

It was a cold and overcast day at the Wammy's House but that didn't stop the children from having as much time outside as possible before the rain came. A small group of children were kicking around a soccer ball to each other. Nearby, a young, albino boy with semi-curly hair, wearing merely white pajamas played by himself in a crouching position with a model airplane. The expression on his face looked as if he were deep in thought, almost bored. He heard a rustling in the grass and looked over to see the ball slowly rolling towards him and stopping at his feet.

"Hey, Near!" a blonde haired girl shouted. "Pass it to me! Kick it!" Near looked down at the ball again and stood up. He picked it up and stared at her. "Come on." she coaxed with her arms outstretched. Near let the ball slip through his grasp and kicked it as hard as he could, sending it flying up in the air. The kids stared in awe as they watched the ball soar then their faces changed to horror as it headed straight for a young boy with long, blonde hair chatting idly with a red haired kid. The children shouted to get their attention but only the redhead noticed and backed away. The blonde looked at him quizzically then looked up to have the ball hit him right in the face causing him to fall to the ground. The kids busted out in laughter as the blonde's friend stood over him and offered him a hand up.

"You alright, Mello?" the young man asked. Mello nodded as he took his hand and stood up, rubbing the sore area on his face.

"Yeah, Matt. I'm good." he replied as he kneeled down and picked up the ball with a deadly look on his face. "Who did it?" he snapped at the others who immediately stopped laughing. They all looked at one another then back at Near. "So it was you." he snarled as he approached the young boy but the others stood in his way.

"Aw come on, Mello." one girl protested. "I was the one who told him to kick it."

Mello huffed and nudged her aside with his free hand and the other kids parted out of his way. Near had returned to playing with his airplane, not paying too much attention. "Hey runt." Mello said, Near looked up at him.

"I'm sorry the ball hit you, Mello, but it wasn't my fault it happened to just fall in your direction. You could've had the sense to move like Matt did at least." Near said as he returned to playing with the plane.

Mello looked back at the kids watching him. "Ok break it up!" he snapped. "You want the damn ball?" He threw it over their heads causing the children to duck. "Go get it!"

"I thought you were used to taking balls to the face." Near remarked slyly. Mello's face turned bright red as he grabbed Near by the collar and pulled him up. Near gritted his teeth as he was forced to his feet again.

“What did you say?” he snapped in an icy tone shaking the poor boy a little.

“That’s enough!” came an elder man’s voice amongst the children’s. “Mello, let go of Near this instant.”

Mello glared at the old man for a second then did as he was told. “Yes, sir.” he muttered. Near brushed himself off and stepped away from the blonde.

“Now get inside, all of you. You’ll catch your death out here if you stay out any longer. It’ll rain soon.” the old man ordered.

“Yes, Roger.” the kids said in unison as they followed him inside with the exception of Mello and Near.

Mello glared at Near and held him back. “I’m not through with you.” Mello growled.

“Mello, it was an accident.” Near said.

“Oh yeah? Well so is this..” Mello replied as he snatched Near’s plane and threw it as hard as he could. The plane soared up high then crashed into a nearby oak tree on one of the higher branches. Mello then walked away with a smirk on his face. Near stared sadly at the tree then followed Mello inside.

The group of kids glared at him before going their separate ways. Mello started to his own room as Matt soon joined him. “That was kinda harsh, Mello.” Matt muttered. Mello glanced at him. Normally, Matt wouldn’t say his real name unless he was a bit agitated at him for some reason. “I mean that was his new favorite toy thing.”

“The runt got what he deserved. It’s a dog eat dog world out there. He’s not man enough to stand on his own two feet here, he won’t last a minute outside this place.” Mello retorted. “Now leave me alone.” Matt regarded him for a moment then left Mello at his room. Mello opened the door and kicked off his shoes and stared out the window, the oak tree in perfect view. His stomach clenched in guilt. Maybe he was a bit too harsh...he shook his head. That thing would probably fall out of the tree overnight....it could break then.

