

# Passing through

## Twelve months of wandering

Von MajinMina

### Kapitel 1: Feverish dreams in a summer-storm

In case someone doesn't know (but that would be very unlikely): I own nothing of Rurouni Kenshin, it is the property of Nobuhiro Watsuki.

please notice: I am not a native english speaker. But I tried my best ;). Please feel free to correct me, I want to improve, therefore I need your reviews! thanks :D

A/N: I know, the setting of a RuroKen-Fic during his wandering years is not really new...But it just popped up in my mind. The idea behind was, simplified, to write twelve stories according to the twelve months of a year, set anytime during Kenshins wanderings. The stories are loosely connected but can stand for themselves. Don't expect some large-scale character-development (like the change Battousai-Rurouni or something)- others have that already written down better than I ever could (for more look at the end of the chapter)

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#### Passing through

#### One year – twelve stories

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Illusory sunlight was shining brightly on colour-palette of summer, but neither the full green of the trees nor the red sparkles of flowers along the path obtained the attention of the lonely wanderer. Instead two bright blue eyes lowered at the sky, where scattered clouds were melting quickly into one dark and offensive mass.

-Dark clouds, looking dirty and almost brown of colour...

Worse luck. The young man knew exactly what that meant.

-...Hail! And the day started so sunny.

Alarmingly fast the menacing clouds began to cover the whole sky and a sudden breeze blew dust from the street into the wanderers eyes. A little perplexed, he looked around – he was on top of a mountain path, not far away from the shore, but there were no villages or larger trees for shelter. A sudden bright flash, reminding him to hurry, enlightened the street, which was softly sloping before him.

-It seems, further down the path turns into a narrow pass with some rocks.

Approaching thunder and first raindrops finally brought the wanderer into action and with a resigned shrug of shoulders he ran towards the possible cover.

-Better to encounter this summer's storm between some rocks than enjoying it standing on top of a mountain.

Unfortunately the rocks beside the path turned out to be no shelter at all, because the wind blew right through them. Quickly he cowered against the most shielding of those uncomfortable, massive stones.

-Maybe it is wet, muggy and windy here, but nevertheless none of the pelting down hailstones are joining me.

One corner of the young mans mouth twitched as a gust whipped him a batch of thick raindrops into the face.

-Is it a sigh that I hear, Himura Kenshin? Being a rurouni you should be grateful for even the slightest support.

These rocks are the most pleasant company for some time past, after all.

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## VIII. Feverish dreams in a summer's storm

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Being a Rurouni on an aimless journey, always in the open air and at the elements mercy, the best season for wandering was summer. Even if in spring nature was more appealing and temperature more pleasant, the undeniable advantages of summer were weightier.

First: It was easy to gather food on the fields or in the woods, and such he could feed himself without the help of others for several weeks.

Second: Stickiness, even though unpleasant for most people, was preferable to the chill breeze of spring or autumn. A fire for warming was not a must and therefore

could be avoided (as bright flames often tended to invite unwelcome visitors...but this is another story).

Third: The heat made the streets empty - perfect for a lone traveller, who wanted no company in form of either, idle chitchat or, contrary and just as annoying, suspicious questions.

-And last but not least: If it rains in summer, the rain is most of the time mild, soft and refreshing...

Jittering, Kenshin pulled his legs nearer.

-...depending on where you are. Of course I've picked out the most raw and rainy part of the country.

With a deep sigh he finished his sarcastic thoughts and got up. The hailstorm had ceased and now only thick, large raindrops were dripping down with loud blobs.

-More wet than wet I can't get. Time to search a more comfortable shelter than this rough rock though you've been an uncomplaining and silent listener to my silly thoughts, old friend.

Absent-mindedly he patted the stone.

-But I need to find a place where I can get myself dry near a warm fire before catching a cold.

A few hours ago – in the brightest sunlight – Kenshin had caught two fishes. With an angry grumble his empty stomach now signalled him that it was about time to eat them. Wet to the skin he trudged along the mountain-path, in one hand the bundle with his few belongings and the fishes, in the other his sakabatou. His long hair stuck on his face in wisps of dark-red and the wind did not dry his cloths, sticking on him heavy as lead, but made them clummy. He tried to keep his body-heat with a little spurt.

