

Mr. Thompson always prided himself on his punctuality. He believed that being early gave him an edge, a moment of peace before the hustle and bustle of the school day began. One chilly autumn morning, he arrived at Maplewood High School much earlier than usual. The sky was still dark, and the first rays of dawn had yet to break the horizon. He parked his car in the empty lot and glanced at his watch; it was only 5:30 AM. With a shrug, he grabbed his bag and headed towards the school building, his breath visible in the crisp morning air.

Inside, the school was eerily silent. The fluorescent lights flickered on as he walked down the deserted hallways, his footsteps echoing softly. Mr. Thompson made his way to his classroom, savoring the quiet time to organize his desk, plan the day's lessons, and catch up on grading. He couldn't help but enjoy the solitude, feeling like the keeper of a secret world that existed only in these early hours. As he settled into his routine, he noticed small, almost imperceptible changes—a stack of papers that seemed to have shifted on its own, a chair slightly out of place. He dismissed them as figments of his imagination, chalking it up to the eeriness of the early morning.

Around 6:30 AM, Mr. Thompson heard a faint noise coming from the direction of the school library. Curiosity piqued, he decided to investigate. As he approached, he saw a light on inside the library. Peering through the window, he saw Ms. Andrews, the school librarian, already at work, shelving books with a serene expression on her face. She looked up and smiled when she saw him. "You're early too, Mr. Thompson," she said, her voice a welcome break in the stillness. They chatted for a few moments, sharing a quiet laugh about their shared early bird habits. Mr. Thompson realized that in those tranquil, pre-dawn hours, he was not alone in his dedication. The school, silent and empty, was a place of quiet purpose, brought to life by the dedication of its early risers.