He sighed heavily border lining a growl as he strode out of his room and back outside, looking up at the oak. The wind started to blow heavily causing him to shiver. “Might as well make this quick.” he muttered as he jumped and grabbed on one of the lower branches and hoisted himself up. He stood on his tiptoes carefully on the branch and reached for the second one. He felt the branch give below him, just as he jumped and took hold of the branch above him. Mello lifted himself higher then sat on

the stronger branch looking down. "I figured it was rot.." he muttered as he stared at the lower branch's weak point. He looked around trying to find where the plane had crashed. It was a few feet higher than he had expected. He sighed as he cautiously made his way up the tree only to be nearly knocked off by a heavy gust of wind. He sighed with relief as he stared at the plane now only feet away from his grasp on the same branch he was on. He stretched out his arm carefully and snatched the plane before another gust knocked him off balance. He gripped the branch with his right arm with the plane safely tucked in his left.

"Finally, now to get....down..." he gulped as he now realized the height he had scaled. Fear immobilized him and he curled up into a sitting fetal position, his gaze fixed at the ground. "Dear, God." he shuddered. Night was coming soon and he knew he had to get down or risk freezing to death at night. But if he made one mistake, the fall could break his neck. Thinking that it couldn't get any worse, it began to drizzle. His eyes narrowed in annoyance. The wind blew harder as the rain stung his face. He closed his eyes tightly as he huddled up to keep warm. The rain began to pick up to a full-fledged storm. He heard thunder in the distance and knew he had no choice but to try to find his way down in the gale. Mello carefully turned around and let his leg slide down the branch seeking the one below him. His foot brushed up against the branch below him. He smirked as he lowered himself down. Then a flash blinded him followed by a loud, thunderous boom which startled him. He gasped as his arms slipped off the branch and fell forwards. His foot twisted sideways causing his whole body to turn to face the ground. He cried out in pain as his back landed on another branch and slid off, he gritted his teeth as he felt the bark rake along his back and landed face-down on the hard, cold, unforgiving ground. He panted heavily partly because of being knocked winded from the impact and from the pain he had just experienced. The rain stung his already sore back as he tried to stand but found that he couldn't move.

"Oh, God. I'm paralyzed." he muttered in a fearful tone. Thunder boomed again as he whimpered in pain. "Someone help me.." He took a deep breath and exhaled slowly to calm himself down and closed his eyes. He shivered heavily in the cold rain and chuckled softly. "Ok, not paralyzed, just pain." he grimaced as he tried to lift himself up but failed.

A few moments later he heard the soft, familiar voice. "Mello? Are you alright?" Mello looked up to see Near standing over him.

"What are *you* doing here?" Mello snapped, trying to put on his tough-guy act again but winced in pain shortly after.

"I was watching you." Near replied. "I saw the whole thing. I thought you..." he trailed off as he looked over the blonde.

"I don't need your pity." Mello retorted in a cold tone. "I'm fine." Near leaned over and placed his hand on Mello's back then applied pressure. Mello cried out "AARGH! Dammit Near!"

"'Fine' are you?" Near replied as he lifted his hand and knelt down. "Let me help you."

Mello responded by turning his head away from the boy stubbornly. Near sighed as he lifted Mello's arm over his shoulder and strained to lift the boy to his feet. Mello gritted his teeth as he tried to stand on his feet but his right ankle gave in, causing him to stumble. Near held him up as best he could. "Take it easy." he muttered as he led him back to the building.

"Where are you taking me?" Mello murmured as Near led him down a different corridor away from his room.

"Have you seen yourself? You're a mess." Near chuckled. He stopped and opened the door to one of the restrooms and turned on the light. Mello squinted as he let his eyes adjust to the sudden brightness. "Take off your clothes." Near stated as he closed the door then carefully let Mello down in a sitting position in the bathtub.

"Do what now?" Mello blinked in confusion. "Why?"

"Mello, just shut up and do what I say." Near snapped. Mello stared at him for a moment then finally gave in and gingerly lifted his shirt up and over his head. He grimaced as the muscles in his back spasmed in protest. He then slid out of his pants and boxers, his face turning slightly red, unsure of what Near was going to do. Near picked up the clothes and set them aside then turned the water on to a comfortable warm temperature.

"I can bathe myself." Mello muttered blushing even more. "I don't need your help for it."

"I know, but most of your injuries are on your back, I highly doubt you can get every bit successfully." Near explained. "Especially in your state, you fell out of a tree. You need to relax for a while."

Mello regarded him for a second again. "Why are you doing this?" he asked.