After running several minutes he felt relieved to spot a little shack not far away from the street, shabby and obviously uninhabited. Without further hesitance, he progressed and rattled at the door. It was locked – not an obstacle, for Kenshin could've easily kicked in that rotten piece of wood. But this hut, as gone to rack it was, might had an owner after all and Kenshin hadn't the intention to destroy personal property. Instead, he walked around the building, searching for a loose plank. Finding one, he pushed it aside until the gap was wide enough to grant him access.

In the half-light he saw, that the inside of the shack, too, seemed to be on skid row and almost unfurnished. Rain, trickling trough the porous roof, made the loamy floor sticky and wind whistled trough large gaps between the planks. At closer look Kenshin found some old blankets and several ceramic-dishes. And, to his surprise, an old bottle of sake – but it smelled rather strangely and therefore wasn't a great temptation.

Finding a pile of firewood in one dry corner of the room Kenshin began to prepare the

fireplace with a little smile on his face. Moments later he watched the flames of the fire with contentment. Swiftly, he put off his wet clothes and, hanging them near the fire, hoped that they would dry soon. Naked as he was he wrapped himself in the stale but clean blankets. Done that he sat down beside the fireplace and started to grill his fishes.

-Something to eat and a roof – at least to some extend leak-proof –over the head...  
What more could a rurouni ask for?  
This shack is the most pleasant overnight accommodation for days, after all...

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A few days earlier

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„Stop right now and give us all your money or I’m gonna stab you!”

A large, crude-looking man balked the small street with his accomplices in a blind corner, wielding menacingly a rusty sword through the air.

Kenshin was neither impressed by the hardly usable blade nor the sudden appearance of the bandits out of bushes on the wayside. He had felt their presence already miles away.

“Sessha’s just a rurouni. I have nothing of value to give,” he responded softly to the harsh voice, face hidden behind bangs of red hair.

“Nonsense!”, barked the leader of the group. From behind another bandit tugged at his sleeve. “What?”, asked the big man impatiently, halfway turned.

“Look at him,” his fellow said. “Look at those rags. I guess he tells the truth, he’s really a vagabond.”

The leaders eyes narrowed and he examined the man standing before him in partial shade. His dark-brown hair, so it seemed to him, was dusty and tousled and his dark-blue gi and grey hakama looked indeed worn out, heavily mended and dirty. Kenshin had to force back a smile when he saw the leaders facial expression turning from grim to disappointed.

-Why do people always judge by outer appearance? At least they didn’t recognize me or else I would read not disappointment but dismay in their faces.

The leader was about to lower his sword when the same fellow tugged again his sleeve from behind. “What now!” He turned angrily.

“His sword,” the bandit suggested with a nod in Kenshins direction.

"Your sword," the leader repeated menacingly towards his victim. "Give it to us!"

Kenshin finally looked up and lifted one red eyebrow. "Why should I give you my sword. You have one yourself. This sword is very dear to me."

„It will be very dear to us too," the bandits smiled and approached.

Now Kenshins eyes were next to narrow.

„Why do you bother a peaceful wanderer? Isn't there any honest and legal work to do? Maybe in some of the near seaports?"

The men laughed. "Hard work and poorly paid!" someone shouted. "No, thanks. It's easier to get our needs from travellers or peasants."

Kenshins eyes narrowed some more.

"You also attack farms?"

„That's none of your damn business," the leader grumbled. "Give us the sword and we will spare your life. And don't even think about drawing it, you don't stand a chance against us. Remember, we're five and you are alone."

Again Kenshin had to smile inwardly but thanks to years of practise no sign of emotion was displayed on his face.

-Why do people always judge by physical appearance!

"I will neither draw my sword nor give it to you," he said quietly but the bandits didn't miss the sudden unsettling undertone.

