

A.M. Wyman

# NEW BREATH



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**Аннотация**

Can you imagine that the characters of our favorite cartoons and books come to life again? What if they “merge” for some time with children who gathered at the festival of talented youth? And how does this help the tale come to life again? Find out by reading this story.

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*Translator* A. M. Wyman

*Editor* Paul-Edward Hizo

*Illustrator* Christina Bezryadina (Zakhieva)

*Illustrator* A. M. Wyman

*Cover designer* Alexey Semukhin

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# PART I

## Chapter 1

### The cost of kinship

On Grahamsstrasse in western part of Berlin, there was a small shop. The wooden door was abraded, and the sign lost, whether it was removed intentionally or not; no one remembered what happened to it, but everyone knew one thing: each time before the early and scrap holidays, students from all around shook out their piggy banks full of money and rushed here to complete the collection of books, comics, cassettes, discs, and vinyl with old records and of course, the figures with their favorite characters.

The most snapped up here were brave Zorro on his faithful horse Tornado and then Spider-Man, Batman, Sailor Moon and many other characters very beloved by the hearts of children. The coolest thing was to collect all the heroes of the saga and if it was possible, find them their supplemented homes and even utensils.

The hostess, frau Tomaco – the mysterious woman with the American Indian roots – helped the children to make a choice while holding sales or arranging gatherings in which the visitors read books aloud or watched movies... Her granddaughter

Marianne, who studied in the local school, helped her around. From past times, their family has owned this shop, which was famous for manufacturing these toys of such high quality.

August von Geltsman liked to come here. Although it has been a while, because some years ago he, his mother, stepfather and a stepbrother moved to Potsdam. He is studying in middle school now which deems it ignoble to shop there.

His stepfather Sebastian – a man of self-proclaimed “Solid morale principles”, owned the corporation for petroleum refining. Last summer, he ordered to clean the room from the “garbage and other things that a young gentleman of his age is not supposed to possess”, so all the things that reminded August of a happy childhood, were sunk into oblivion.

His parents divorced many years ago, although August kept the last name, because it belonged to the ancient Counts family. Mom married Sebastian Van der Hoffen and Philip was born, a snub-nosed boy, who looked like his father but had his mother’s curly hair. Sebastian was concerned that children should be brought up in severity, without giving them favors, and assigned them various “useful” hobbies, that will not allow them to hang around the house in search of destruction. For some reason, he was sure that the little insolents are striving to destroy something. Any outdoor games like hide-and-seek or touch-and-run were banned. They had to keep a perfect silence in the house, because Sebastian dealt with serious matters at work, he stays in his office for long hours.

When Philip was seven years old, the family settled in the new house in Potsdam. Then August enrolled in a boarding school named after Albrecht Altdorfer<sup>1</sup> and Philip began to study in a private school that was located not far from their home. August used to think if he should transfer to study there, but enduring life with his stepfather during vacations without any pleasure and rarely seeing his mother who was a fashion designer that often traveled to other countries to fashion shows or art exhibitions, constantly changed his mind.

Anyways, August liked the boarding school. The demanding attitude of teachers forged a good and ambitious character in him; he had a strong will and was a reliable friend. In addition, the school held a good reputation in the world of historical reconstructions: the appearance of the stone castle with a preserved forest in the district created a pleasant space. August had skills in fencing, and he even participated in international competitions. In addition, in the boarding school he could run, jump, make noise, and generally lead a life according to his age.

Arriving for a summer vacation, August yearned again. The boy did not unpack his things and just put the suitcase in the closet. His mother stayed with him the whole day and half of the night before she flew to Florence for the next show. August in the hearts asked to take him there too, but she refused, saying

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<sup>1</sup> German artist, master of paintings and engravings of historical and religious subjects.

that there will be only the work, and Sebastian just took some holidays to spend time with children.

– For what? – August did not believe what he was hearing. – He never liked to spend time with us...

