

FROM: The Devil

SUBJECT: Dance with me

Hey, this is a message from the Devil.

Ian Stanley wrote about the first time him and I fought and I wanted to share it with you...

Here's his story...

A couple months ago in the mountains of California I fought the devil...

...and I won.

I laughed in his face and loved every second of it.

The darkness is where I find my light.

The chaos is where I find my calm.

There's no better way to find out who you are than to Dance with the Devil.

Which is why I've decided to engage in battle with the Devil yet again.
(Maybe I'll share the story of the first battle another time.)

I choose the word *battle* for a reason.

See, the Devil will wage *war* for as long as you live. It's your job to win the battles along the way.

Let me be clear, it's war. But it doesn't have to feel like war. You can wear down the enemy until you break his will to fight. He may show up for battle, but a light breeze could blow him away.

You defeat this enemy by becoming the scariest thing the darkness.

You dive into the depths of your fear. You expose the gaps in your armor.
You sharpen your sword.

You find out who you are when nothing is going your way...but you keep going anyways.

So what is this battle with devil I'm gonna start?

I'm gonna play tennis again.

"But Ian, tennis isn't scary. What the hell are you talking about?"

Ahh...that's where you're wrong.

For me, there's nothing scarier than a tennis court. There's no other place in the world where I can better explore the darkness that lurks beneath the surface. There's no darker cave in my soul, than the one I find on the tennis court.

I started playing when I was three years old. Which is the same time my dad told me I was supposed to win Wimbledon. (The most prestigious professional tennis tournament in the world.)

That pressure to become the best in the world made it almost impossible for me to become the best in the world. (I won a National Championship in college but I severely underperformed my whole career.)

That amount of pressure is not healthy. Most dangerous of all...it binds your identity and self worth to winning. It binds you to your sport.

So when I was losing a tennis match, I wasn't simply losing a match. *I was failing as a human being.*

When you understand that, you can understand why I chucked rackets over fences and punched myself in the head when I was losing.

Imagine participating in something every single day that makes you hate yourself.

Imagine losing a match and repeatedly saying the words "you are worthless" over and over again. Imagine being 13 years old, crying in the backseat while your mother sits in the front saying "I can't believe you'd behave like that. You're so embarrassing." Instead of asking "are you ok?"

So when I think of tennis I don't think of a fairy sport where you hit a fuzzy yellow ball over a net.

I think of the broken rackets. The silent car rides home. The shame of being a loser. The thoughts that I don't deserve to breathe.

Just thinking about it can cause self-doubt to creep under my skin and give me the chills.

Which is exactly why I need to play again.

Cuz I gotta be honest with you...

Life has gotten pretty easy...

For society as a whole...but especially in my specific circumstances.

Someone delivers food to my house or I go to restaurant where someone makes it for me. (No hunting necessary.) I have clean drinking water at the press of a button (once I filter it with my FIXT water pitcher of course). I have AC and heating to keep me at the right temperature no matter what the weather is like outside.

On top of all that...I don't have a boss who tells me what to do. I make enough money that I don't have to worry about money. I work a few hours a day and only do work that I deeply enjoy.

The only "tough" thing about my life is dealing with Crohn's disease. Which means I have to eat a ridiculously strict diet...but I'm used to that so it's not really hard either.

So what does all that mean?

It means I don't have to do stuff I don't want to do. It means I don't have to push myself through hard times.

But hard times can happen to anyone. A parent can die. A loved one can leave you. Your health can get stolen away in second.

And I believe that you discover the Self in times of trial.

"Beyond the very extreme of fatigue and distress, we may find amounts of ease and power we never dreamed ourselves to own. Sources of strength never taxed at all because we never push through the obstruction." -William James

So it's important to do things you don't want to do.

To put yourself in situations that make you uncomfortable.

To expose yourself to the elements...both externally and internally.

Tennis is the best way I can do that for myself.

And it doesn't matter if I play pro or win a lot of matches when I start playing again.

I just figure if I can play tennis and actually enjoy it then I can do anything.

So what's your "tennis?" What brings your demons to the forefront?

What's your Dance with the Devil?

Reply and let me know.

Talk soon,

Ian "calm in the chaos" Stanley