The Leaders rusty sword paused in mid-air as the young man was stepping out of the shadows into the bright sunlight.

His hair was not brown but like fire. And his eyes...

Hesitantly the bandits paused. "I... we...", the leader stammered, obviously rattled. Lost in thoughts he tried to figure out why this strange appearance made the alarm bells in his mind ring so weirdly loud. A sudden tug on his sleeve made him jump.

"Damn it, WHAT!"

"His hair... and his face...", came the shattered voice of his fellow from behind.

The leader stared again at the youthful face before him. A soft breeze revealed a scar on his left cheek, hidden until now under red hair. The alarm-bells rang even louder.

A cross-shaped scar. The leader froze.

"Hi...Hitokiri Battousai..."

With a clang the rusty sword hit the ground, shortly afterwards joined by the five

bandits, voluntarily pressing their face into the dust.

"Please... mercy!" they whimpered sheepishly.

Kenshin sighed. No little fight to keep in practice this time.

His eyes turned to the old sword.

-Though such dilettantish bandits are surely nothing better when it comes to fight.

He softly shook his head about himself.

-You've had enough fights for the rest of your life, Himura.

He stepped forward and simultaneously the bandits backed. "Please, don't kill us!" They exclaimed in different degrees of desperation.

For a short moment Kenshin felt a familiar pain in his heart.

-Why do people always judge by physical appearance... and why does this question seem to be the bane of my life?

Frustrated, he passed the crouched bandits, who would never knew anything about his non-killing-oath. "I won't kill you. But promise, you'll never attack innocent people again. Go to the next city and get yourself a honest work."

Hastily nodding heads raised little clouds of dust.

Leaving them behind, Kenshin hoped, they would consider his advices. They were no evil men at their hearts, he felt that. And the sword – by the way the only real weapon aside from some thick branches – was surely old but not chippy or bloodstained. Kenshin felt certain that this gang was founded out of foolishness in a mere attempt to make a better living, not knowing any better way.

-They are mere humans, trying to live the only way they know. Aren't those your words, Hiko Seijuro? Would you laugh at your baka deshi? Sure you would and why not. I first had to shatter my soul before I could understand the principles you unsuccessfully tried to teach me back then. That really is laughable, that it is...

Entering the next village shortly before dawn the peasants gave him a warm welcome, containing fiercely fidgeting with various field-equipment. "Bugger off!" they yelled. "And tell your fellows that this village is well-defended!"

With a sigh Kenshin followed the insistent request and spent the night alone in the near forest.

After all, he considered while leaning on a trunk, his sword propped against his left shoulder, my appearance might not be fortunate for myself - but at least this village-people don't have to fear danger anymore. As long as I'm around, the bandits won't dare to show their faces in this area again.

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Few days later again

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Still wrapped in the blankets, Kenshin was breathing deep and steadily. Neither the monotone drops of the raindrops leaking through the roof nor the loud creaking of the wooden shack disturbed him in his sleep. His face, usually tensed to keep its expressionless mask, was now relaxed and soft. But cautiousness was deeply ingrained, his left hand still clutched the sword.

Nearly bent down, a last loud crack of the fire awoke him. In an instant his right hand reached the hilt of his katana, before he recognized where he was.

A shack, not Kyoto. He tried to calm himself.

-It is more than a year since I've left the Ishin Shishi but still those rare occasions, when I find myself waking up from deep sleep, make me feel vulnerable and careless.

Sleepy he blinked through one of the gaps between the planks. It was already dark outside.

-How long have I slept? I can't even remember a dream... a rare occasion, too.

His clothes were now dry and he quickly put them on. While tying up his hakama he felt a sudden dizziness.

Maybe I should drink some water...

He reached for one of the ceramic bowls, which he had found and put under one of the leaks of the roof earlier. In one gulp he drank it empty and felt the cool rainwater trickling down his throat. Where was the heat he felt coming from? From outside or inside?

He picked up some new firewood and started to reanimate the fire.

-If I've caught a cold, sweating it the best thing to do.

