

SUBSTITUTE FOR DEATH

by Kamron Klitgaard

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SUBSTITUTE FOR DEATH

A Comedic One Act

by **Kamron Klitgaard**

SYNOPSIS: When Alex learns that Miss Ewlenhope, a substitute teacher famous for her sneezing allergies, will be substituting for her Honors English class, she convinces the class to prank the sub. But Miss Ewlenhope, who sneezes whenever she gets flustered, has a new allergy remedy. The only problem is that it makes her drowsy. When the honor students prank her, she gets so flustered that she accidentally takes four times her normal dosage. The remedy is so powerful that she falls asleep mid-sentence and collapses on the floor. The honor students mistakenly believe that their prank has killed the substitute! This leads them on a guilt-ridden path to hide the body in an effort to keep their college scholarships.

DURATION: 40 minutes.

TIME: Present.

SETTING: A school hallway, classroom, and auditorium stage.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 male, 1 female, 12 either)

EWLENHOPE (f) The substitute teacher. *(27 lines)*
 JENSEN (m) The Principal. *(35 lines)*
 ALEX (m/f) A rebellious honor student. *(58 lines)*
 HARPER (m/f) Scholarship-obsessed honor student.
(51 lines)
 DREW (m/f) Peer pressure susceptible honor student.
(27 lines)
 TAYLOR (m/f) Logical honor student. *(30 lines)*
 HAYDEN (m/f) Highly organized honor student.
(23 lines)
 JORDAN (m/f) Scared honor student. *(41 lines)*
 LOGAN (m/f) Touchy-feely honor student. *(25 lines)*
 RILEY (m/f) Student Body Officer. *(10 lines)*
 SKYLER (m/f) Student Body President. *(15 lines)*
 AIDEN (m/f) Dumb Student Body Officer. *(12 lines)*

DALLAS (m/f)..... The head janitor. (27 lines)

HOUSTON (m/f)Janitor in training. (34 lines)

SET: The school hallway could be in front of the curtain, the classroom with desks could be set up behind the curtain, and the auditorium stage could be in front of the curtain just by moving on a podium.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Casting Notes: Every character except for Jensen and Ewlenhope can be either gender. Just make minor pronoun adjustment. If Logan is played by a male actor, he could play it as if he has a secret crush on Ewlenhope.

Ewlenhope Sneezes: For most actors, making a fake sneeze sound real is difficult. Luckily, for this play, Miss Ewlenhope's sneezing doesn't need to sound real, it just needs to be big. The bigger, the better. The louder, the better, the longer, the better. This will add to the humor of the scene.

Tying Ewlenhope's Legs: Instead of using ropes, a strip of Velcro is faster and easier to get tied and untied. In the final scene, when Ewlenhope's legs are tied to one of Taylor's and one of Haden's, there is time to use rope to tie them together before they enter, but rope is harder to remove when they have to abandon Ewlenhope. Velcro will make it easy for them to get released from her.

Final Dance Scene: The dance should be simple because three of them will be tied together. Of course, Ewlenhope can just go limp. She must also learn the dance but she needs to make it look like she is unconscious and the others are manipulating her limbs.

Pretending Ewlenhope is Alive: Take the time to practice the four parts where people talk to Ewlenhope, thinking she is alive and well. When she speaks to Jensen in her chair, make sure her arms are behind her back and her sweater hides her shoulders. Alex can then stick his arms through her sweater and under her armpits to look like her arms. In the stretching scene, the more Jordan can move Ewlenhope's legs around in different stretching positions the funnier it will be. During the hallway scene when they talk to the janitors, practice the blocking just as much as the lines. The actors need to be able to

control Ewlenhope's movements. Ewlenhope must help them but not look like she is helping.

PROPS

- books
- papers
- purse
- glass of water
- packets resembling sugar packets
- sunglasses
- school backpacks and school supplies
- button up sweater
- hall pass
- paper airplane
- slip of paper
- 2 mops
- 2 sets of keys
- teacher of the year award certificate
- gift certificate
- 2 rope or Velcro ties

SET PIECES

- teacher's desk
- teacher's chair
- 7 student desks
- podium or microphone with mic stand

SCENE 1

AT START: *The halls of school. MISS EWLENHOPE enters with an armful of books, paper, purse, and a glass of water. She stops and struggles to get something out of her purse. Her hand gets caught in the purse then suddenly springs free, launching a handful of packets (resembling sugar packets) into the air and across the hall. JENSEN enters just in time to see this and rushes to help.*

JENSEN: Well, if it isn't Marjorie Ewlenhope. (*Joking.*) Making a mess of things as usual, I see.