– Last night we had a conversation with Sebastian, darling, – his mother said, long-haired beautiful woman, wearing a dark blue coat and old gloves, fashionable in this season. – And decided it would be better if you stayed here. I know that you have a relationship; which is unimportant – she said, kissing his cheek – but it would be better.

And his mom came out to the yard, lit by artsy lanterns, leaving him completely alone in this unfriendly place. August stood for a while near the window, watching her step into the car and as it turns at the end of the alley and disappears in the dark, until he heard someone coughed beside him.

Decided that it is not necessary to be on the sight of anyone right now, August rapidly reached the ladder and safely locked himself in his room. There was a consolation in the thought that a couple of weeks after his own father had to take him watch the baseball championship, and then August would go back to school at the annual summer camp festival, to which he was preparing the entire previous year. The camp program consisted of sports events, including his favorite historical reconstructions, the Olympiads of the school subjects and musical parades.

August changed for the dinner. Sebastian insisted on this old-fashioned habit. He often said that “a gentleman always have

to be a gentleman,” adjusting a small bow tie on his pale, thin neck.

Speaking as soft as possible (as he thought), Sebastian greeted August, saying that the next day they are going fishing with Philip. However, he did not invite his stepson with them. “Well, well, – thought August, watching as the younger brother sedately sits at the table, keeping his back perpendicular (why won’t he just show his tongue in the second as Sebastian turns away, but no – he was immensely calm), – let them go!”.

– Is there something you wanted to say? – shrewdly looking at him asked his stepfather.

– No, Herr, nothing, – August just grinned. – I wish you a pleasant bite.

– I told you several times to call me Dad, – Sebastian said, piercing the boy with his eyes.

“I’d rather cross the Pacific Ocean swimming; than call you so”, – August answered mentally, continuing with appropriate gratefulness to chew the unloved spinach and pork.

After the dinner, stepping to his room, August found a couple of messages in the internet from his school mates and fencing coach. They all wished him a pleasurable holiday and expressed the hope to see him soon again. August spent a couple of hours surfing the Internet, listening to music and playing his favorite strategy games, in the boarding school to use computers was permitted only for certain hours and with educational purposes only.

Someone knocked the door. August immediately closed the laptop, removed the headphones and picked up the first book in his hands. His stepbrother entered the room.

– Hi, – he said quietly, averting his eyes.

– Already greeted, – answered August, hiding a yawn. He could not remember when he and his brother became estranged. Probably, when Sebastian sent him to a boarding school, showing whom in this house he wants to see more often. Lack of collaborative tricks and games did not add to their relationship heats too. When Philip was very young, Sebastian kept a sharp eye to the contacts between the boys, making them as small as possible.

– Look, seems you're going to spend the whole summer here...

– Is it so? – the boy could not help smiling, raising an eyebrow. – A few weeks later, my father would come, and we're going to Berlin for baseball! It's a tradition of Von Geltsman!

– No, I heard Mom and Dad talked about it, – the brother looked down. – Mom was okay about your plans, but dad secretly made a call and on your behalf; he canceled your appointment.

August's eyes went blank. Sebastian is against his meeting with his dad?! But why has his mother acted like this? After all, she knows how important the rare meetings with his father are! But anyways, now she won't be able to influence the situation, being so far away... The boy jumped up, breathing hard. One of the features he would like to get rid of was his impulsiveness.

It hampered him in the classes of fencing, when it was necessary to preserve the ultimate concentration and tranquility, but in rare cases, playing in his favor.

– Wait, – stopped him Philip. – Now you can commit follies, and he will punish you yet...

– Does not matter! – Shouted August. Philip instinctively shrank his shoulders. – How can Sebastian do this to me?! The worst punishment you can imagine!

August saw how cautiously Philip was looking at him. It seemed there's a reason he gave his secret. Noticing this, August made himself to calm down.

– Well, what do you want? – A little rougher than expected, he said.

– I need a favor. I was saving money and I would like you to buy me something, while I and dad are out of the city...

August's eyes narrowed with interest.

– And what is it? You have intrigued me.

