not usually cut, and so I know that not everyone has to go through this. I don't think being cut is right, so it embarrasses me that my family put me through it.

37. Since I started talking to my lawyer about FGM, I also started trying to talk to my sister about what happened to us on the phone. She does not want me to talk about it with her or anyone else. I think she feels ashamed also and has never had anyone encourage her to talk about it and think about it. She has told me she thinks that I should not talk about it here, that I should only talk about being afraid to marry John.

MY FATHER’S ABUSE OF MY MOTHER, SISTER, AND BROTHER WHEN I WAS A CHILD

38. My father and my mother fought very often when I was a child. Occasionally, my father would hit my mother. I remember one incident in which my father pushed my mother toward a hot stove while they were fighting. More than the physical violence, however, my father would make my mother pay for their fights by being silent toward her and treating her like a stranger. When my dad was most angry, my brother would hold him back to keep him from hurting my mother. My mother said that without my brother, maybe she would not be alive. When my father mistreated my mother by being silent toward her during the day, he would still make her have sex with him at night. She had no freedom to say no to sex, no matter how bad things were between her and my father. I knew that my mom had to have sex with him when she didn’t want to, because sometimes we would see her crying in the morning. My mom is not usually open to talk about private things, but one day she told us that she had to please my father because in our religion the angels would be unhappy if she didn’t please her husband.
39. When my brother would make silly mistakes, my father would hit him. My father also once grabbed my sister by the ears and then lifted her up off of the floor, and then dropped her back down on her feet. He did this because my sister had failed an exam and he was very angry with her. My father never hit me, I believe because I never gave him a reason to. I was careful to do everything right and obey him.
40. One time, I remember that my father was worried about me because I got too scared by movies. My brother was also worried about me, and so they talked about this with my father’s family. My father’s family told him to take me to a Sheikh, and so my father took me to the Sheikh. I did not

really understand what was happening, but the Sheikh pressed hot irons on my chest and on my back. I was very embarrassed by this, and it was strange to me that my father made me go through this. It really hurt me. I think my father's family pushed him to do this to me, because it was not like him to do this. To me, this shows that my father is not strong enough to stand up to his family even when he does not fully agree with them.

41. I am also embarrassed because I have a scar from what the Sheikh did to me. This is the only time I have been in front of a man without a shirt on, and I do not believe it is appropriate.

MY RELATIONSHIP WITH JOHN, A MAN I SAW AS MY UNCLE, WHEN I WAS YOUNG

42. When I was young, I was close to a friend of my family's, and my father's, named John. John is also mixed . I called him "Uncle John," and even though we did not have a blood relationship, I thought of him as my uncle. Often he gave me rides home from school or family events, and I talked to him a lot about my dreams and whatever was on my mind. In fact, I thought of John as more than a father because he was warmer and more caring towards me than my own father was. Because of this, I always confided in him.
43. One time, my mother and sister were going to a wedding. I did not feel like going, I was very tired. Uncle John drove my mother and sister to the wedding, and I rode along with them. John was supposed to take me home after he dropped my mother and sister off at the wedding. I always rode in the front seat of the car, I liked being the front passenger. After he dropped off my mother and sister, John drove to his and his son's apartment to pick up his son. We had to wait in the parking lot, because when John called his son he was still showering. While we were waiting, John reached across the front seat and grabbed me by the arms. Then, he kissed me on the mouth. This really surprised me and made me feel very uncomfortable and scared. I thought of John as an uncle and he was about my father's age. I had never kissed anyone or imagined kissing him. I did not kiss him back, and when his son came down to the parking lot I moved into the back seat to get away from Uncle John. It was very strange for me to ride in the backseat, but after this happened I rode in the back seat and tried to avoid Uncle John.

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44. Uncle John often came to our house to visit, and usually he brought my favorite sweets from the store. I never understood why he treated me differently from my sister, but he did. After the night in the car, when he came to the house I tried to stay in my room to avoid him. My mother would chide me that I needed to thank him for bringing me the sweets, so I would have to see him. I tried to avoid giving him the traditional greeting of two kisses on the cheek, because I wanted to stay away from him.
45. I know that John was married twice before, although I don't really know much about the way he treated his wives. I know that he is now divorced from both of them. His first wife lived in Saudi Arabia, and I know that she was not allowed to work after she married John, even though she worked before she married him. I do not think his second wife was allowed to work either.
46. I do not know whether John ever hit his first two wives. However, I know that John is a person who, when he is angry, he will punish you. One time, a friend of mother's owed John money, and when she did not pay that money back when John demanded it, he tried to get her put in jail.

