Uncomfortably Numb

by creatureofhobbit

Summary

Locke reflects on times in his life when he has felt both physical and emotional pain.

"Did it hurt?" Ben had asked Locke that day at the Barracks, not long before he and Richard had brought out the "man from Tallahassee", Anthony Cooper.

"I felt my back break," Locke had snapped. "What do you think?"

But in truth, even before Ben had explained that he wasn't talking about the physical pain, Locke had known what he had meant.

"I wanted to know what it felt like knowing your own father had tried to kill you."

Locke hadn't wanted to admit it at the time, but Ben was right. The day Cooper pushed him from the window, it was true that Locke had felt his back break, but he'd passed out pretty much straight after that and couldn't remember much physical pain at all.

A lot of the earlier days after the accident had been blocked out too. Locke could remember the day he'd first been given the wheelchair, and all the days he'd struggled to walk again. But what he remembered was not pain but numbness, the lack of feeling in his legs that remained until Oceanic Flight 815 crashed four years later.

He also remembered the feelings of betrayal, the regrets that he had ever confronted Cooper again, the anger at his father mixed in with the general feelings of hopelessness as it slowly dawned on him that he was unlikely to ever walk again, the self loathing at the thought that his own father had hated him so much that he had done this to him.

And it galled Locke now to think that Ben had actually understood something about him after all.
This time, it was the absence of physical pain that bothered him, at least at first.

The island had given him back the use of his legs immediately after he'd landed there. Yet when the shard from his makeshift trebuchet device had pierced his leg, he'd felt nothing at all, hadn't even noticed the injury until Boone had pointed it out.

Locke had had nightmares about this happening ever since the island first gave him back the feeling in his legs. Every morning, he'd wake up sweating, convinced something had happened in the night to take that away from him. He'd always had to move his legs straight away when he woke up, just to prove that he could. Then he'd laugh at himself afterwards for the lack of faith that he had displayed. The island wanted him to walk again, of course it did. But for the first few moments, the fear was always there.

And now, as the physical pain was absent, Locke began to fear that he was going to end up back where he started.

The pain returned to Locke as he sat banging at the door of the hatch, knowing that not far away, Boone lay dying. But even as it did return, Locke had begun to think there were more important things after all. When Locke had first sent Boone into the Beechcraft, he'd genuinely thought at the time that there was a chance the island might spare Boone's life.

But when he saw the light appear from the hatch, Locke had been sure that it was a sign. Boone was the sacrifice the island demanded, the island had given him back the ability to walk once more.

As he was later to tell Sawyer when they relived that night again, Locke had needed the pain to get him to where he needed to be.

The physical pain wasn't Locke's immediate concern the day the hatch took on a life of its own, trapping his legs under the blast door. He'd been more concerned about the fact that being trapped there left him unable to enter the numbers into the computer. The only person able to do so was the man he knew then as Henry Gale, the man who may or may not have been an Other.

He was almost able to ignore the physical sensations in his legs as he desperately tried to communicate his instructions to Henry. All that mattered was that Henry inputted that sequence of numbers exactly as Locke told him.

Locke still hadn't known why at the time. But he did know he was entering the numbers for a reason.

It had taken a while for the feeling to return to his legs when he was finally freed. Jack had suggested putting him in a wheelchair, which only reminded him of the futility he'd experienced during the four years after Cooper had pushed him from the window.

The feeling of futility had then been emphasised when the man he now knew to be an Other had taunted him with the revelation that he had not entered the numbers after all, but the timer had automatically reset itself to 108 anyway. It had then been further intensified when Locke and Eko had discovered the Pearl Station Orientation video which stated that the Swan was part of a psychological experiment.

The button was a joke, just like the rest of Locke's life had been up to that point. It all meant nothing.

Eko might believe that pushing the button was important, but Locke knew different. He felt like he
was back in the place he'd been before the island, drifting with no purpose in life. Locke had thought he'd escaped that world of dead end jobs and not being taken seriously. But the hatch had been the most dead-end job of the lot.

The next time Locke looked at the computer, he felt nothing at all.

It wasn't the pain from the broken leg keeping Locke awake at night. As he'd said to Sawyer, days earlier to him but three years earlier to the outside world, Locke knew that it was what he needed in order to get to where he had to be. And he knew that he faced worse: Richard had told him that he had to die in order to get his friends back to the island.

What kept Locke awake at night was the memories of his past mistakes. He'd dreamed of Anthony Cooper, pointing and laughing at him. "You kept on talking about fate, John," he'd said. "But look at you now. You're back where you started. Your destiny is to be back in the wheelchair, John."

Boone appeared to him, bloody and broken, just as he had been in Locke's previous vision the day after the Swan hatch had imploded.

"So how does it feel, John?" he had asked. "Taking my place as the sacrifice that the island demanded."

Helen Norwood didn't say anything at all. Locke had tried to talk to her, to tell her he was sorry for putting his father first. He knew now that he had loved her, and he wished he'd told her so more often, that he'd been with her at the end.

He tried to tell her then, when she appeared to him. But she'd just looked at him sadly before vanishing as suddenly as she'd appeared.

Being back here on the mainland had only reinforced Locke's knowledge of how alone he was in the world, reminded him forcibly of all the bad decisions he'd made. When Sayid had talked about his marriage, and Kate had asked if he'd ever been in love, Locke had remembered the pain of losing Helen all over again.

He'd been aware that there was tension between Jack and his father, although he'd never known exactly why. Yet when Locke had passed on Christian's message to Jack, he'd understood that deep down there was an affection there that he and Cooper had never experienced.

Walt had clearly been putting on a brave face for the last three years. He was in enough pain already without Locke adding to it by telling him what had really happened to his father, or trying to persuade him that he had to go back to the island. Walt had told Locke, the day he burned Michael's raft, that he'd moved around all his life and didn't want to move again. He'd now been in a settled home for three years. Could Locke really ask him to uproot himself again?

But seeing Walt again had reminded him of the friendship they had shared on the island. He'd thought about Boone, too. He thought now that Boone and Walt had possibly been the only people over the years to have ever shown him real friendship, and how had he repaid that?

And he also felt as though the island had abandoned him. He'd believed that he was special after the island had given him back his ability to walk. He'd been sure that his destiny was to lead the people his fellow crash survivors called Others, to protect the island. But Christian had told him that it was he, not Ben, who had been meant to move the island, and Richard had told him that he had to die. Boone, in Locke's dream, had been right after all. Locke was now the sacrifice that the island
demanded.

Ben had been right too, when he had said that destiny was a fickle bitch. He'd thought he was the one who was supposed to save everyone by bringing the Oceanic Six back. But none of them wanted to know. He'd failed in his task.

He was back in the very position he'd thought he'd escaped forever: alone and friendless on the mainland, no real purpose on life, back in the wheelchair. The island had chewed him up and spat him out.

As Locke began to tie the noose for his neck, he reflected that this was the worst pain he'd ever known.

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