– I noticed that in the last year Ralph threw away your stuff, and asked him to leave me some things... – Philip blushed. – Honestly speaking, I left your toys... You know, from that old store...

August's jaw dropped. Turned out this papa's son has a rebellious heart, wow!

– Are you serious?

– Yes, if you want to see them...

– Of course I do, let's go!

Philip visibly relieved. He put a finger to his lips and went out on the prowl. August hurried after him, turning off the lights.

Having entered the Philip's room August was a little surprised. He's never been here before. The time when they lived in an apartment on the solar Berlin's street has passed. They used to have lots of colors and patterns that the boy loved to look at so much. In this house, a Gothic style prevailed, the building was quite old and gloomy with pointed bay windows and columns, outwardly resembling if not the middle-aged castle then fortress.

A similar design was in the Philip's room. The August's one was much more modern – it had plastic windows and wallpaper on the walls. Sebastian allowed to leave everything like this because these windows looked out on the eastern part, invisible to bystanders, as well as the cabinet's window, and servants' one located on the floor above and below respectively. In other parts of the house there were mostly the stained glass windows and wall tapestries.

– And you live here? – With a little grimace said August.

– His father's room in style is more high-flown, – Philip sighed. He shut the door, came closer to bed and pushed the drawer out of it. After a moment he reverently, like in front of him it was a box with treasure, opened the lid.

August gasped – there were his lovable things: old comics with Mickey Mouse, some pages of which still had his doodles, recorded songs from the cartoons (once they had a player, but the needle was broken, and Sebastian immediately sent it to the

scrap) and, of course, his favorite figures and dolls.



Of the fullness of feelings August hugged his brother and ran to the toys. He took them, breathed the preserved peculiar smell, moved their cloth, rubber and plastic arms and legs.

About three minutes later, Philip shyly touched his shoulder. August regained consciousness.

– So will you help my request?

– You have not said what it is yet.

Philip pulled off the shelf tin can and shook from it a decent

handful of coins and bills. August whistled.

– I have been collecting them for a while, – said the brother, – and I want you to buy me some toys, missing from the series. You see, despite the fact that I study at a private school... Well, all the guys collect them too. However, they all go to the new and prestigious stores, but I like this style of toys.

– Oh, why can you not go there yourself? Oh, Sebastian?...

Philip nodded sadly.

– Dad says that toys spoil the man, forcing him to dive into a fantasy world, and we must live in the present, so he forbids me to play with them or watch cartoons.

– But this is outrageous! You're still a child how can he do that to you?

– Keep your voice down, please. I do not want him to know...

– How about mom? Does she agree to this?

– Mom does not contradict him, he knows how to rule people... Or make them feel guilty and act the way he wants it. In addition, she has many trips always, and we rarely talk.

August again resisted the urge to hit Sebastian's face when they meet again. He counted to five, tried to smile, and turned back to his brother.

– So what toys do you lack?

## Chapter 2 The New Berlin

In the morning August did not get up for a long time and he just stayed in bed. He had the right to do so, because at that moment there was no one in the house except him. The butler Ralph drove Sebastian and Philip fishing and most likely, they had not yet returned, and Griette their old maid, was visiting her family in Berlin as August told her to do the night before.

Thank God, the cortege departed early, because August did not really want to face the man once again, the man who was shamelessly spoiling the life of his family, assuming that he is absolutely right.

August made the bed (school habit), got prepared and took the bag over his shoulder, making sure everything is there and headed for the exit.

Waving to the camera mounted over the gate, he waited until the guard will open them, and had an enjoyable breakfast in a nearby cafe. Here you can take what's absolutely harmful to your health, but extremely tasty burgers and coffee. When the boy finished with this and paid, he called a taxi, benefiting from the money his mother left him and headed to Berlin.

The boy went out at the beginning of the street, and walked in the right direction. He could not recognize his favorite city. This part of Berlin has changed dramatically and not in the good way. Some shops have disappeared completely, for example, his

favorite Mr. Adams' bakery, replaced by one of the branches of the corporation making spare parts for cars. Everything seemed haggard, old and ashen. Even the sky was covered with clouds, seemingly, only in this area.

