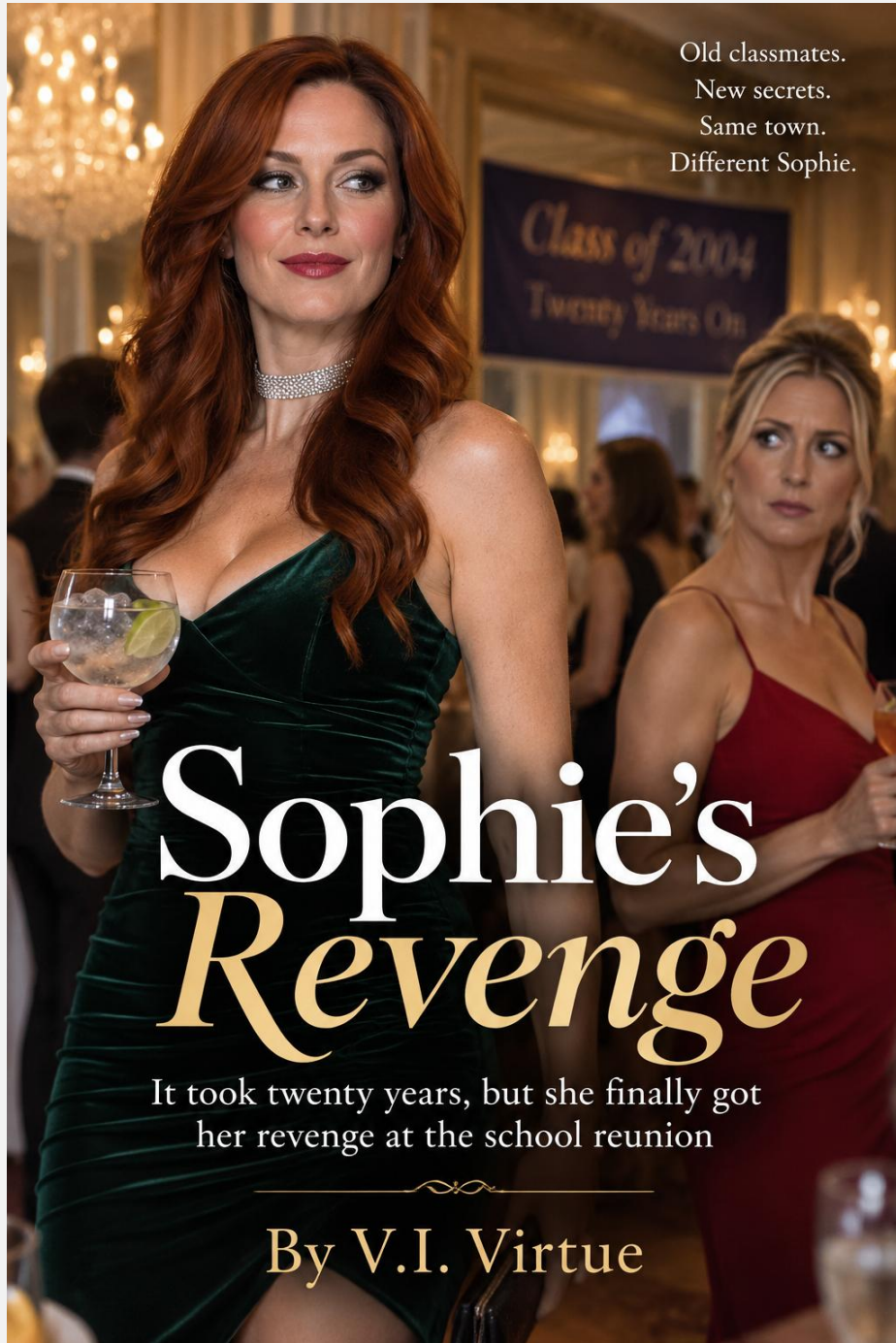




Sophie's Revenge

It took twenty years, but she finally got her revenge at the school reunion

By V.I. Virtue

SHE REOPENED THE email for the third time and read it through again. A school reunion. Bloody hell. It had been twenty years since she had seen any of them, and for good reason. She could hardly believe she was even considering it, but there you go.

