

real life

# 'Our friend stole £12,000 from us for her FAKE wedding'

Helen Morse, 51, was excited about her pal Charlotte's upcoming nuptials abroad, but things quickly went awry as the big day neared...

**P**opping the Prosecco open, we all cheered. 'Turkey, here we come!' I smiled as I poured some fizz into the bride-to-be Charlotte's glass. 'I can't wait to be Mrs Thomas,' she gushed excitedly. 'And I'm so glad you're all going to be at my wedding. It means so much to me.' Charlotte was engaged to our friend Paula's son, Daniel, and quickly became part of the group.



Charlotte was found guilty in court

She'd join us, alongside Sue and Tracey, on our nights out and we always had so much fun.

Before Charlotte got together with Daniel, she'd been through a tough time when her daughter from a previous relationship underwent treatment for brain cancer and was thankfully given the all clear. After Charlotte and Daniel had a baby, the two got engaged in 2022. They were planning to get married in Turkey, and when Charlotte invited us to the wedding, we jumped at the chance. We were so touched to be included in their big day, and we couldn't pass up the excuse to crack open the fizz and celebrate the upcoming nuptials.

Charlotte had given us plenty of notice – the wedding was in 2024, so we had a lot of time to save for it. 'I'll get everything booked and then we'll work out the costs,' she explained as she showed us the resort. It was a five-star hotel village, with lots of restaurants and pools. 'We're in for a real treat,' I said to my partner, Harold, as I showed him



Tracey, Sue, Paula and Helen are still so close, despite what happened

the hotel. As my 50th birthday was going to be that year too, we saw it as an excuse for a double celebration.

Charlotte told us how much we owed her and explained that we could pay her in instalments via bank transfer. But as the months passed, extra costs started to creep in. We needed to pay £30 each upfront to have our hair done by a hairdresser for the wedding,

and she said that we could upgrade our rooms to a pool view for an extra £120 each. 'It'll be worth it,' I said to Harold as I transferred over Charlotte the extra money. In total, our group had paid her £12,682. I'd paid £3311, Paula had paid £3296, Sue £3272 and Tracey £2803.

Then two months before we were due to fly out, we received a bombshell from Paula. 'The wedding has been postponed,' she tearfully told us over the phone.

She explained that Charlotte had been diagnosed with a heart condition and was unfit to fly. It seemed to have come out of nowhere, and we were all concerned for her. We met up with Charlotte and she apologised profusely and said she would pay the extra money to postpone the wedding as she felt bad. 'Don't be daft,' we all said. 'We're more than happy to pay it.'



Charlotte

me the booking details. But when I received them, I noticed the odd spelling mistake. And when I contacted TUI, the representative on the phone told me no booking matched the details I'd provided. I called Paula and explained what had happened. Worried, I confided in Sue who took our printouts to our local TUI travel agents. 'They told me these aren't from them,' she revealed.

Confused, we popped round to Paula's house to get to the bottom of it. 'None of this adds up,' we explained to her. Paula agreed and rang Charlotte right away, but she refused to come over. 'I'll go and speak to her,' Paula said. But when she came back to us, she had terrible news.

After pushing Charlotte to see bank statements for the account we'd been paying our money into, she broke down and told the truth. 'She's spent all of our money,' Paula sadly explained. 'She booked a wedding but only for us three and our partners. You and Harold were never included on the booking, Helen,' she added. We were in complete shock. Paula went on to add that Charlotte's illness had been a total lie too. 'We were her friends, and we trusted her,' I said.

Devastated by Charlotte's betrayal, we had no choice but to go to the police, and three days later she was arrested.

In March this year, Charlotte Blackwell, then 31, appeared at Cardiff Crown Court, where she admitted four counts of fraud. After her arrest, she'd told police she'd used our money for gambling and to pay off debts. Shockingly, it was revealed that just months after we'd gone to the police, Charlotte had been in court for trying to defraud a cancer charity out of £4000. Morgan's Army had been set up by the parents of Morgan Ridler, who'd died from a rare liver cancer when he was just three. They'd thankfully recovered the money, but Charlotte had been given a 10-month jail sentence, suspended for 21 months, and ordered to complete 180 hours of unpaid work and 10 days of rehabilitation activity,



Helen now

after admitting fraud by false representation.

According to her barrister, Charlotte had shown huge remorse for what she'd done to us and was willing to pay the money back. She wept as the judge slammed the 'fiction' and 'pack of lies' she'd created in her 'shameful' frauds. He gave her a 12-month prison term suspended for 18 months, 120 hours of unpaid work and five days of rehabilitation activity, and ordered her to pay £3500 in compensation to me, Paula and Sue and £3250 to Tracey.

In my eyes, Charlotte wasn't upset because of what she did, but because she'd been caught. Her sentence was an insult and it will take years for her to pay us all back. It's affected my mental health enormously and I've had to take on cleaning work on top of my normal full-time job to make up the money she stole.

Thankfully, Paula, Sue, Tracey and I have such a solid bond, and it hasn't come between us. Because of this Daniel broke up with her when he found out what she'd done. I still can't believe she sat drinking with us, pretending to be our friend, while scamming us for a wedding that never existed. I will never forgive her for that and what she put us through.

**'None of this adds up'**