



Princess Charlene appeared cheerful in her most recent post but has always struggled to put her emotional wedding day in the past. Pictures: Getty and Instagram



Princess Charlene was said to be visiting South Africa to continue her conservation work; (right) a family visit in August raised more questions than it answered.

# MYSTERY IN

Gazing into the distance, smiling beatifically, Princess Charlene looked happy as she sat in front of a Bible, with rosary beads on top of her black sweater.

"God Bless," she posted on her Instagram account this month, alongside the image.

Her 350,000 followers were thrilled to see the troubled royal looking cheerful, although it still seems like a long way from the happy ending they want for the mother-of-two and wife of Prince Albert of Monaco.

While Charlene, 43, remains far away from her family, in South Africa, where she has resided for much of the year, the mystery of Monaco continues, unresolved.

The Prince's Palace of Monaco says Charlene has been in South Africa having operations for a serious Ear Nose Throat (ENT) infection and had what should be her last procedure on October 8.

"This operation under general anaesthesia is the last operation she had to undergo after the ENT infection she previously had," the palace told French news agency AFP.

"She has now been under observation for 48 hours."

Charlene had said she hoped to return to Monaco this month and Prince Albert told RMC Radio earlier this month that his wife was expected to return imminently.

"She will be back very soon, we have to talk to the doctors in a few days," he said.

Zimbabwe-born Charlene has been in South Africa, where she grew up, since May, having flown there for what was meant to be a short conservation trip, during which she developed an infection following a sinus lift, which

prevented her flying home. Her ongoing health issues mean Charlene has missed many family milestones including her 10-year wedding anniversary and six-year-old twins Prince Jacques and Princess Gabriella's first day at school, as they joined private Catholic primary school, François d'Assise-Nicolas Barré.

However, rumours persisted it's not just Charlene who is sick, but the relationship. "How long can she remain away from her children, her duties?" Madame Figaro magazine stated, even suggesting Charlene is looking for a house in Johannesburg.

"How long will Albert II of Monaco go on bearing this affront, which is becoming ridiculous?"

The 63-year-old prince is facing troubles of his own, fighting allegations he fathered a third illegitimate child, with a Brazilian woman.

"I will fight with all my strength for Monaco to be beyond reproach," he said in his accession speech in 2005, pledging he would rid Monaco of its "shady" reputation and the government would be guided by "morality, honesty, and ethics".

However, Albert's own morality took a bashing when it emerged he had two love children – daughter Jazmin

Grace Grimaldi, 29, who is an actor and son Alexandre Grimaldi-Coste, 18.

The then bachelor formally acknowledged them, although they are not in the line of succession. But now a third claim has come to light, of a daughter born in 2005, which is more awkward because it was during the time he was with his future wife, the then Charlene Wittstock, an Olympic swimmer who he met at a swimming competition in Monaco in 2000.

The prince's lawyers say it is a sham, while the plaintiffs want a DNA test.

Charlene, who first shocked the world when she allegedly ran away before her 2011 wedding and burst into tears at her lavish, celebrity-packed ceremony, has once again been raising questions in Monaco's social scene that she has done a bolt.

Last December, the glamorous blonde appeared at the palace's traditional Christmas tree ceremony sporting a Dior jacket, gold sequin face mask and dramatic new hairdo which consisted of half her hair shaved off.

Was it a fashion-forward cut, or Britney-style cry for help?

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# MONACO



The Christmas look which shocked royal observers in Monaco.

looked wan in her grey jumper and black trousers, while Albert sported top-to-toe red, including crimson Crocs.

Now, as another Christmas rolls around, will Charlene return in time for her twins' seventh birthday in December?

An infuriated Albert finally addressed the gossip in an interview with People magazine in September, denying there was a crisis.

"She didn't leave Monaco in a huff! She didn't leave because she was mad at me or at anybody else," he said.

"She was going down to South Africa to reassess her foundation's work down there and to take a little

time off with her brother and some friends.

"She didn't go into exile."

The prince said the rumours affected his family, but he hadn't spoken sooner, because, "I was concentrating on taking care of the kids, and I thought it would just probably go".

He added that Charlene "jokingly said that she's ready to stow away on a ship to come back to Europe," to which royal onlookers pondered, he of all people, could make a reality as he had the funds.

The family was briefly reunited in August, when Albert and the twins flew

Prince Albert and Princess Charlene on official duties in 2020; Albert has always acknowledged his daughter Jazmin Grace Grimaldi (right) and son Alexandre Grimaldi-Coste but is fighting allegations he has fathered a third illegitimate child. Main picture: Getty

to South Africa to see Charlene, subsequently posting a series of photos on Instagram.

In them, a pale and weak princess, wearing camouflage sweat pants, headscarf and hat, embraced her husband and kids and wrote she was, "thrilled to have my family back with me".

Gabriella emulated her mum's dramatic hairstyle with a severe V-shaped fringe that Charlene explained her daughter cut herself and she tried to fix.

"Gabriella decided to give herself a haircut," she posted, "Sorry my Bella I tried my best to fix it."

But the happy images did not convince everyone.

"They have denied there is any trouble in paradise, but I don't know if anyone was too convinced by the photo of Charlene and Albert hugging," says Brittani Barger, deputy editor of Royal Central.

"Her staying in South Africa so long has naturally led to suspicions."

After the visit, in September, Charlene was rushed to hospital in Durban after collapsing.

But now, with her last surgery behind her, it's hoped the royal can return to Monaco and her family, leaving her health issues and rumours, behind her.