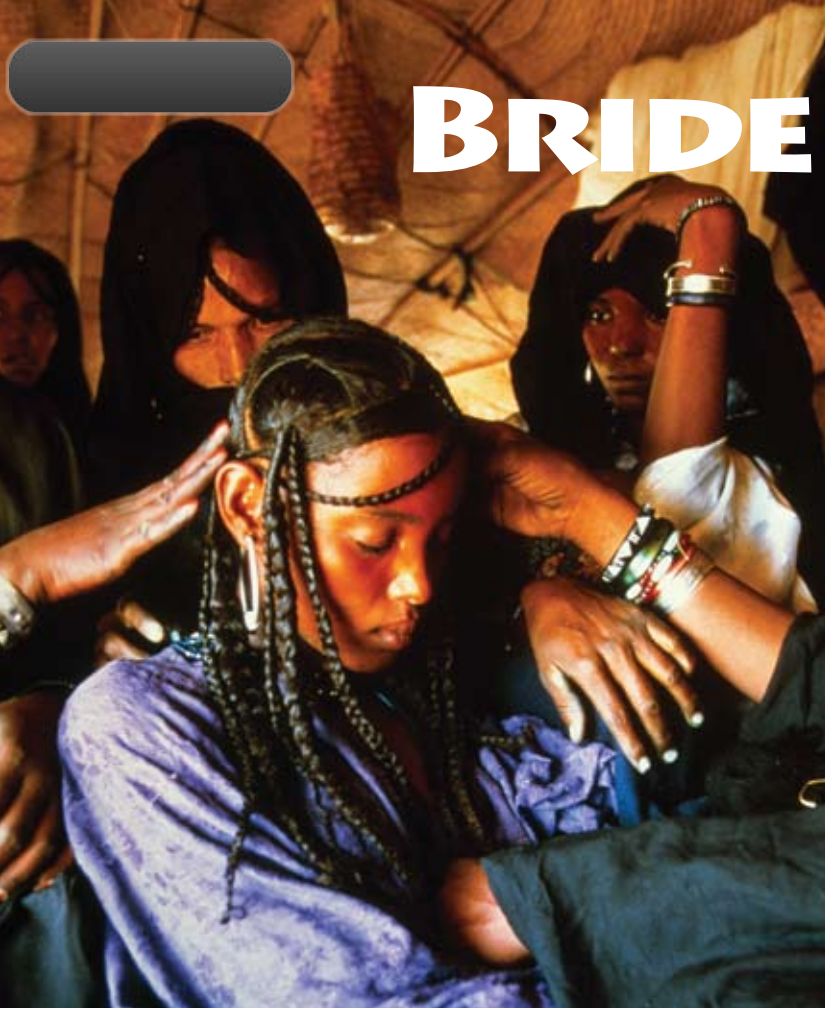


BRIDE OF THE SAHARA



▲ On the first day of her wedding celebration, relatives and other women rub a scented cream, containing fine black sand, through Assalama's hair.

1 The Tuareg bride,¹ Assalama, sits
silently as female relatives and helpers
make sure that every hair is perfect
for the first day of her **wedding**
5 celebration. Such attention is new
for the bride, who is only 15 years
old and who has spent most of her
time tending her mother's goats and
sheep. The Tuareg are nomads, and
10 it was only by chance that she was
reunited with her 25-year-old cousin²
Mohamed a month earlier. Just back
from five years working in Libya,
Mohamed spotted Assalama as she
15 drew water from a well. "I knew
from that moment that I wanted
to marry her," he says. Wasting no
time, he asked for her hand, she
accepted, their families approved,
20 and wedding plans began.

Following Tuareg traditions, the marriage rite is performed at a **nearby** mosque³ in
the presence of only the couple's parents. Assalama and Mohamed are absent. A few
days later, the time for the celebration approaches, and guests begin to arrive. For a
week, some 500 guests enjoy camel races, sing, and eat rice, dates, and roasted meat
25 in **tents** under the Saharan stars.



▲ Henna, a reddish-brown coloring used on the feet and hands, is a traditional symbol of purity in North Africa.

Mohamed wears an indigo
tagelmust, a cloth that **wraps**
his head and face. The rich color,
which rubs off onto the skin,
30 earned these once fierce⁴ Saharan
warriors⁵ the title "blue men of
the desert." For the Tuareg, the
tagelmust is more than just
clothing that keeps out the desert
sand and sun; it **demonstrates**
35 respect and is thought to keep evil⁶
creatures known as *jinn*s away, as
is henna, a reddish-brown coloring
used on Mohamed's feet. Henna
is also a **symbol** of purity and is
40 **reserved** for a man's first marriage.