"I could've asked you the same earlier." Near responded as he grabbed a washcloth and added a bit of soap to it. "You certainly took a beating." he stated as he began to clean the wounds as gently as he could. Mello's back looked like it had suffered a massive rug burn. There were even a few spots where blood oozed out of small areas of broken skin.

Mello winced in pain. "That's the last time I do something nice for you too." he growled angrily.

"I suppose no good deed goes unpunished then." Near responded as he tenderly cleaned Mello's back then turned off the water. "However; I do appreciate it."

“Don’t mention it. Ever.” he replied as his hands clenched into fists.

“Your secret is safe with me.” Near said as he rinsed off the lather from Mello’s back. “How is your back now?”

“Good.” he growled as he looked away. “I guess anything to get my clothes off, eh Near?” he added with a cheeky grin.

Near chuckled. “Oh, very funny. Don’t deny that you enjoy it.”

“Not really.” Mello scoffed. “Now are you done yet?”

“Almost.” Near said as he set down the washcloth on the side of the tub. He stood up and looked through the cabinets and took out a bottle of rubbing alcohol.

Mello groaned. “Aw, great.”

“You big wuss.” Near retorted as he added a bit of the solution to the cloth. Mello turned his back away from Near. “Mello, it has to be done. If you don’t comply I’ll take your clothes, leave the door open, then make as much noise as I can to wake up everyone here.”

“So that’s why you used the public one instead of the one in your own room.” Mello stated.

Near shook his head. “Actually, the thought just came to me. Now, be a good boy and turn around.” Mello glared at him and finally turned with his back facing Near. The young boy smiled and gently cleaned the wounds on Mello’s back. Mello gasped and sat straight up, gritting his teeth. “Easy, it’s not working unless it stings, remember?”

“Yeah,” Mello sighed heavily, his back throbbing in pain. After a minute, the pain subsided and he relaxed.

“See now that wasn’t so bad now was it?” Near asked as he unplugged the drain and helped Mello out and handed him a towel to dry off. Mello took the towel and dried off using Near as balance then proceeded to dress himself again.

“Actually, I could’ve gone the rest of the night without that.” Mello answered in his usual stubborn tone.

Near shook his head as he opened the door and helped Mello out. The blonde shivered, now realizing how warm and comfortable the bath was. "I don't think you'd be able to walk on that ankle for several days." Near said as he tried to keep the pace steady. "It looks a bit swollen."

"It'll be fine." Mello assured. "I just twisted it."

"All the same, you need to stay off of it or you'll make it worse."

"Why are you acting like you care?" Mello snapped. Near didn't answer him. Instead he led Mello to his room and let him go near the bed. He caught a glance out the window at the steady downpour then smiled.

"Would you rather be left outside then?" Near asked as he gestured toward the window.

Mello scoffed. "I wouldn't have cared one way or the other. I would've gotten up myself." he said as he laid back in his bed.

"Uh-huh." Near said skeptically as he sat on the floor, leaning against the bedpost.

"But seriously, why did you help me? If I were you I would've just left you out there."

"You just answered your own question, Mello." Near replied with a smirk. "I am not you and you are not me. That's why I helped."

Mello shook his head. "Sometimes you just don't make any sense." he muttered as he fluffed his pillow and rested his head on it.

"Or maybe I just make perfect sense, you just fail to comprehend as usual." Near retorted. Mello scowled as he grabbed his pillow then knocked Near over the head with it. The young boy merely laughed as he fell over. "You can't get a joke either? You need to chill out every once in a while."

"That's pretty difficult with you around to constantly bug me." Mello growled as he turned away from Near and laid back down. Not five minutes later, he passed out as his exhaustion finally overtook his body.

A little while later, he awoke to feel his bed was quivering slightly. His brow furrowed as he sat up and looked around. Near was still leaning against his bed shivering from the cold. Mello's

conscience gripped at his stomach again. The boy probably had saved his life, he did owe him. Sighing heavily, Mello wrapped his arms around Near and pulled him up next to him and covered him in the majority of the blankets to keep him warm. Near stopped shivering and nestled himself in the covers without waking. Mello chuckled as he gently stroked Near's damp, matted hair away from his eyes.

"You're not so bad..." Mello whispered as he turned away again. "...for a runt."