MY FORCED ENGAGEMENT TO UNCLE JOHN, A MAN TWICE MY AGE

47. In about [redacted] my father came home one day announcing "good news" that I would be married. I had always thought that I would be able to choose my own husband, as my mother had done.
48. When my father first made the announcement, my mother and twin sister and brother started asking right away to whom I would be married. When my father said that I would be married to "Uncle John" we all began laughing, certain that my father was joking. It could not be possible that I would be married to Uncle John, who was like a father to me and about the same age as my own father.
49. When I realized my father was serious, I was speechless. My mother started yelling at my father, mostly about how my father had done this behind my back and without ever asking me.
50. After making this announcement, my father told me that he had a list of things that John likes and does not like. I do not remember everything from this list, but I distinctly remember that John

would not allow me to work outside of the home once I was his wife. This was very upsetting to me, because I had always studied and worked hard, and I valued my career – I wanted to work and build a life for myself, to use my brain, to meet other people who had studied the way I had, and to live an independent life. In addition, my father told me that I would be required to welcome John’s two sons (who live in _____ into the home whenever they came to visit.

51. After the announcement, I avoided my father. John did not want an engagement party, a common tradition in Yemen, so the marriage would not be announced formally and publicly until the wedding itself. My dad told me that the wedding would be in June or _____, so he instructed me that the deadline to stop working _____. I knew there was no way to reason with my dad, because he is tough and, as the man of the house, used to having his decisions go unquestioned.

52. I had never imagined that anything was dangerous about my relationship with Uncle John before my father announced this engagement. However, since my father announced the engagement I have remembered many things that make me wonder if John always intended to marry me, regardless of my own wants. John always favored me over my brother and sister, giving me rides places in his car and always bringing me my favorite sweets.

53. Looking back now, I think John always planned to marry me, no matter what I wanted. It is the only thing that makes sense, because I know that he is aware that I do not want to marry him, and still he wants to proceed with this wedding. He was never really as kind as he seemed, he was just preparing me to submit to be his wife.

MY FIRST TRIP TO AMERICA

54. Around the same time as my father announced the “engagement,” I _____, my dad instructed me to get a visa to come to the United States to go shopping for wedding things (including a wedding dress) in New York City. I paid for my own visa, but my dad gave me the plane ticket. My dad’s only income was his retirement payments, which were only about \$150 a month, so I

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found it strange that he suddenly had money to pay for a plane ticket for me to come to America. That was my first clue that John had paid my father in exchange for the promise that I would marry him. My father's other spending habits changed around the same time, so I think he must have been paid a lot of money as a dowry.

55. I think I was allowed to come to the United States because I would stay with my male cousin on my mom's side, X, here and I would not be alone. Also, at that time, my father's family was not pressuring my father very much. I am not sure if they were really pushing the marriage at that time, but I think maybe they were pushing him to force me to marry to John. Still, even if there was some pressure, my father's family was not pushing him the way that they would push him later.

56. My mother always tried to raise us to be independent women. Before recently, my father allowed my mother to raise us the way she wanted to but I think now that she was only ever going to be allowed to have that kind of freedom with us when we were young – until it was time for us to be married. John's daughter was also in New York, so I don't think my family really thought I had a chance to escape by coming here.

57. I went to the US embassy for my visa interview in December [redacted]. I told the embassy official that I wanted to come to the United States to go shopping just as my dad instructed me. I did not at that time intend to stay in the United States, I really had not figured out what to do yet, although I knew I did not want to marry John.

[redacted] I entered the United States on

59. Once I arrived in the US, I stayed with my cousin X in New York. For about two weeks, I said it was good to be away from my dad. X is close with me and already knew what was going on through phone calls with my family. Almost every day, I received emails from my twin sister. My twin sister was very upset, and told me things were getting worse all the time. It's hard for me to describe, but somehow my father seemed more "serious" about the impending marriage after I came to the US, maybe because the wedding date was approaching. At one point, my dad

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and John went to look at wedding venues. Because I had always confided in John, John and my father decided the wedding would be held at the place I had always dreamed about. I hated this, it made me feel like John was using me for all those years when he acted like my “uncle” and pretended to love me like a “niece.”

60. It’s very hard for me to remember the date, but in about early [redacted] I fell down or fainted somehow in X’s home. To be honest, I do not remember what happened very well – I think I underestimated how stressed I was by the events and the threat of a forced marriage. I remember coming to in the bathroom, with X standing next to me. I was not hurt, but I went to a doctor in New York. I really didn’t understand what was going on or what they said. I understood them to say that I was having trouble because of the stress.

61. Because of this incident X contacted my brother and my mother, and my brother postponed my return ticket until [redacted]. X never really talked to my dad, because X is my mother’s blood relation. I believe that my mother and sister gave a lot of excuses to my father about why I had to stay in the United States longer. I was allowed to change the ticket a couple of times without causing additional charges, so I do not believe that John or my father knew the exact date for which I rescheduled my ticket.

MY RETURN TO YEMEN AND FIVE MONTHS HIDING FROM MY FATHER AND JOHN IN SANA’A

62. All I really remember about the time right before I went back to Yemen in [redacted] was that I wanted to return to my mother, my sister, and my brother. I was under so much stress at that time, so X and my mother arranged everything. I couldn’t even talk to my family at this time, I was unable to talk to anyone really at that time.

63. In the end, I was not even the one who made the decision to go back to Yemen in [redacted] it was X and my mother. Also, at this time, my father’s relatives were not yet really involved in the situation the way they would become involved later. I am in more danger now that my father’s family is involved.

64. When I returned to Yemen, I stayed with my paternal aunt in Sana'a, the capital city. This was in a very different neighborhood from where my family and father live. I stayed with my paternal aunt because my father does not have any relationship with her and her husband, and my mother and sister thought that my father would expect me to stay with maternal relatives and find me there. My mom stayed with me, because often she stayed with her own sisters so it was not an obvious red flag for her to stay away from my dad. My twin sister came to visit but could not stay because that would alert my dad that something was going on.
65. I suffered from a kind of sickness I didn't understand in Yemen, just as I had in New York – I was very afraid to be away from my mother, to shower, to do anything. I almost always stayed in the house to hide, although my family took me to many doctors as a result of the sickness. When I went to see the doctors, I left the house with a veil covering my whole face (rather than just covering my hair, as I normally do) in order to make sure no one would find out that I was in Yemen and alert my father or John. I always got rides to the doctor and never took public transportation. I was very afraid that my father would find out that I was in Yemen. I had trouble sleeping more than one hour a night because I was so afraid that my father would find me. I was so terrified of what would happen next, I could barely even focus on one specific fear.
66. My whole life in Sana'a was about not being found by my father or John. I did not even want to talk to my sister or brother most of the time there even though they would try to visit me in secret. I did not like going out, I did not even want to leave my room and walk around the house. I just wanted to stay in one room with my mother beside me. I did not want to eat.
67. Looking back on that time in Sana'a, I know that I could not bear to live like that again. Living trapped like I had to live in Sana'a to stay hidden from my father and John, this is something that felt like it was killing me.

MY FINAL FLIGHT FROM YEMEN TO THE UNITED STATES

68. My mother told me that I needed to leave Yemen, to love myself first for once in my life, and escape John and my father forever. My mother had to tell me this every day. It reminds me of a

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parent teaching a child to walk, every day giving me a small idea that I should leave. My aunt would also tell me that I had to leave. My mom told me that things were getting serious and that she could not do anything about it. Even my aunt on my dad's side told me that she would not be able to protect me forever. My aunt does not have a good relationship with my dad, and she was scared that she may face a problem – that maybe he would call the police and report that she was hiding me if my father found out where I was.

69. I remember the day that I finally agreed to leave Yemen for good. I don't remember the date, but I know that my aunt called her friend in Virginia, USA and asked if she could accept me in her house. My mother and my aunt told me that if this friend said yes to taking me in, I had to go. I agreed that if they said they would take me in, I would go. I felt sad and afraid when these friends in Virginia agreed to take me in, because I did not know what would happen to me in the United States. I did not know if I could survive leaving my family forever, and I was afraid that my mother, brother, and sister would face another problem if my dad found out that I had been in Yemen. I was even afraid of this family in Virginia, I did not know anything about them. But, I felt that I had to leave because I had told my mother that if this family would take me in, I would go. Keeping my promises is important to me, especially when they are related to my mom.
70. I returned to the US on the same B2 visa I had first come here on, arriving on
71. Even when I left Yemen in November, I was not really sure that I was leaving forever. I hated the idea of leaving my mom, sister, and brother. Even though America is a nice country, it is not my country and I never wanted to live here. I love my mother and my sister and brother, and even still my father despite what he has done and wants to do to me. I did not want to leave my family forever.
72. Ultimately, I realized that I had to leave Yemen forever so that I could be safe and be spared a lifetime of forced marriage and rape, and possibly other violence by John, my father, and his family.