EWLENHOPE: Hi, Principal Jensen. I can't believe I just did that.

JENSEN: Please, call me Mike. Who are you subbing for today?

EWLENHOPE: Mr. Greenhall. I wanted to get there before the students, but I still have to stop by the faculty room. Thanks for the help.

JENSEN: (*Studying one of the packets.*) What are these things?

EWLENHOPE: It's this new all-natural herbal stuff my doctor gave me for my allergies. It's really strong.

JENSEN: Huh, maybe I should try it.

EWLENHOPE: The only drawback is it makes you really sleepy. I accidentally took two the other night and I fell asleep into my ramen noodles.

JENSEN: Ramen noodles?

EWLENHOPE: Yeah, the microwavable kind. That's what single substitute teachers eat.

JENSEN: You deserve better than that. What do say I take you out to dinner and we not eat ramen noodles?

EWLENHOPE: Principal Jensen, are you asking me out on a date?

JENSEN: Maybe. Probably. No. Yes. Sort of.

EWLENHOPE: Well, let's see how the day goes. Hopefully I can keep my allergies under control.

JENSEN: (*Handing over a packet.*) Alright, I'll check on you later. You better not take any of this before class. The students would certainly take advantage of a sleepy substitute teacher.

ALEX enters wearing sunglasses and eavesdrops.

EWLENHOPE: It's just in case I get flustered. My weird allergies really act up if I'm flustered.

JENSEN: Who are you subbing for again?

EWLENHOPE: Greenhall. English.

JENSEN: That's an Honors English class. They won't be a problem. They're all straight "A" students and terrified of getting in trouble. They don't wanna risk losing their college scholarships.

EWLENHOPE: I hope so. I don't wanna have a sniffing and sneezing fit in front of them.

JENSEN: The "show no weakness" strategy.

EWLENHOPE: (*Picking up the last packet.*) Exactly.

EWLENHOPE struggles with all the stuff she's carrying.

JENSEN: Come on, I'll hold the faculty room door open for ya.

EWLENHOPE: Thanks, Principal Jensen.

JENSEN: Mike. Call me Mike.

JENSEN and EWLENHOPE exit. ALEX smiles and exits.

SCENE 2

AT START: *Lights up on a classroom. HARPER, DREW, TAYLOR, HAYDEN, JORDAN, and LOGAN are all at their desks busy reading or writing.*

HARPER: I'm dead. I am dead! There's no way I'm gonna get a good grade on this essay. Dead!

DREW: Shut up, Harper. You'll get an "A" as always.

TAYLOR: Of course, you will. In the middle of your essay, you could write, "Mr. Greenhall is so ugly that Hello Kitty said, 'goodbye,'" and you would still get an "A."

HAYDEN: No way! He'd be expelled for sure!

JORDAN: Actually, Taylor's right. When Mr. Greenhall sees the name "Harper" at the top of the paper, he doesn't even bother to read it. He just writes "A+" and some generic comment like, "Nice job, Harper. You really out did yourself."

LOGAN: It's true! Alex tried it on our last assignment. Remember the essay on Hamlet? She wrote, "Hamlet is so boring, that when I read it, it feels like my face is on fire and someone tried to put it out with a fork."

HAYDEN: What grade did she get?

LOGAN: "A." With a little note that read, "Nice job, Alex. You really out did yourself."

DREW: How is that possible?

TAYLOR: It's our reputations. We all have the reputation of being 4.0 students. So, the teachers just figure we're gonna get an "A," and they don't even read it.

HAYDEN: If that's true, you can stop worrying about your essay, Harper. Just write any old dribble.

HARPER: It's not worth the risk. Besides, I could never turn in a paper that wasn't perfect.

ALL: Me either.

ALEX enters, running.

ALEX: You guys! Mr. Greenhall's not here today! We have a sub!

JORDAN: So?

ALEX: So, let's prank the sub!

LOGAN: Prank the sub? What does that mean?

ALEX: You know! Punk her?!

