Summary

Falling down,
falling down.

Shiro kidnaps Chief Commander Keith Kogane to bring down the Garrison and their heinous training methods. After weeks of psychological torment and physical torture, Keith, with one foot in death's door, realizes the sickening reasons behind his kidnapping.

Bottomline, this nursery rhyme is more twisted than you remembered it as a kid, and we find out how Shiro actually lost his arm.
London Bridge is Falling Down

He regards the tattoo masking the rotten flesh of his back. The bathroom light throws a shadow over the design. It unfurls a restless heat across his chest.

_Galaxy Garrison_, it reads. _Chief Commander Kogane_

By trailing his eyes across the mirror and over the ink, he relives the misery of the needle and every tiny punch into his skin as the lines grew thicker and bolder. It covers his neck and reaches down to cup the bottom of his shoulder blades. He’s seen commanders before his time that’ve had worse. Ink that slithered down to the tops of their thighs, portraying the many woes of their military status.

So although Keith’s might not go down in the hall of fame, his back still felt exposed even under three layers of clothing. His tattoo is an oily creature that eternally drowns him in the Garrison’s infamy.

His life is orchestrated by a strict set of rules. He always sleeps with a shirt on, never swims in public, and never leaves the light on when he brings a boyfriend home. He never initiates physical contact in fear that someone will accidentally brush against the raised platform of scars on his back.

Half of him wonders what he’s more embarrassed of, the tattoo or how hard he tried to remove it.

He snaps immediately out of his daze as a knock peppers the door.

“You’re on in five, chief,” a hollow voice outside reminds Keith.

Right. As he buttons up his shirt and shoulders on his jacket, Keith sloppily runs through his speech.

_Thank you for coming this evening…Galaxy Garrison exists to turn young cadets into the next generation of elite astroexplorers…that being said…more rigorous final trials are to be discussed…in the future, should this referendum pass… Once again, thank you to the board and staff…Enjoy the rest of your evening._

Although his mouth robotically spills out his lines, his focus strays to the honored guest of the evening. A Garrison alumni and celebrated pilot. Somewhat of a horror story amongst freshmen cadets.

But to Keith, Takashi was just the boy sitting in that dark, bleeding room all those godless years ago.

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The night goes off without a hitch.

He leans against the bar nursing a double brandy. The music is pulsing, supplying his heart with a beat to follow, and the sweeping lights put hot pressure behind his eyes. He’s been at his perch for a good twenty minutes by now, only granting himself a small sip every now and then. He shouldn’t be drinking at all. A night like this requires sharp concentration. Shiro consoles himself by classifying his drink as an antidote to his nerves.

It’s bordering on 23:00 when he locks onto his target. His staggering heartbeat constricts his chest as if two hearts are exchanging blows to one another inside him. His prey stumbles up to the far end of the bar where another man gives up his seat and buys him a drink.
Pathetic, Shiro thinks.

The commander is much younger than how he imagines when someone says the word “commander”. Shiro’s heart and gut pound with fascination as he drinks in his target. Heavy, solemn brows are offset by a boyish grin that suggests what little optimism the Garrison allowed him. His soot black hair, twisted back into a low knot, has a few strands that still manage to fall into his eyes due to an unfavorably situated cowlick. Next to the geriatric creep who evidently enjoys exploiting young boys, the commander is sitting round-backed at the bar, making himself smaller as he samples his amber colored drink. If Shiro remembers correctly one has to be at least 21 to become Chief Commander. To achieve such a rank, the person has to have graduated from a prestigious military academy, be fluent in NASA terminology, and have connections with national intelligence agencies. He may look like a kid, but Shiro knows he could skin and gut him then ship the remains off to one of Saturn’s fifty-three moons.

The Chief Commander laughs at something the older man says and a goofy grin remains afterwards.

He catches Shiro’s gaze and his face falls. Shiro politely averts his eyes to his drink. When the coast is clear, he turns sideways and looks at him from the corner of his eye. From this angle, it’s impossible not to stare at the geometric patterns of ink that decorate the back of his neck.

It’s also impossible not to notice the older man’s hand steadily hovering over the commander’s drink as his head turns away.

Two women elbow each other out of the way to reach Shiro, but once they do he shushes them away. Another time maybe. He expertly weaves through the crowd as to not draw attention to himself.

As Shiro approaches Keith, the old man excuses himself to the bathroom, as if a lion was approaching a gazelle-filled watering hole.

Though neither of them make direct eye contact, Keith says, “You were staring at me earlier.” