**

TRENDING

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**A modern-day tale of Romeo and Juliet**

**Girl meets boy, her father disapproves. It is a story as old as time but, unlike Romeo and Juliet, a couple arrested in Yemen have sparked a major Facebook campaign.**

Once upon a time, three years ago, Huda, now 22, walked into a mobile phone shop in her home village in Saudi Arabia. She met Arafat, now 25, a Yemeni migrant worker from a much poorer family. Love blossomed.

Arafat approached Huda's parents to ask for her hand, but was refused, according to the couple's lawyer. "My family wanted to marry me off to another guy," Huda seems to have told Saudi journalists, in a [**clip posted on YouTube**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5eWBoQeYOME). "But I refused. I said no-one will touch me except for Arafat. That was when the thought occurred to me that I should escape."

Huda then left home and crossed the border into Yemen disguised as a Yemeni worker. She was arrested on charges of illegal immigration. Huda's family claimed Arafat had used "magic" on their daughter, according to reports. Arafat returned to Yemen and he too was arrested, for helping Huda.

So far, so familiar. So what is the difference between Huda and Arafat's story, and that of Romeo and Juliet or the Arabic Laila and Majnun?

This time, there has been a huge reaction on Yemeni Facebook, with several pages and images of the couple being widely shared (one has [**9,000 likes**](https://www.facebook.com/1Huda.Arafat)). Some of the comments have been nationalistic - with Yemenis venting anger at their wealthier neighbour's attitudes. But others have invoked the 2011 uprising in which Yemenis demanded rights.

"The sympathy with Huda is because she rebelled against her culture," says Fahad, a 33-year-old civil servant who is on Facebook every evening. "She stood up against a patriarchal society which told her who to marry. It highlights the need our societies have for modern states where there are freedoms and rights and where people can, for example, choose who they want to marry." He is organising a group to protest outside Huda and Arafat's court hearing on Sunday.

*Reporting by Mukul Devichand*

**Update - 25 November, 08:40 GMT:**

On 24 November, Huda's court appearance was adjourned until 1 December to await a UN High Commissioner for Refugees ruling on her request to be given refugee status in Yemen. UNHCR officials in Yemen told the BBC Huda's application was likely to be approved on the grounds that she could face mistreatment, or even death, at the hands of her family if she returned home.

Huda had earlier pleaded with a Sanaa court to let her stay, while a crowd of supporters outside chanted "We are all Huda."

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