I AM AFRAID THAT IF I RETURN TO YEMEN, MY FATHER AND MY UNCLE X, AND MAYBE OTHER MEMBERS OF MY FATHER'S FAMILY, WILL PHYSICALLY HURT ME TO PUNISH ME FOR OPPOSING THE MARRIAGE AND SETTING A BAD EXAMPLE FOR OTHER GIRLS IN THE FAMILY AND FORCE ME TO MARRY JOHN

73. After I left Sana'a, a cousin accidentally mentioned that I had been in Yemen in front of my father. My sister told me about this, and told me that my father became even more angry and serious about the marriage after he found out that I had defied him in this way.
74. My father is very upset that I managed to hide from him for five months. I believe that he would find out if I went back to Yemen now, because I think he has tried to spread the word that he is looking for me. Two men who know my family from the roots and the time in work at the airport, and I am fearful they might tell my father right away if I entered the country. Last time when I returned to Yemen, I was lucky and they did not see me. When I was departing, my mother told them I was going to Egypt. However, that was before my father found out that I had been hiding in Yemen and became even more angry. I think now those men who work at the airport would tell my father if I were back.
75. Since I left Yemen in November, I have heard from my sister that my father is even more angry. My uncle X, my father's brother, is telling him that I have damaged our family's reputation, and that I must not be allowed to set a bad example for other women in our family. My uncle X also says that I am ruining the marriage prospects of other women in my family, especially my twin sister. My Uncle X has also started dangerous rumors, saying maybe I have found a man here and calling me a prostitute. In our culture, these are very shameful things, and my father's relatives could be even more ready to hurt me because of these rumors.
76. I believe my father is vulnerable to this kind of pressure, and that he is becoming angry and seeing me as disobedient and as a threat to our family's honor the way that my uncle does. My Uncle X and my father were not close when I was growing up, so this might be why Uncle X did not have influence over my father before, like when I stopped wearing the full veil over my face. However, now Uncle X has a lot of control.

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77. My Uncle X and my father have common beliefs about women. They both think that wives are there to serve their husbands. I heard a story once that my Uncle X's wife had just been released from the hospital and was still in bed in pain when Uncle X came home and just asked her whether lunch was ready. It was like his wife was a slave in this story, he did not even bother to ask her how she was feeling.
78. I believe my father and uncle would hunt me down if I returned to Yemen, no matter where in Yemen I tried to live. I do not believe that any friends or family members would even be willing to hide me this time, because people will not want to take the risk of angering my father by hiding me because my father and his family are more angry now than before, and anyone who wants to hide me would be in more danger than before. I can't blame them for not wanting to help me, I think it is a very dangerous situation.
79. Even if somehow my father did not find me, if I were back in Yemen I would have to be hiding all the time. I would have to be afraid to leave the house, I would not be able to work. I would always be afraid that someone would notice me and would tell dad. I would have to wear the full veil to hide from my father. I can't take wearing the veil like this. When I was in ninth grade until I graduated at university, my father forced me to wear the whole veil over my face. My dad was never ok with me not wearing the veil. It was a big problem when I first stopped wearing the veil. After getting that kind of freedom, I don't want to lose it again. Wearing that veil again would be more than losing freedom -- it would also be losing a battle for my independence and really for who I am with my father. Living in hiding all the time would feel like it was killing me slowly, just like it felt when I was living in Sana'a last summer. And this time, I am sure that I could not be successful in hiding from my father and his family.
80. I believe when my father finds me in Yemen, he might try to use the approach of remembering the good times we spent together to lure me to go back to his house or my uncle's house. In the end, I do not think it matters how my father tries to get me back to his house or my uncle's house,

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because he can simply call the police if I refuse to go with him, because in Yemen my father is my legal guardian and I must obey him.

81. I think if I am brought back to my Uncle X's house or my father's house, I will not have a key, I will not be allowed to leave the house, and I will not be allowed to see my mother and my twin sister. I think my brother would want to protect me, but I do not know if he is strong enough to protect me against my uncle and my father.