Still, she would think about it later. It was time for work. She snapped the laptop closed and stood up. The pearlescent grey latex of her mini-dress creaked and squeaked as she strode through to the studio on sharply pointed four-inch silver stilettos.

Mr Wilkins had been cleaning the floor in her absence. With a toothbrush. He was on his hands and knees, the lace-trimmed cap of his powder pink French maid outfit askew on his head, his dress riding up to reveal straining stocking tops.

"That is quite inadequate," Sophie declared sternly. Mr Wilkins knew better than to stop unless told, but Sophie had other clients to see. It would not do to have one leaving while the other was arriving. "You may stop for today."

She towered over him as he kissed the tips of her toes, not daring to look up. "You're dismissed," she told him, a little irritated that he was still there. "Stop. Time's up. Get dressed and get out."

Ten minutes later, Mr Wilkins, now changed into a business suit and tie, left the building through a discreet door into an alleyway beside the car park, and Sophie checked her notes on the peccadilloes and preferences of her next client.

She *would* go to the class reunion, she decided. Just for the hell of it. She wondered how much the girls from school had changed and what they would make of her.

Back then she had been the tall, skinny, carrot-topped butt of too many unkind jokes, gawky and socially inept even by teenage standards. Even the friends she had made in primary school had drifted away when they realised that it made their lives easier if they joined in the mockery.

But life changes you. Her height now seemed imposing, her willowy body desirable, and her bright orange hair had matured into the sort of rich auburn that some women paid a fortune to emulate.

Sophie carried herself with a self-confidence she could not have imagined in her school days. And when she walked into a room, heads turned.

THE ROSE HAD been the obvious choice for the reunion. It was the most upmarket hotel in town. To be honest, it was the only one worth the name, and Sophie had only ever been inside when her parents took her there for birthday meals as a child.

It had seemed so very glamorous at the time with its plush carpets and crystal chandeliers; now it just looked provincial.

Sophie stopped at the door to the function room to collect her name badge. Lord alone knew what she was going to do with it: she had not the slightest intention of sticking a pin through her designer dress.

“Name?” asked the woman behind the desk, her pen poised to tick it off her list.

“Sophie. Sophie Anderson.” She had vague memories of a younger version of the woman, but the name eluded her.

The woman looked her up and down incredulously: long auburn hair draped in loose curls over her shoulders, a diamond choker at her throat, and a figure-hugging emerald-green velvet dress above endless black-stockinged legs and stilettos.

“*You’re* Sophie Anderson?” She handed her a sticker with her name on it, unable to drag her eyes away from Sophie’s cleavage.

“And you are?” asked Sophie.

“Tracy... I was captain of the hockey team. Remember how after PE lessons we used to...” she looked awkward, her voice trailing off.

A shudder went down Sophie’s back. Oh yes, she remembered the changing rooms, the horror of having to strip off and shower in front of everyone, and the “boisterous, good-natured fun”, as the teacher put it when her parents went in to complain after that incident with the wet towels.

She pulled herself together in an instant and gave Tracy an icy smile. “How could I forget?”

She stalked into the room and headed for the bar, ordering herself a gin and tonic rather than take a complimentary glass of warm white wine. Word was getting round quickly, people staring in her direction before looking away rather than meet her eye.

Eventually, one of the gaggle of women at a table in the corner came over to the bar, watched by her friends. She stood next to Sophie to order her drink, surreptitiously sizing her up.

Sophie dredged up a name from the recesses of her memory. “Hello. You’re Sarah, aren’t you? Your dad was the local vicar.” And well-known dirty old man.

“Yes, that’s right. Rector of Saint Catherine’s. He still is.” She took a sip from a lurid orange drink with a cocktail umbrella and a cherry. “Of course, everything’s changed round here since your day. Where did you go? You disappeared.”