Again he slipped under the blankets near the flames and a little later he felt the first sweatdrops on his forehead. Wiping them off with the back of his hand he felt that his temperature was higher than normal.

-Damn. I got a fever. Nasty summer's storm.

He rummaged in his small baggage, hoping to find those temperature-sinking herbs he'd once collected, but doing so he remembered having used them all to help an ill boy last month (but this, of course, is another story).

-I should probably try to collect some new herbs before my fever runs too high...

But the warm blankets were already too tempting and his eyelids felt so heavy, that he barely could keep them open.

Sleep would be the best, much sleep. By tomorrow morning the fever should've gone away. Then he closed his eyes.

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Instantly he sank into confusing dreams. He saw himself sitting in a shack, a fire in front of him, feeling restless until he remembered why: He still had to collect some herbs for making medicine. But he couldn't move. Something heavy was resting on his shoulder.

It was Tomoe's head. She turned to him and slightly smiled. Her face was very pale. Suddenly he saw her lying on the futon – the place, where they had loved each other just the night before – she was not breathing. She was dead. Her pure white kimono was sparkled with drops of her own blood.

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„No,“ he heavily breathed. Feeling a hand on his shoulder he turned around.

Through the fog in front of his eyes he saw the face of a man – Katsura Kogoro.

“You must come to Kyoto,” he said, a serious expression on his face. His voice sounded strangely unfamiliar.

“No!” Kenshin tried to shake off the hand but again he couldn't move, the blankets seemed like bonds. “Let me here. I don't want to go back to Kyoto. Let me stay in Otsu. Together with her. In Otsu!”

Now the hand was pressing him to the ground. “To Kyoto...,” Katsura's voice whispered. And suddenly another voice stated: “Hitokiri.”

Kenshin felt new waves of heat surging up inside of him.

Sword. Where is my sword!

He couldn't move. He couldn't speak. Give me my sword! He wanted to scream but no other word than a muffled “ord” left his mouth.

A fearful voice answered. „He's searching for his sword.“ Some footsteps. A Pause. A surprised exclamation. „Sakabatou!“

It was so hot. Near him a fire was burning.

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The fire got bigger and bigger. Their house in Otsu was ablaze. Not turning back he left it, slowly waking back towards Kyoto. With every step he felt the familiar cold creeping nearer. Seeking help, his trembling hand clasped the blue scarf around his neck. He still felt the awful cold taking possession of his body – but it couldn't reach his heart anymore.

„Tomoe,“ he reassured himself.

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Without warning everything in front of his eyes changed. He was in Otsu again, summer, lying on the floor and it was boiling hot. His forehead burned.

„Water,“ he cawed and like an angel Tomoe descended beside him, putting a cool cloth on his head. He fumbled for her hand and she winced. “Tomoe, don't go away...”

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“He thinks, I'm his wife!” said a bewildered male voice.

“That's not good,” another voice noticed. Is this Katsuras voice?

“That's my line,” the first voice laughed bitterly. “Do I look that girlish?”

“Baka. I meant that his fever still runs too high.”

Kenshin blinked.

-Fever? Where am I? Who are those men? And where is my sword!

He tried to get up but everything around him seemed to spin fast. He felt a sudden nausea. Someone was kneeling beside him.

“You are save,” he heard Katsuras voice and again he fell back into darkness.

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Kenshin saw the katana in his hand. Saw the horrified faces of his victims, blood gushing out of their bodies like streams of a red river.

The smell brought him on the verge of madness.

A voice in his head cried: more!

Another voice pleaded: never more!

Again Katsura was in front of him. “I need your sword. Can you kill for me?”

Perplexed Kenshin showed him his sakabatou. “I am a wanderer now, Katsura-san. A Rurouni. You know, I vowed never to kill again.”

Katsura stared at him, speechless. "Sakabatou?"

Kenshin tried to nod, his head felt very heavy. "Thus I am... trying to repent...". His tongue felt heavy too. Katsura offered him some water and he drank it greedily.

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His vision was slowly becoming clear again.