As for the toy shop, it still stood in the same place, although the door was even more shabby and some windows were boarded up with plywood. Suppressing a bad feeling, August pushed the door, which opened with a slight creak. The bells hung above the door rang and the boy stepped inside. He winced. Silver plated shelves with discs and books, standing along the walls, turned dark, and everything stood on them, it was curtained with light blankets and covered with dust, and in some places with cobwebs. Painted like the night sky ceiling partially crumbled and covered with yellow and the maroon fringe has lost color. The small sofas stood in the middle rubbed and a table covered with small cracks and scratches.

August closed his eyes, and in front of him appeared a very different picture – he was a baby, sucking on a lollipop, sitting on this couch next to other children and watching a small puppet show, played out by Frau Tomaco. He remembered her colorful dress and shawl, bright bandage on her head, green eyes, charming smile, tan skin and thin arms, studded with rings and bracelets.

As the time spent here was truly magical! August immediately recalled as his father buys him a Zorro mask and Frau Tomaco whose melodic voice and ringing laughter still stood in her ears,

was smiling and inviting them to come again. She frightened, and at the same time attracted by her dissimilarity to the other.

But then he opened his eyes, and the fairy tale ended. The charm caused by the flood of memories disappeared.

August went up to the desk, which was an old cash register, and loudly cleared his throat. No one responded, and then he easily jumped over the counter, knocked on the wooden closet door of the back room in which Madame often went in the old days. There was no answer again.

Suddenly, a bell has rung and a soft yell made him look back. On the threshold there stood a very pretty tanned girl, in whose features he recognized Marianne, the hostess' granddaughter. However, she does not seem to understand who he was.

– What do you want? – she asked anxiously. – What do you want from the two poor women? If you expected to steal something, take it and go away immediately!

August smiled.

– Marianne, don't you remember me?

She peered doubtfully into him.

– I am August, and I lived nearby! We used to hang out here very often. – August came from the desk and stepped closer to her, caught in the beam of light, struck from the not cluttered part of the window.

Marianne suddenly sobbed, and rushed to hug him.

– I am very glad to see you again, August, – she said in a trembling voice, stepping back a few paces and peering with

her attentive beautiful eyes, just like her grandmother.

– Yeah, and this certainly wet my shirt? – Ironically, but encouragingly he commented.

– I’m sorry, – said the girl, taking a tissue out of his hands. – You know, the business is not as good as we it should. The customers we had before are no more. Children do not come here to play. Only old-timers and we both know how good that time was.

– Where’s your grandmother? – The boy wondered.

Marianne silently walked to the door of the back room and pulled hard on the door, which was difficult to open. August saw a woman lying on the couch, or more precisely, her shape, since she was covered with some rags. She was sleeping. Nearby, on a small table a greenish bottle wrapped in straw stood. He understood everything.

Marianne looked at him with desperation.

– Since a toys shop “Tinkle” opened in the neighboring district, no one comes to us. Even thieves bypass our home, as they know that we have nothing for them to steal.

– I don’t believe this is happening... And what about our peers?

– Many of them left for other cities, as you, the parents in the neighborhood believe that we render a bad influence on their children.

– Bad influence? – August frowned. As far as he could remember, there were not only the children. Adults themselves

often sat on sofas or were standing around, enjoying the unusual ideas.

– They believe that in “Tinkle” everything is modern and with a high quality. In addition, I and my grandmother are American Indians...

– Since when the blood indicates the personality?!

Marianne sighed.

– Everything changes. Let’s go outside, – she led him into a small outdoor cafe, a couple of blocks from the shop, where they drank coffee and shared news. August told her of Sebastian, Philip and about the school.

– I may be expelled, and I understand this... I can’t afford tuition and I failed the recent tests, so there are more worthy candidates for this place. – Marianne lamented.