“I left for London the day I turned eighteen,” Sophie told her. “It seemed easier that way. I didn’t want to spend the rest of my life in a small town.”

“I can’t imagine living anywhere else. I know everybody and everything that goes on here,” said Sarah. She gestured expansively around the room.

“I mean, Rachel’s banging her personal trainer but thinks nobody knows; Chloe drinks mineral water in public but is actually a raging alcoholic; and as for Tracy,

knocking back the Bacardis, don't let the Stepford Wife act fool you. Dead eyes, dead marriage and loathes her husband."

Sophie smiled politely but was not really listening. She just did not care.

"So what about you? What have you been doing down in London with your life? Good job? Husband? Kids?" asked Sarah.

She laughed. "No, definitely no husband or kids. But yes, I would say I'm quite successful at what I do."

"Which is?"

She had to think about that one. She was not ashamed of her job, but when she came out with it, it rather killed off other topics of conversation. "I'm a therapist."

Sarah nodded. "You should come over and say hello," she said.

"Maybe a bit later." She sipped from her gin and tonic, watching as Sarah weaved her way back across the empty dance floor. Then an awful realisation hit her. Saint Catherine's. That would explain a lot. She put her glass back on the bar and went in search of fresh air to clear her head.

SHE HAD BARELY gone three paces down the corridor before she heard a voice behind her.

"Where do you think you're going, Miss Snooty? Are we not good enough for you? I wish I'd whipped your skinny little arse a lot harder when we were still at school." It was Tracy and she had clearly had quite a lot to drink.

Sophie stopped, turned on her heel to face her, and smiled sweetly, her mouth so close to Tracy's that the other woman would feel the hot breath on her cheek.

"Of course you do," she said quietly. "Only, it was never really just a bit of common or garden bullying, was it Tracy? Making me run naked through the changing rooms, whipping me with wet towels. You were getting off on it. You secretly wanted to fuck me."

Tracy's mouth fell open in shock. Her eyes darted from side to side as if someone might be watching.

"What of it?" she asked belligerently. "But now I'm happily married. And I've googled you, so I know what you are. You're nothing but a whore."

"Oh Tracy," said Sophie. "How is that marriage? I bet he fucks you once a week, but only after he's had a drink these days because he can't face it otherwise."

Painful recognition flickered behind Tracy's eyes. Sophie had hit on a truth.

"And you lie there counting the seconds until it's over. But it's OK because he plays golf or takes the dog for a walk or whatever on a Sunday morning and you've got a dildo hidden away somewhere that does the job better than he ever did."

"OK, so it's not the best marriage, but there's nothing anyone can do about that," said Tracy, more quietly.

"Isn't there?" asked Sophie. "It's never too late to change your life."

She took Tracy's head in her hands and kissed her, feeling her resistance fall away in an instant. Soon, Tracy's tongue was in her mouth, hands all over her body, enthusiastically smothering Sophie's face and neck with kisses.

At last Tracy pulled back, breathing heavily. "Oh, my god, what have I done?" Then she reached a decision. "I've got a room. We can go there together," she said urgently.

Sophie smiled sympathetically. "I'm sorry, you've had your free sample." She pushed a gold-edged business card into Tracy's cleavage and took a step back. "As you so perceptively pointed out, I'm a whore, so if you want any more, you are going to have to make a booking and pay."

"But... you kissed me... you knew all along... I don't understand."

Sophie shrugged. "You made my life hell for years, but I'm over it now. So why don't you just go back to your friends and enjoy the rest of your evening? Oh, and I meant it, by the way: email me if you want to see me again."

Tracy tugged the business card free, thought about throwing it on the floor, then quietly put it in her clutch bag.

“One more thing, Tracy. I’m just going in here to fix my make-up. If you see Sarah, tell her I want to see her before I go. Maybe tell her I know a secret and I’m willing to share it with her.”

SHE FOUND HERSELF in a storeroom. There were mirrors on the walls where it had once had a more glamorous role, but now there were stacks of conference chairs, abandoned mirror balls, and even a rolled up red carpet and coils of rope to cordon off a VIP area.