-I am not in Otsu. And neither in Kyoto. I am in a shack in the middle of nowhere, hallucinating because of a fever. But someone's definitely here. Is it really...

"Katsura-san?" he asked with a raw voice. No answer.

-Right. Just like I thought, a hallucination.

"Yes, I am here," suddenly someone answered.

Kenshin didn't dare to look up.

-This voice. It's really Katsura! But how... this is impossible... unless...

Slowly Kenshin relaxed.

-I don't hallucinate. I'm dying.

„Katsura-san... quite fitting, isn't it? You brought me to the hell of Kyoto. Now you'll take me to the real one."

"Hell?" The man beside him knelt a bit closer. Kenshin opened his eyes but everything was blurry. Katsura's face seemed to be surprised.

"Where else...," Kenshin muttered. His mouth broke into a wry smile. "I am dying."

He felt Katsura flinch. "Does this make you happy?"

Kenshin barely managed to nod.

"But... haven't you said something about trying to repent a short while ago?"

Katsura's voice followed Kenshin into the darkness.

Repent. How.

-I cannot repair the losses I've caused.

He turned his head, away from Katsura, to face the flames.

-I should burn in hell.

Suddenly the slender figure of Tomoe appeared beside him. And he heard the promise that he'd given her.

-Once the bloodshed's over, I'll find a way to atone for my crimes. I'll find a way to protect the happiness of people without killing.

He heard her soft voice.

-People can change.

The both had changed so much in Otsu. And she'd died to give him a second chance. She'd died so he could fulfil his ideals.

-If I let myself die here, all would have been in vain.

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When Kenshin regained consciousness, his headache was gone. He still felt a little dizzy when he sat himself up, but at least he saw his surroundings clear. Sunlight was shining through the gaps of the shack.

"How are you?" A sudden voice asked and Kenshin turned around.

Behind him near the wall, two sitting men were watching him curiously.

-Dumb or else I would've noticed you sooner, Kenshin thought but instead he answered: "Better, thanks."

The men nodded with contempt. "The medicine worked." Kenshin saw, that one of the men was holding a sword. His sword. Immediately he tensed and narrowed his eyes.

Somehow the man with his sword seemed to notice Kenshin's glare and he got up and handed Kenshin his katana. Eyes softening, Kenshin examined the man. He somehow looked familiar.

„You two... I assume you have helped me?" he asked. Again the men nodded. Kenshin looked towards the other one, who stepped now out of the shadowy corner.

His eyes widened with recognition. It was one of the bandits he encountered a few days ago!

-Knowing that I am Hitokiri Battousai this guys took care of me? And they give me my sword back voluntarily? Puzzled he slowly took his sword out of the still outstretched hand.

After a while the other man, who had – Kenshin now recognized - a strangely resemblance to Katsura Kogoro, spoke again. "You've been very lucky. We were just passing through. Just searching shelter for the night. Though we came through the

door – this hut belongs to my friend here.”

Apologizing, Kenshin bowed. “I didn’t meant to break in.”

“Never mind,” the bandit spoke. “I’ve abandoned this shack months ago, when I joined them...” He paused and looked down. “I’ve burden of debts to the villagers.”

“We wanted to take you to the next village,” the Katsura-similar man continued. “But you’re fever was getting worse and we couldn’t move you to Kyo.”

Surprised, Kenshin asked: “Kyo?”

“Yes, that’s the villages’ name. Well, as I said, we couldn’t move you. And this morning we thought you were a goner. Actually you really wanted to be one.

But now you’re fine again. You’ve slept deep until afternoon.”

The two men prepared for leaving. “We’ve got to go now,” the bandit explained. “We just stayed to be sure everything’s alright until you awake.

We still have a long march before us. My old friend here offered me a Job in one of the seaports. I can work there until I can repay my debts to the villagers. Maybe I can even repair my old house...”

The ex-bandit smiled and followed his friend to the door. “You can stay here until you feel well enough to travel again. It’s not very comfortable, I know, but better than nothing.” He turned.

