



THE OILMAN

Last Spring, my wife Stacy and I decided that buying a home would be a wise choice for our family. We had always watched the show *Fixer Upper* on HGTV and thought it would be a great idea to buy a charming older yet distressed home and return it to its previous glory. Truth be told, we couldn't afford to buy our Dream Home. Our kids, Nelly and Emmy, were turning 4 and 5. We wanted to provide them a place to call home filled with warm memories.

We started our search in Middletown, DE, but a recent boom in development steered us away. We're not anti-social but like our privacy. In the Summer of 2018, we settled on a home in a great rural community in Cecil County, Maryland, that had its fair share of fixer-upper homes. As first-time homeowners, there was a lot to learn about this new home. For one, with two-acres of land pushing a lawnmower was out of the question. That summer, I provided Emmy and Nelly free joyrides on my new riding mower. I can still hear their giggles when they got the turn to steer.

Secondly, our home was heated by an oil furnace in the basement with the oil tank located outside. While exploring the mechanical items in the basement, we came across a disturbing engraving or better described as scratches on the concrete walls. "Never let the heat run out. He will come." This message freaked my wife out. I played it cool and tried to act tough, but it was chilling. I told her it was nothing, and we forgot about it over time.

On our first Halloween night, the temperature was a comfortable 69°F. It was an unusually warm October. Emmy dressed up as Princess Elsa from *Frozen*, and Nelly was Ryder from *Paw Patrol*. Our plastic pumpkins overflowed with Peanut Chews, Nerds, lollipops, candy corn, and my favorite, Reese Peanut Butter cups after trick-or-treating around the neighborhood. When we got home, we let the kids dump their candy on the table so they could take inventory of their spoils. They started trading candy like Wall Street veterans. We allowed them to have one candy, but kids have a way of eating more when you're distracted.

Stacy mentioned it seemed a little chilly inside, but I shrugged it off. "She is always cold," I thought. She said something to me about heating and a plan, but I was too busy goofing around with the kids. I am their personal comedian.

After putting pajamas on and spending a little extra time brushing their teeth, we put the kids to bed. They each had the slightest smile as we turned off the lights and kissed them goodnight. My wife and I snuck downstairs to partake in the candy buffet but made sure there wasn't a noticeable disappearance.

Stacy again mentioned to me she was cold. I suggested we get snuggly and watch a scary movie. She agreed but first said she had to make that call. I didn't know exactly what that call was because I was on Facebook. I had uploaded some of the cuter photos of the night. My mom loves to see pictures of the kids, especially in their costumes. About 15 minutes later, we were off to bed, watching some horror she wanted to see. Not sure why she loves them because she always shakes during most of it. She said she had to keep her phone on during the movie because she was expecting a callback.

Around 9:45 PM, I was forcibly awakened by a shivering wife. She anxiously told me, "Wake up. We have no heat."

I immediately thought she was scared from the movie. I didn't realize I had dozed off.

After about a minute or two, I got my bearings. I immediately felt the cold on my feet when I stepped on the hardwood floors. I could even see my breath every time I exhaled. I rubbed my stiff hands together, and I asked myself, "How could this be?"

I first checked the thermostat. It read 32 °F. I thought to myself, 'A cold front must have come overnight.' The thermostat was not set to heat. "That must be it," I believed.

I changed the setting to heat and expected the heater to fire up. No luck. Just then, a screeching, hallowing sound echoed through the house.

Stacy whispered from the bed, "Did you hear that?"

"Yes. It's nothing." I replied.

"I am calling 911," Stacy said in a panic.

"Are you kidding me?" I snapped with annoyance. "I will go check it out."

I could hear the screeches coming from the basement. When I go to the heater, I heard and saw a young boy in the corner near the engraved message.

"You're in danger," he whispered, "you don't have much time."

I could barely make the young boy out. From what I could see, he had dull-white yet wrinkly skin. Too wrinkly for a boy. He was frail and looked malnourished. His lips were ice blue, and his clothes looked like they were from the 1920s.

"Ed isl lih, Ed isl lih," he kept repeating with the sweetest voice I've ever heard.

"What did you say?" I said, caringly yet puzzled.