Five minutes later, Sarah put her head round the door. “I don’t know what you did to Tracy, but she looks like someone’s rogered her senseless with a cucumber. So what’s the gossip? It’s got to be good.”

“It certainly is,” Sophie told her. “You asked me why I left town so suddenly when we were younger. But I think you already know.

“When I was seventeen I signed up to a dating website. It wasn’t easy being me and being a lesbian in a town like this, but I really thought I’d found someone who was interested in me. Being young and naïve, when she asked me to send her nude photos of myself, I did.

“But you know that, don’t you,” she added. “Because someone calling themselves Catherine Saint got hold of them and emailed them to everyone I knew. It was the most excruciatingly awful thing that ever happened to me. I couldn’t live here another day.”

“I saw the photos, but I don’t know what that’s got to do with me or why this is relevant,” said Sarah. She looked uneasy and started edging towards the door.

“Because *you* are Catherine Saint, aren’t you Sarah? I only put two and two together this evening when we were talking about your father being vicar at Saint Catherine’s.”

Sarah looked panicky, then shook her head and shrugged. “So what? If that’s all you’ve got, I really don’t care.”

“It wasn’t just me, though, was it Sarah? OK, I was the only one stupid enough to send you nude photos, but Catherine Saint spread the most awful gossip and lies. Pretty much everyone we went to school with has a grudge against her. What happens when they find out it’s you?”

“You wouldn’t dare! I’d make sure you could never show your face in this town again.”

Sophie laughed. “I think I could live with that.” She waggled her phone. “I’ve still got those emails. I’m willing to bet there’s enough information in them to find out who sent them.”

Sarah made a lunge for the phone, but Sophie snatched it away and dropped it back in her shoulder bag. “Grow up, the emails are on a server somewhere.”

Furious, Sarah grabbed her by the wrist. Sophie calmly rotated her hand around Sarah’s, breaking her hold. Her left hand came up beneath Sarah’s elbow, pushing her to one side.

Sophie was hardly a black belt, but those self-defence lessons could come in handy. She pushed Sarah against a mirrored wall, holding her still with one arm twisted behind her back.

Sarah struggled and kicked out, spitting fury. Her breath steamed the mirror as she tried to stamp her heels into Sophie’s ankles. “Hold still or you’ll regret it,” Sophie warned her.

“Fuck off, you fucking whore.”

That again. When a stiletto raked down her leg, ripping her tights, Sophie had had enough. Still holding Sarah against the mirror, she deftly unbuttoned her skirt with one hand and tugged it down to tangle around her knees to stop her kicking. First disarm your opponent.

“What are we going to do with you, Sarah?” she asked.

“Let me go, you bitch.”

Sophie laughed. “What, no payback? Nothing at all for everything you’ve done? I don’t think so.” She had not thought this through; had no idea where to go next. Then an idea struck her.

“Do you remember Miss Briggs? What she used to do to girls when she lost her rag? You used to watch and laugh when she did it to me.”

“No! Don’t you dare!”

She smacked Sarah’s bottom, a single hard swat that landed with a satisfying slap of noise.

“Ouch, no. Stop it!”

“Stop complaining. People normally pay me for this sort of thing.” She had no intention of walking away now. She pressed Sarah harder against the mirror, her arm rising and falling. The crack, crack, crack of her hand filling the room.

“Come on, you can take more than this.” She was in her element. Perhaps too much. She dragged Sarah’s knickers over her thighs and began again, picking up where she had left off. Sarah’s bum began to turn pink, handprints spreading across the pale cheeks of her backside.

“Let me go! Just stop! You can’t do this.” Frantic, she finally struggled free of the skirt around her ankles.

Sophie had no intention of being at the mercy of those stiletto heels. She pivoted Sarah around and pushed her face-down onto a table, taking advantage of the moment to twist a loop of rope around her ankles. A second cord took care of her wrists, leaving Sophie with both hands free.