– But then you don’t get a diploma!

– I know, but what can I do? Looks like, that is my fate.

– Marie, I recently realized it, – August said firmly. – But there are no miracles or destiny in the world.

August sighed, and a light breeze ran through the street, forcing the children’s hair and napkins on the table to stir.



– Are you sure? – asked the girl quietly.

– Unfortunately, – he nodded.

– But then everything becomes meaningless! – she exclaimed.

The tape strapping her hair fell off and her hair scattered whenever the wind blew.

– What are you talking about? – August asked surprisingly.

– About our childhood, of course! – Marianne even blushed. –

You know, we're, perhaps, the last of those who remember the magic of our wonderful store! And I thought that we believe in...

– Believed, – corrected Augustus, seriously looking at her. –

After the last few years my confidence has severely shaken.

Marianne irritably blinked.

– What is that?

– Your words sounded as if nothing can be saved. Either shop or childhood... Just nothing.

August paused and then decisively took her hand.

– You know, even if we can't save our childhood, then at least we can try to save the store for new generations. I will personally help you to make this happen.

– Really? – Marianne looked at him with such hope and gratitude in her eyes, that the boy was embarrassed. – But just the two of us can't cope! And when do we start?

– First, I have to go to the school camp, – he said. Noticing her downcast look, he hastened to add: – I'll talk to the guys; maybe someone will agree to help us. I have great classmates. You'll see.

Marianne nodded and smiled, and then rummaged in her bag decorated with the fringe and took a few coins.

– Wait, – August made a preemptive gesture and reached into his pocket for the money. – Never mind, I understand. By the way, I came here actually because of business, – he remembered, then they went back to the store, and he told her Philip's request.

Marianne beamed:

– We have all the figures! Grandmother purposely left them in a special box, when things became bad. And she didn't want to sell them, even for the interested buyers! Apparently, they were important to her. But does a painted plastic matter now?

## Chapter 3

### Runaway

The next day Sabastian and Philip came back. It seemed they had a poor catch, or simply didn't get enough sleep, because at the breakfast Sebastian looked even angrier and gloomier than usual, pressing fingers to his temples.

During lunch, August literally felt the wave of hostility, emanating from her stepfather. But he tried to keep quiet so as not to attract undue attention.

– Enough! – Sebastian suddenly yelled. And he stood up so abruptly that a chair fell down with a clatter. – How can you sit there with such an innocent expression?!

– Herr, what are you talking about? – August was scared in the first second, then he immediately felt calm. It's like fencing – to calculate all the possible moves after a sudden shock to excel again.

– As if you do not understand? – He was seething. – I know that you let go without my knowledge Griette and the security service reported to me that you were absent the whole day! Where were you, answer immediately!

August sighed, thinking to himself: “Just this one? Even if he accused me of robbery of a Swiss bank, I would then justify so much emotion”.

– I was walking.

– All day long? I was told that you came back much later than it is suitable for a man with the count's surname! – and that was the truth, August yesterday had stayed with Marie almost till the night, and then he didn't have enough for the taxi, so he had to wait for the last bus.

That was the line that he crossed, and August could not tolerate. He jumped up.

– How dare you?! You! How can you blame me for anything, when you are acting like a child yourself! Is your last name from the Count's family? You seem to have gained power only because of the company! Why don't you want me to meet with my real father? – questions were coming out like a pouring stream, and August could not stop. – Are you afraid that Mom would leave you for him? – This idea has recently haunted the boy. Everything was so wonderful, before his mother met Sebastian at the dinner party.

Stepfather's face immediately blushed. He ran to the boy. August even thought that he would hit him. But he just hissed and spat on the boy's face:

– Your father is a crook, and your mother would never pay any attention to him... He has disgraced his name! I know that you were in Berlin with that witch-beggar woman and her granddaughter. Hehe, how good that I convinced my old friend Tinkle to open a branch in the next street... Heh, heh, heh, heh... – Sebastian smiled nastily.