“Wait,” Kenshin called, still sitting on the ground like a statue wrapped with blankets. “Why... why did you help me?”

The two men looked at each other. Finally the former bandit answered. “A few days ago, when we tried to rob you... It was then when it became clear to me that I had to start a new life. In return it was the minimum to make sure you’ll get the same chance.”

He smiled. „We really need to go now. My name is Mutoshi, and my friends’ name is Keigo.”

Keigo bowed formally.

“And you are...?” Mutoshi asked.

Kenshin looked even more puzzled, if this was possible. “Who I am?” he repeated barely audible.

“Yes!” Mutoshi now laughed. „It would be rude not to introduce yourself to your saviours, ne?”

Kenshin felt a sudden warmth that had nothing to do with his fever. Slowly, he answered.

"Himura. My name is Himura Kenshin."

One last time the men nodded and then they left.

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A little way away from the shack Mutoshi tugged the sleeve of his friend.

"What?" Keigo turned.

"I never thought, than... he ...would be like ... this."

Keigo raised an eyebrow. "Of course, like me you just knew the stories, Mutoshi."

His friend frowned. "I think that we know more about him like the majority of people."

„This could be true," Keigo agreed. "If you hadn't insisted on helping him, we might be as unknowable like them."

"When I entered the shack and saw him there lying in feverish dreams...judging by his appearance and infamous name, I was almost convinced that it would be no shame to let him die. But hearing him mutter all those things...The sakabatou, his wish for redemption... I suddenly knew that it would have been wrong not to help him."

Keigo walked on. "You know," he said over his shoulder, "that no one, except me of course, would agree with you on that subject. Never tell anyone that you saved the Hitokiri Battousai. Someone might actually kill you for that."

„Himura, not Battousai," Mutoshi corrected. Then he scowled. "Doesn't everyone deserve a second chance?"

Keigo shrugged.

„Don't you think, that's somehow... unfair?" Mutoshi asked with bitterness in his voice. "People are unfair," Keigo philosophised. "They just see what they want to see and..."

„That's not, what I mean," he was cut off by the sulking Mutoshi. "Why did he mistake me for his girlfriend! Couldn't I have been the famous Katsura Kogoro? There's no resemblance between him and you at all!"

Keigo laughed. „Guess you make a better lady-love, my friend."

Mutoshi fumed. "Cut it out! I don't look half as girlish as the redhead in the shack!"

"Don't let him hear that, though it's true!"

Chuckling both, they walked on.

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Fortunately Kenshin hadn't overheard their conversation. He was still sitting in the shack, staring at the expired flames. For over a year he's been a rurouni and he had still a long path to go. And though the fire was out and the men gone he could still feel a pleasant warmth within. Slowly he stood up, placed his sakabatou to his side and left the shack the same way he'd entered.

Once outside a breathtaking sunset welcomed him.

The lone wanderer simply stood and contemplated the play of colours. A soft smile played around the corners of his mouth.

-Maybe the last few days weren't this bad, after all.

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Done! This is the second story I tried to write in a language that is not my own. Please tell me if it was worth the effort of translating (it took me hours) and if it's worth writing on.

I liked the Idea of somehow connected oneshots. Every storie is inspired by my personal feelings about a month. For a start I picked out the month number VIII, August. The season is summer. I connect that with: being outside, heat, heavy summer-storms and fever. A cold in the middle of summer is much more severe and dangerous than normal. And I forgot: Hallucination (ever lay too long in the sun?). Of course this is simplified :D There's much more between the words, a general "mood", and I lied, writing that I won't show any character-development... maybe you noticed, that the kenshin I begin with is very cynical and still very much caught in the past... There will be little changes in every chapter. Beware! I'm not posting them in cronological order! Also, the months are not situated in one particual year. (In this story you can guess it though ;))

I feel a little intimidated by all those outstanding wandering-years-stories. I can't recommend all stories here that influenced me (I have faved most of them though) but for this story my main-inspiration-source was "Fear no Evil" by sueb262 (I love the whole concept as well as her writing-style).

Thanks a lot for reading and reviewing!