82. I also believe that for the time I am in my uncle's house or my father's house, I will be made to be a slave and cook and clean to learn to be a "good woman" as my father and my uncle see it. I have heard that my uncle is calling me a prostitute back home now, and I think he would continue to use bad words to insult me and to indicate that I have harmed our family's honor. Being called a prostitute in our culture is really a horrible thing, and it is dangerous because the family might hurt me to restore our family honor.

83. As I think more and more about my uncle X now, I also have a strange memory from when I was 12 or 13. My uncle was staying in our house, sleeping on the floor in the room where my sister and I slept. At some point, my mother told me later that I woke up and saw my uncle looking at me in a strange way. I really don't remember this, but it was a bizarre incident and after it my father asked my uncle to leave the house. I am afraid that if I am kept in my uncle's house, my uncle could also rape me. If he did, I know that I be blamed for failing to protect my own honor.

84. Before this engagement, my father gave my mother some flexibility to raise me and my siblings how she wanted to, allowing her and us some independence, even though he was physically violent with everyone but me. I think that my dad allowed this flexibility because he was able to benefit from my education and career by taking most of my salary. When John offered the dowry, my father decided he wanted that instead. Since I have resisted this engagement, my father has come under pressure from his family and this has changed him and made him more like the rest of his family. I know that I have embarrassed my father by resisting and fleeing this

marriage, and so I think that now he feels that he needs to put his foot down to show that he is the man of the family.

85. I do not think my sister has as much freedom as she used to have either. I have heard that my father does not let her go to university anymore, but I think that my sister sometimes says she has a doctor's appointment and sneaks off to university. I believe that it is just a matter of time before she is forced to marry someone against her will, especially after what I did by disobeying my father and resisting this marriage. She tried to protect me, and I don't think she would even tell me now if my family were planning to make her marry someone. She always tells me to stop talking about the hard things.

86. My father is a man very susceptible to pressure, as I saw when he made me to go the Sheikh when I was younger because his family pushed it. Even though my father has not physically hurt me other than bringing me to this Sheikh before, I think that because of the pressure he is under from his family and because I have strongly and publicly disobeyed him by leaving Yemen and resisting this marriage to John, my father could physically hurt me if I return to Yemen. If my father does not physically hurt me himself, I think my Uncle X or my paternal cousins would do it.

I AM AFRAID OF BEING FORCED TO MARRY JOHN, A MAN I ALWAYS SAW AS AN UNCLE, AND I AM AFRAID OF A LIFETIME OF RAPE, AND POSSIBLY PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AT JOHN'S HANDS

87. If I am required to return to Yemen, I am very sure that my father and his family will succeed in forcing me to marry John. I believe it is simply impossible in Yemen to resist a forced marriage; culturally, I do not even think forced marriages are recognized – they are just marriages.

88. I have heard from my sister and brother that John has told my father that if I do not return to marry him, my father will have to pay him back. I believe that my father has spent the money he has received from John for the promise to marry me and cannot pay him back. I think it is likely that if I somehow avoided marrying John by staying outside of Yemen for long enough for him to

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call off the wedding, then my father would have to ask his family to help him pay the debts to John. I believe that my father's family would then think they owned me upon my return, and that they would force me to marry someone else to get their money back and make sure I did not set a bad example for women in my family.

89. I believe that John knows that I do not want to marry him, and that he has always known this. I think he must have known this since the day he kissed me against my will in the car. At the very least, he has certainly known this since I began avoiding him after the engagement was announced. I do not think John cares about whether I wish to marry him, because he has pushed to have the wedding all along, even though I have shown through my resistance and flight to the US that I do not want to marry him.
90. I cannot simply run away, in Yemen there is no place for a woman with no male guardian to go – no one would want to rent me an apartment. Even if I somehow found a place to live, as a woman alone in Yemen I would be very suspicious. Women do not generally live alone in Yemen, and people around me would realize very quickly that I was a woman without a male guardian. Once they realized this, I would be in serious danger of being raped.
91. I believe if I tried to say no to the marriage and simply refuse to go to the wedding, my uncle or even my father might physically harm me to force me to go. I also think that it is possible under Yemeni law for a woman to be married without her signing any paper or being present for the wedding, my father could simply arrange the marriage. John seems committed to the appearance of a marriage that I am choosing through his commitment to a big wedding, but in the end I think my family could simply force this marriage or a marriage to another man without my knowledge.
92. The part of marrying John that scares me the most is the fact that once I am his wife, I will not be able to decline to have sex with him. In Yemen, women are not allowed to say no to their husbands. A husband cannot rape his wife under Yemeni law. But, I know that John would rape me for my entire life if I am forced to marry him, because I would never, ever consent to having sex with him – nor would I be able to escape having sex with him.