Augustus gasped in the total astonishment, and it seemed

to him that everything around have disappeared except this evil face distorted by grimace.

– Frau Tomaco is the kindest person I know. And my father is a hundred times better than you, stupid, petty, jealous... – Sebastian grabbed August by his shirt and began to shake.

– Dad! – Philip exclaimed, watching them terrified. Sebastian snorted doubtfully at his side and, rousing himself, let August go.

– Both of you should go to your rooms! – Sebastian commanded, pulling a handkerchief and dabbing his brow.

August quickly ran upstairs, slammed the door, and collapsed his face into the pillow. He did not notice the moment when Grietta came in and began to stroke his hair. The boy loved the old maid, who was with him from the Berlin times. She was a part of his family reminding that not all is lost...

– Herr August, do not worry. Herr Sebastian doesn't feel okay, as he and your mother were swearing on the phone this morning...

– What? – the boy startled. – did they have a quarrel? What do you know about it, Grietta, tell me!

– I do not know the details, from what I heard, he does not want to let you go somewhere. And your mother has apparently said that she is tired of living with Herr Sebastian and she does not like this house, it does not give the expanse for her imagination, and she's a creative person...

– GRIETTA! – they've heard a roar from downstairs.

– Well, I am not lucky again, – she felt alarmed. – Ralph has

got a punishment already, but he is respectful here anyways, and now I'm on the waiting list. Try to sleep, Herr August. Things will look better in the morning.

However, it was difficult for the boy to fall asleep in that day. Everything mixed up in his head. Tinkle, mom, red ugly face of the stepfather, his dear Marie, Grietta, Philip...

Exactly! Philip has to be saved! It is not too late! August even jumped up and began to sort out options frantically. Then he opened the door, but could not get out: Ralph, a haughty butler of Van Der Hoffen family was standing at the door.

– Herr Sebastian told me to stand at your door, – he said. – He thought you might want to go out.

– Ralph, look, this is very important, in this very moment, – the boy fervently whispered. – It's a matter of life and death, – he concluded.

– I'm not allowed to do so, – the butler firmly replied.

“Well, he is not so straightforward, – the boy thought of his stepfather. – Intimidation, cunning, cruelty... Perhaps that is why he became so powerful”.

Then they've heard the Griette's sobs.

– What is it? – the boy exclaimed. – You've heard it, haven't you?! – August tried to break down, but the mighty hand of Ralph stopped him.

Like a grimed statue Sebastian appeared on the stairs. His grin frantically ran across his face to the right, then the left ear.

– Ralph, shut him inside.

Butler eagerly shoved the boy into the room. The key cranked double.

– What did you do with Griette? – August moaned helplessly, kicking the door a couple of times.

– Griette? And who is she? Ralph, do you know? She no longer works here, – almost sang his stepfather. August heard how his steps remote, and a giggle calms down in a distance...

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August has already laid down, putting his hands under his head when he heard the quiet creak. Just above his bed, something rustled, and then a folded piece of paper fell on his head.

Fumbling the switch of the table lamp, August got up and unfolded the note.

“Sorry about that, I did not know that all this would happen... Dad does not want to let you go to the camp. If you want to run – around 2 a.m. open the balcony door and climb over my room. Philip”.

August looked up: there was something like a dormer, which are still preserved in such ancient houses, like this one.

Upon hearing the shuffling, August turned off the lamp and hid sleeping. Ralph probably saw the light streaming through the crack. A few minutes later all was quiet again.

August could not sleep glancing at the watch. About two hours later he got up and went to the closet. Having pulled sneakers and hoodie, August took a suitcase; he was glad that he almost didn't

take out any stuff out of it. Having opened the balcony door, the boy looked on Sebastian's office. Everything seemed to be quiet. Then he pulled out a suitcase and crept to the edge. Between his balcony and that led into the hall, there was a distance of about half a meter. Being in a good sporting shape, August could overcome it easily, but the case was an excessive load. The door creaked on the neighboring balcony and brother showed with a sign that it's fine.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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