JORDAN: Punk?

ALEX: Yeah. A joke? Play a trick on the substitute?!

JORDAN: Alex, why did they let you into this class?

ALEX: Their mistake. What do you say? Is everyone in?

HARPER: Absolutely not! No tricks. And take off those stupid sunglasses. We're indoors, you idiot.

ALEX: Come on! It's Miss Ewlenhope!

DREW: The one that sneezes all the time?

ALEX: Yes! All we have to do is make her frazzled and she'll start sneezing. It'll be hilarious.

JORDAN: Frazzled?

ALEX: Yeah. Perturbed? Confused? Rattled? Agitated? Discomposed?

TAYLOR: You know, Alex, for an idiot, you sure know a lot of words.

ALEX: Come on, you guys! Where's your spirit of adventure?!

HARPER: My spirit of adventure is in going to an Ivy League school with a full ride scholarship because I didn't risk my 4.0 GPA on "tricking the substitute!"

ALEX: Don't you think it's funny when Miss Ewlenhope starts sneezing uncontrollably?

HARPER: No! It's juvenile.

DREW: I think it's funny.

HARPER: You're juvenile too.

ALEX: Alright, Drew's in! Anyone else?

DREW: What do you mean, I'm in? I just said I thought it was funny.

ALEX: You're not chicken, are you? Bawk! Bawk! Bawk!

DREW: No one... and I mean no one... makes a "bawk" noise at me! I'm in. What am I in?

ALEX: We're gonna make Miss Ewlenhope so flustered she'll start sneezing.

TAYLOR: What exactly would it entail to make her, and I quote, "flustered?"

ALEX: I don't know. Like, ask her a bunch of questions at the same time, make animal noises, do a kick-line.

TAYLOR: A kick-line? As in a dance? What logical reason would we have to be doing a kick-line in class?

ALEX: To make her flustered?

HAYDEN: What Taylor is saying, is that if there is a logical reason for what we are doing, and it just happens to fluster her, then we wouldn't get into trouble.

JORDAN: Yes. It must be logical.

ALEX: Okay, I get it. Logical. Um... we're reading *Animal Farm*, right?

HARPER: Nope! We're not pranking Miss Ewlenhope!

ALEX: Yes, we are. And if you don't help, we're gonna tell her it was your idea.

HARPER: What?!

SFX: school bell rings. EWLENHOPE enters and heads for the teacher's desk. She puts her stuff down including a glass of water and her button up sweater.

EWLENHOPE: Good morning, everyone.

ALEX: Everyone, just follow my lead.

EWLENHOPE: I hope that lead is sitting in your desk. Let's see, Alex, right?

ALEX: You remembered!

EWLENHOPE: Mr. Greenhall is sick today, so guess who gets to substitute.

ALEX: Don't you mean, Guesswhonteit gets to substitute?

The STUDENTS laugh, except for HARPER.

EWLENHOPE: Very funny, Alex. You remembered my allergies. Are you laughing with me or at me?

ALEX: Atchoo!

The STUDENTS laugh again, except HARPER.

HARPER: I don't think that's very funny. And Miss Ewlenhope, you should know that Alex is planning to—

ALEX: Read first!! I want to pick up where we left off yesterday, reading *Animal Farm*. I get to read first! Harper doesn't want to read first! Don't even let her talk!

EWLENHOPE: Oh, uh, okay. Alex, you can read first. Where's your book?

ALEX: It's okay, Miss Ewlenhope, I have it memorized. Moo! Moooooo! Moo!

EWLENHOPE: Alex, what are you doing? That's not funny.

ALEX: *(Looking around for support.)* Moo! Moooooo! Moo!

ALEX continues "mooring" throughout the following.

DREW: Oh! Uhhh... hey, Miss Ewlenhope, can I sharpen my pencil?!

EWLENHOPE: Yes, go ahead. Alex, please.

DREW: *(Walking to the front of the class.)* Hey, there's no pencil sharpener. I'll just pretend.

DREW pantomimes sharpening a pencil while making a grinding sound. EWLENHOPE sniffs and rubs her nose. She goes to her purse, pulls out a tissue and dabs her nose. DREW continues grinding and pantomiming throughout.

EWLENHOPE: Oh, no. Please take your seat, Drew.