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93. I believe that sex with John would also be extremely painful, because I was forced to undergo FGM as a child. I am very afraid of this pain and the shame that I would feel being forced to have sex and even just forced to show someone that part of my body. I think John might want to inspect it to make sure I was cut properly, and perhaps to make sure that I have not been with another man since I escaped, and that sounds like a terrible and embarrassing thing to me. I do not believe women should have to submit to that kind of examination by their husbands.
94. I also am afraid that John could be unsatisfied with the way that I was cut by the Sudanese woman. From what I have heard from my cousins, there are three ways for a woman to be cut – the most cutting, the middle, and the least. I like women to be cut the most, and I think most of my cousins were cut the most. Based on my own understanding of my body, I believe it would have been possible for me to be cut even more, I think I was cut the middle amount. John is culturally very conservative. I believe he would have a big wedding. As a result, I think he would want me to be cut the most way. I am afraid that he would force me to be cut even further once he sees the way that I was cut.
95. I would only be able to use birth control if I could somehow hide it from John. The idea of having kids with John is terrible to me, just like the idea of having sex with him. I also am afraid because I know that if I had a daughter, John would want her to be cut.
96. I also know that John would not allow me to work. He told my father as much after the engagement, and I know his first two wives were not allowed to work. This would represent a loss of my dreams and really my identity – I have worked hard to learn, be a good translator, and be a professional. I did all this work because I believed I would, and all women should, be able to make my own choices in life.
97. Just like my father can call the police to report me for disobeying him now, John would be able to call the police if I disobeyed him after we were married. I do not know the word in English, but I know that there is a special court that a husband can call in Yemen if his wife tries to escape. The judge can force the wife to go back to her husband's house. I think it is very likely that John

would call this court if I tried to escape him, because I know he has tried to call the police before to get the women who could not pay back her debt to be put in jail.

98. If I wanted a divorce from John, I think it would be impossible for me to get one. In Yemen, it is easy for a man to ask for a divorce but very hard for a woman to get a divorce. I believe that a woman needs a supportive male family member to get a divorce. Because I don't have family support, I would have nowhere to go to be safe even if I could get a divorce – and I think that I would not have a male family member to support me to get a divorce in the first place. I would be completely trapped in a marriage with John.

MY LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES

99. To be honest, living in the United States is still not easy. Even if you have good people around you, which I have, it is confusing to live in the United States. I really love that here in the United States women have rights. Here, women have the right to say “I am tired today, I cannot do something today.” That is not possible in Yemen.
100. On the other hand, just being away from my mother, my brother, and my twin sister, and my friends is so difficult for me. I even miss my father sometimes, and I hate the idea that I miss him given everything that he has done to me. I hate my dad, but I love my dad. It's very hard for me to think about my family, and often when I do, I cry.
101. It is good to be safe, and I hope I will have the chance to stay here and be safe forever. I feel so lucky to have an opportunity to avoid marrying John and being forced into a life as his slave with no rights and to avoid physical violence by my father and his family. However, at the same time I don't feel so lucky because I have lost everything. It is confusing, sometimes I don't know if I am happy or not.
102. I miss my career, back home I was happy with my job and had dreams for my future. For me, my career dream was to be one of the best translators in all of Yemen. In Yemen, there are two companies that are excellent in their translation, and I always wanted to work in those companies. I wanted everyone to know that I could make it, that was one of my dreams.

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103. In the United States, for a while I did not work. I started to feel very guilty about being a burden on the family that took me in, and with nothing to do I could only think about everything that would happen to me if I returned to Yemen. I have started babysitting for a family now. To go from having a career that I was really invested in and believed in to being a nanny here in the United States has been very hard.

104. However, I hope that I will be given a chance to stay here and be safe, so that I can begin to really build a life for myself here with all the freedom I imagined, and all the freedom that I believe women should have.

Signed under the pains and penalties of perjury of the laws of the United States.

Jane Doe

Date