“I want an apology from you. And I want to know that you are going to confess to everyone out there on that table what you have been doing to them all these years. Because if you don’t tell them, I will – once I’ve finished with you here.”

“Fuck the fuck off,” Sarah spat defiantly. “I’ll rip your fucking head off if you don’t let me go.”

“You really are in no position to make threats,” said Sophie. She secured the ends of the rope holding Sarah’s hands to the far side of the table before poking around in her shoulder bag and retrieving what looked like the handle of a skipping rope.

“Now, imagine how Miss Briggs could have enforced discipline with one of these.” She flicked her wrist and a slender, black carbon-fibre rod telescoped out of the handle. She twisted the base, locking the vicious-looking eighteen-inch rod rigidly into place.

Sarah looked back over her shoulder and squealed in alarm. “Let me go and I’ll say sorry.”

“Not good enough.” Sophie gently tapped the rod against Sarah’s bottom, watching her flinch. Then she flicked it with an economy of movement, a brief whirr of displaced air and a crack of carbon-fibre on bare flesh.

A thin white line cut across both buttocks, rapidly turning to angry red as blood rushed back into the skin. Sarah screeched, straining against the ropes.

Another flick of the rod, barely any effort on Sophie’s part, made Sarah howl, a second scarlet track running parallel to the first as the rod whipped into her. “Please no more, I’m fucking sorry, all right?”

Sophie ran the flat of her hand over Sarah’s bottom, feeling the hot, angry weals with the tips of her fingers. “I might be prepared to accept that as an apology. But I don’t hear you saying anything about Catherine Saint and confessing what you’ve done.”

She snapped the rod sharply against the spot where Sarah’s thighs and buttocks met, the curve at the very top of her legs where padding gave way to harder muscle. The insect-like buzz as it cut through the air ended in a sharp scream of pain.

“I can’t; I won’t.” Sarah’s voice shook; there were tears in her eyes. She clenched her fists, her legs shaking as she waited for Sophie to strike again.

The next stroke cut diagonally across Sarah’s left cheek, bisecting the parallel scarlet lines, the energy contained in the rapier-thin carbon rod concentrated in one short but agonising line that erupted ruby red.

Barely pausing, Sophie whipped the rod back and forth with a high-pitched hum of sound to deliver an equivalent line on Sarah's right cheek. There was, she thought, as Sarah cried out, something very satisfying about the symmetry of the thing.

"You know I'm just going to keep going until you give in," said Sophie.

Sarah whimpered, weak at the knees, her buttocks quivering. Sophie knew she was close to surrender. Just one more stroke should do it if she got it just right.

"There are two ways to do this," said Sophie. "Either we keep going and eventually I lead you back into that room with makeup running down your face and your knickers in your hand to confess everything. Or you tell me you're ready to do it on your terms and all this ends."

"I... I just can't. They'd never forgive me. I'd die of embarrassment."

"Then let's begin again," said Sophie. She made a show of brandishing the rod through the air, letting it buzz and hum; drawing out the moment. Letting anticipation grow in Sarah's imagination. Psychological warfare.

The final stroke of the rod cut almost exactly along the same line as the first. Sarah howled, a terrible screech of pain that subsided into sobs as she squirmed helplessly.

"You win. I'll do it. I am really so sorry for everything I did to you and everything I have done to the others. I'm a terrible person. Please, just let me go and I'll tell them everything."

"There, that didn't hurt too much, did it," said Sophie. "At least, not as much as this did." She twisted the base of the rod and telescoped it back into the handle before returning it to her bag and turning to go.

"Where are you going? Untie me. Please. You promised!" Sarah begged her.

"Really? Oh well, life is full of disappointments." Sophie dropped Sarah's dress at reception on her way out of the hotel. "I think I heard noises in that storeroom," she told the receptionist.

It would have been entertaining to see what happened when they found her, but she was not going to hang around.

Perhaps she'd come to next year's reunion and find out. Or not. She laughed as she closed the car door behind her. Still, it was good to get some sort of closure after all this time, and it would make a good story to tell her wife when she got home.

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