ALEX: Moo! Mooooore, it's working moo!

TAYLOR: *(Raising hand.)* Miss Ewlenhope, I gotta go to the bathroom!

Do you have the hall pass?!

EWLENHOPE: Class just started.

TAYLOR: Please! I can't hold it much longer!

EWLENHOPE sneezes. TAYLOR continues asking for the hall pass.

EWLENHOPE: Atchoo! Oh, no!

EWLENHOPE opens an allergy packet and dumps it in the glass of water. ALEX motions to the OTHER STUDENTS to join in. HAYDEN stands up and runs in circles around the class.

HAYDEN: I have a big race after school today. I need to warm up.

EWLENHOPE chases after HAYDEN but starts sneezing.

EWLENHOPE: Please! Sit... atchoo! Atchoo!

EWLENHOPE rushes to the desk, opens a second allergy packet and dumps it in the water. Goes to drink it but is interrupted by JORDAN, who stands up and does jumping jacks.

JORDAN: I have a jumping jacks test in P.E. today. I gotta practice.

EWLENHOPE approaches JORDAN to get her to stop, but sneezes get in the way.

EWLENHOPE: Please... atchoo! Please... atchoo! Please... atchoo!

Atchoo!

EWLENHOPE rushes to the desk, opens a third allergy packet and dumps it into the water. She stirs it with her finger and goes to drink it down but is interrupted by LOGAN.

LOGAN: Miss Ewlenhope! Check out my paper airplane!

EWLENHOPE: Don't you throw... atchoo!

LOGAN throws the plane and then chases it. HARPER stays seated and watches. EWLENHOPE tries to get to the plane first but is interrupted by a gigantic sneezing fit. She can't talk, because of the sneezes. EWLENHOPE rushes to the desk, opens a fourth allergy packet and dumps it in the water. She stirs it with her finger and then drinks it down. The students continue the chaos. EWLENHOPE gains her composure, walks to the front of the class. ALEX points at HARPER in a threatening manner, trying to get her to participate.

EWLENHOPE: QUIEEEEETTTT!!

Everyone freezes in silence. HARPER stands up in her chair.

HARPER: *(Moving arms like a chicken.)* Bwak, bwak, bawk!

EWLENHOPE collapses. Everyone stares in horror. Then, suddenly, they quickly take their seats and pull out school work as if nothing has happened. EWLENHOPE remains motionless on the floor. After a few seconds...

TAYLOR: Uh... maybe we should do something.

ALEX: *(Panicking.)* What are we supposed to do?! Harper killed her!!

HARPER: I did not! It was your idea!

ALEX: You killed her with your chicken noises!

HAYDEN: Everyone, relax! We don't know that she's dead. Can anyone tell if she's breathing?

JORDAN: *(Panicking.)* It doesn't look like it from here.

LOGAN: *(Panicking.)* She's not breathing! She's not breathing!! What are we gonna do?!

TAYLOR: Someone needs to check her!

JORDAN: Alex should.

ALEX: (*Panicking.*) Me?! No way! I'm not checking her! Harper should! She's the one who killed her!

HARPER: I did not! It was your idea!

ALEX: You killed her with your bawk, bawks!

HARPER: Chicken noises don't kill people!

LOGAN: Well, someone's gotta check her!

DREW: Not it!

ALL: Not it!

TAYLOR: A tie!

DREW: Nose goes!

ALL put a finger to their nose except for DREW. ALL look at him.

DREW: Dang it!!

DREW cautiously approaches EWLENHOPE.

HAYDEN: Come on, Drew. You can do it.

DREW slowly stoops over EWLENHOPE and reaches out a finger.

JORDAN: Do it, Drew.

DREW touches EWLENHOPE with one finger. Then suddenly releases a blood curdling scream and runs to the back of the room and hides behind a desk. The OTHER STUDENTS turn and look at him.

TAYLOR: What? What is it, Drew?

DREW: She's all... cadavery!

The OTHER STUDENTS scream and join DREW in hiding behind the desks.

LOGAN: She's dead! What are we gonna do?! What are we gonna do?!

JORDAN: We're murderers!

HAYDEN: But we were just foolin' around!

TAYLOR: This is terrible!

HARPER: The first time in twelve years I act out in class and the teacher ends up dead!

ALEX: We're gonna get the electric chair for sure!