"Don't let the oilman in. Ed isl lih." replied my friend with apparent urgency. "He's almost at your house right now. Don't let the oilman in. Ed isl lih."

"What do you mean Ed isl lih? I have no idea what you're talking about."

"And, who is the oilman?" I asked.

"The oilman," he replied. "He comes to homes on cold nights. Once he knows you have no heat, he will come. Then, it's too late."

"What does he do once you let him in?" I asked.

The little boy looked down. "You don't want to find out. Don't let him in. Ed isl lih," he cautioned.

"I don't understand," I pleaded. "How can we stop him from coming in?"

The little boy was getting very nervous. "Take my hand, and I will show you," he replied urgently. "Look, we're almost out of time."

"Out of time?" I repeated his words.

Just then, the doorbell rang.

"My time is almost up," said my little friend. "Whatever you do, don't let him in. Don't answer it. Please, please, take my hand." The way he said it made me want to help him.

I started to reach toward him when I heard voices and a set of footsteps on our main floor.

"Please, take my hand." He said with a kind yet nervous voice. "This is our last chance. I will show you if you, please take my hand." His little hands seemed like they needed my help. I felt so compelled to take his hand.

Now the voices and footsteps were near the basement stairs.

As I reached for his hands, I heard my wife gasp. I looked at her on the staircase, and her eyes were open wide, and she quickly covered her mouth in fright.

When I looked back at the boy, his hands were now wrinkled and marred. His nails were long, sharp, and dirty. His face went from a boy to a very wrinkled older man with deep black eyes.

"Take my hand now!" This time his voice was deep and crackly.

I looked back at my wife, and I also saw a man with a blue shirt with a Hillside logo on it. I wasn't sure who he was. I felt like I was in a trance. When he stepped on the concrete floor of the basement, I seemed to have snapped out of it.

Before I could say anything, the little-boy-turned-old-man was enveloped by the shadows as if something pulled him back into the darkness. There was one final exhale, and he was gone.

"Hi, I am Joe, the Hillside emergency technician here to look at your furnace. Are you ok, sir? You seem startled."

"Yes. I think I am now," as I shook my head, clearing my thoughts. "How did you know to come?"

"Your wife called our office this evening and said you had no heat. When KC told me you were a heating maintenance plan member, I came as fast as I could."

"You called the oilman," I said with relief to Stacy.

"The oilman? That's a weird way to put it."

"Yes, in June I googled heating and cooling company in Cecil County, MD and Hillside kept showing up. I visited their website, and they had over 600 5-star reviews. I trusted they could be our heating and cooling company. They tuned up our AC, and I signed us up for their [heating maintenance plan](#). Remember?"

I didn't recall that conversation. I wondered if she told me during the NBA Finals.

"I knew it was too cold in here. Didn't you hear me when I said I was going to call Hillside? I talked with KC, and she said our emergency HVAC technician would be here soon."

"I am sorry. I don't remember that at all."

I wasn't surprised, and neither was she. I pretend to hear her when she tells me stuff. She's always organized and thankfully, always on top of things.

"Sir, let me get this furnace turned on for you and your family. You'll be warm in just a few minutes."

After Joe left, the house was warm and cozy, just as he said. It turns out a fuze blew to the furnace, and we were low on heating oil.

I told Stacy what happened with the little boy in the basement. She said she saw me reaching toward the wall with a glazed look in my eyes and that it frightened her.

The one thing I couldn't figure out was what "Ed isl lih" meant. I wrote it down on a piece of paper. I pondered and pondered about it. It was getting late, and we both had to get up in the morning. Stacy said we should go back to bed. I told her that I wouldn't be able to go to sleep unless I figure it out.

Stacy looked at my scrap paper with the words "Ed isl lih" Then suddenly, she gasped.

"Write that in reverse!"

"In reverse? Ok".

H-I-L-L-S-I-D-E.

I dropped my pen on the floor. "He didn't want me to let it in Hillside," I said with fear and amazement.

The next day I also signed up for Hillside's [automatic oil delivery](#). That plus our heating maintenance plan, we'll never let the house run out of heat again ... or he will come back.



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