At the celebration, a tent called an *ehan* is prepared for Assalama and Mohamed. Women take down and put up the tent every day of the celebration, making it slightly larger each time to symbolize the progress of the celebration and of the couple's relationship. Assalama stays inside the tent during the whole celebration, only showing her face or speaking to Mohamed, her best friend, her mother, and one special helper. During the celebration, neither Assalama nor Mohamed is ever left alone for fear they might be harmed by **jealous** jinns.

As the celebration ends, the couple prepares to spend the first year of their marriage with Assalama's family. Mohamed will offer displays of respect to his in-laws, working hard to win their approval. Once he does that, he will take his bride back to his **camp** and start his nomad's caravan moving again.

¹ A **bride** is a woman who is getting married or who has just gotten married.

² Your **cousin** is the child of your uncle or aunt.

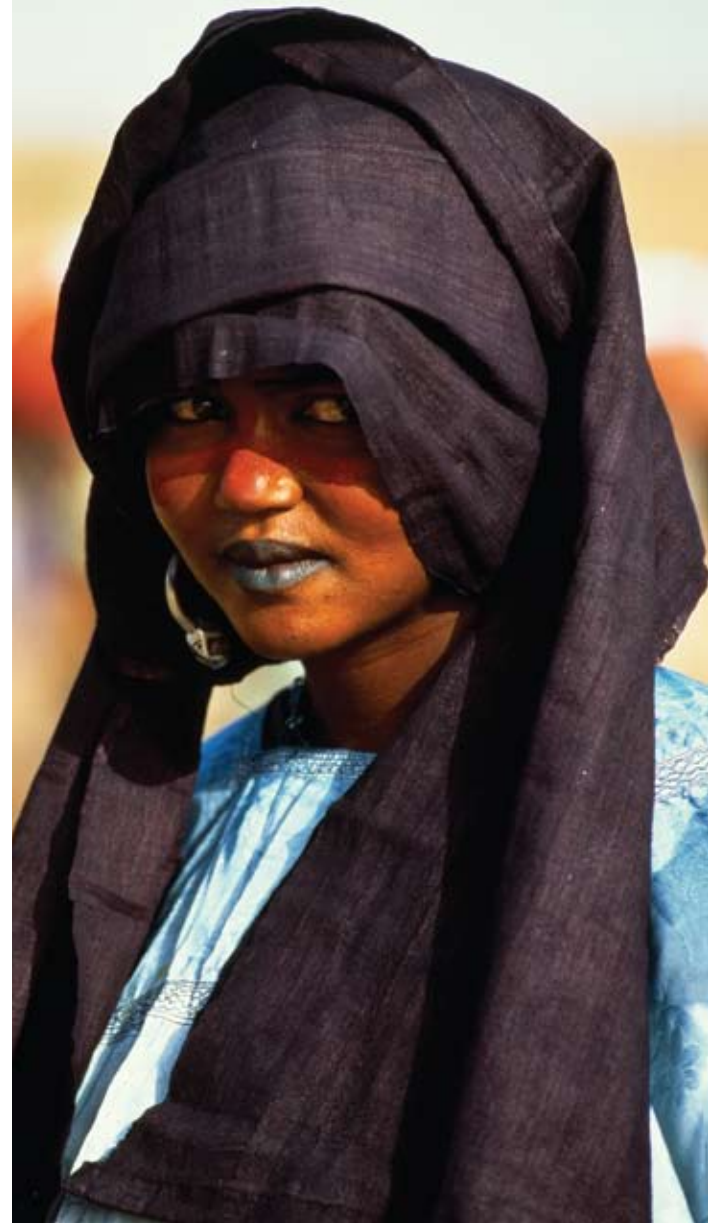
³ A **mosque** is a place where Moslems go to worship.

⁴ A **fierce** fighter attacks with great bravery and energy.

⁵ A **warrior** is a fighter or a soldier, usually of past times, who was very brave and experienced in fighting.

⁶ If you describe something or someone as **evil**, you mean that you think they are morally very bad and cause harm to people.

▼ A Tuareg camel caravan crossing the Sahara desert.



▲ An unmarried Tuareg woman wears her traditional indigo headdress to the wedding

▼ A view of the Grand Mosque in the desert town of Agadez, the largest Tuareg town in Africa