HARPER: If I get the electric chair, I'll lose my scholarship!

JORDAN: I'm too young to lose my scholarship!

HARPER: Alright, think. Think!

ALEX: We need a scapegoat!

DREW: Yeah, a scapegoat!

ALEX: We just tell them that Harper did it!

DREW: Yeah, that sounds good. Harper did it.

HARPER: (*Grabbing ALEX and DREW by the lapels.*) You listen to me, you juvenile delinquents! If you try to pin this on me, I'll tell them everything. I'll tell them how you ran into the class with a premeditated plan to kill the teacher by causing her stress and anxiety. And you! I'll tell them exactly how you pretended to sharpen your pencil! If I go down, we all go down!

TAYLOR: Alright, relax. Nobody's pining this on anyone. We're all in this together.

HAYDEN: Maybe we can look up a solution on the internet.

LOGAN: You want us to Google what to do when you accidentally kill your substitute teacher?!

JORDAN: You guys. We're all 4.0 students. We should be able to think of something!

HARPER: (*Taking over.*) Alright, first, if someone walks in and sees her lying dead on the floor it's all over. Let's make sure it's all clear.

TAYLOR: Good thinking.

ALL rush to the doorway to peer out. JORDAN and LOGAN are in the back of the group. Suddenly, EWLENHOPE sits up, mostly asleep. She sneezes.

JORDAN: (*Looking at LOGAN.*) God bless you.

LOGAN: Thank you, that is so nice; to take the time in the middle of a crisis like this, I really appreciate it.

JORDAN: Sure.

ELENHOPE collapses again.

HARPER: Alright, the coast is clear!

THEY all turn around.

DREW: Now what?

HARPER: We gotta get her off the floor. Taylor, you're the look out. Warn us if anyone comes. (*Grabbing the teacher's desk chair.*) Alex and Drew, pick her up and sit her in this chair.

ALEX: (*Hyperventilating.*) I... I... I... promise... not to pull... pranks... anymore. Please... I... can't!

HARPER slaps ALEX.

HARPER: Pull yourself together! This is your big idea, so you're gonna do exactly what I say!

ALEX: I... can't... breathe!

HARPER slaps him again.

HARPER: Breathe! Take a breath and breathe normally, you idiot!

ALEX: Slap me again!

HARPER slaps him.

HAYDEN: (*Winding up.*) Can I try?

ALEX: I'm good! I'm fine now!

HARPER: Good. Now pick up the body and put it in that chair.

ALEX and DREW grab EWLENHOPE by the arms and legs and take her to the chair. They set her in it the best they can.

JORDAN: We need to make her look more alive.

LOGAN: Put her sweater on her. She always looks good in that sweater.

TAYLOR grabs her sweater off the desk and drapes it around her shoulders, tucks her arms behind her so they are hidden.

DREW: That's better. But her head keeps falling.

HARPER lifts her head up and it falls back down. HARPER lifts it several times, but it keeps falling.

TAYLOR: Principal Jensen is coming down the hall!

HARPER: Everyone back to your seats!

ALL rush back to their seats and pretend to do school work. EWLENHOPE falls out of the chair and onto the floor. HARPER and DREW rush up and set EWLENHOPE back in the chair. HARPER puts her hand into her hair on the back of her head and lifts her head up.

HARPER: Bring me a book!

DREW: *(Grabbing a book and handing it to HARPER.)* Take this!

DREW rushes back to a seat.

HARPER: *(Opening book in front of EWLENHOPE.)* So, Mrs. Ewlenhope, I was wondering what this passage... her eyes are closed! She looks dead!

ALEX grabs his sunglasses off his desk, rushes up, and puts them on EWLENHOPE.

ALEX: There! Perfect!

JENSEN enters. ALEX drops down and hides behind EWLENHOPE.

HARPER: Hi, Principal Jensen.

JENSEN: Good morning.

HARPER moves EWLENHOPE'S head to acknowledge JENSEN.

JORDAN: *(Panicking.)* Everything's normal!!

JENSEN: Uh... thank you, Jordan. *(Approaching EWLENHOPE.)* Is everything alright, Miss Ewlenhope?

HARPER nods EWLENHOPE'S head.

HARPER: Everything's great, Principal Jensen. Miss Ewlenhope was just explaining this passage in the book.

JENSEN: Ah. Our office aide is out sick today, and we got this message for Mr. Greenhall, so I thought I'd deliver it here personally and you can put it with Mr. Greenhall's stuff.

JENSEN hands EWLENHOPE a slip of paper. JENSEN stands awkwardly waiting for EWLENHOPE to take the slip.

HARPER: Take the paper, Miss Ewlenhope.

ALEX reaches his hand through the chair, under the sweater, and through EWLENHOPE'S arm and reaches out to take the note as if his arm was EWLENHOPE'S.

HARPER: What do you say, Mrs. Ewlenhope?

ALEX: *(Imitating EWLENHOPE.)* Thanks.

JENSEN: Uh, why are you wearing sunglasses inside?

ALEX imitates EWLENHOPE'S voice as HARPER moves her head as if she were speaking.

ALEX: *(Imitating EWLENHOPE.)* Um... because I'm cool, man.

JENSEN: What?

ALEX: I mean, because my allergies are acting up and my eyes get sensitive to light.

JENSEN: Are you okay? Your voice sounds a bit funny.

ALEX: That's just my allergies. Sniff, sniff.

JENSEN: You aren't flustered, are you? These students haven't been flustering you, have they?

ALEX: Oh, no, no, no. These students are the absolute best. They wouldn't even make chicken bawking sounds if we were reading *Animal Farm*. My favorite is Alex.

JENSEN: *(Looking around the classroom.)* Oh, where is he?

ALEX: Oops. I mean... he's invisible. Yeah, that's it. He took this magic spray called Invisospray that he bought from an infomercial and—

HARPER: Ha, ha, ha, ha! You're so funny, Miss Ewlenhope. Alex had to go to the bathroom.

ALEX: Yeah, that's better. Alex had to go to the bathroom. But he's a wonderful student. They all are. They'd never do anything homicidal.

JENSEN: Glad to hear it.

ALEX: Yeah, they're all totally radical.

JENSEN: What?

ALEX: I said Greenhall should go on a sabbatical.

JENSEN: (*Uncomfortable in front of the students.*) Oh. Uh, Miss Ewlenhope, I was wondering, have you given anymore thought to that thing we discussed? You know, about the ramen noodle situation? Are you, uh... game?

HARPER nods EWLENHOPE'S head.

JENSEN: Yes! (*Composing himself.*) I mean, that's good. I'll talk to you later about the... uh... noodle thing. (*Extending hand to shake.*) Nice seeing you again, Miss Ewlenhope.

ALEX extends his hand as if it were EWLENHOPE'S. JENSEN shakes it, but lingers, holding it extra-long.

ALEX: Nice seeing you, too.

JENSEN: Excellent. I'll make sure all the arrangements are made. (*Putting his other hand on top of ALEX'S and patting it.*) Thanks for being such a great substitute. Goodbye. Carry on, Harper.

JENSEN exits.

HARPER: That was a close one!

LOGAN: Am I imagining things or was Principal Jensen crushing on Miss Ewlenhope?

ALEX pulls his hand out and wipes it off.

ALEX: Grose! I got Principal Jensen cooties all over my hand.

HARPER: Would you grow up?!

JORDAN: What's he gonna do when he finds out we killed his crush?

TAYLOR: We'll be expelled for sure!

HAYDEN: Oh, man! I'm gonna have to adjust my day planner!

DREW: Someone needs to come up with a plan!

HARPER: What if we bury her?

JORDAN: Yeah, let's bury her on the football field!

DREW: (*Goes to pick up EWLENHOPE with ALEX.*) Good idea! We can get shovels from the janitor's shed.

LOGAN: No, no, no! We can't bury her on the football field.

HAYDEN: Why not?

LOGAN: (*Tearing up.*) Miss Ewlenhope hates football.

TAYLOR: Besides, don't you think the P.E. class would be suspicious when they see a bunch of honor students DIGGING A GRAVE IN THE END ZONE?!

HARPER: You're right. Burying her is out of the question. But we need to do something with her.

HAYDEN: We should put her in Mr. Jorgensen's social studies class. He's so boring, it's like a cemetery in there.

TAYLOR: You idiot, we need to put her somewhere she won't be noticed.

HARPER: That's it! We'll put her in the worst place in the school: the faculty room.

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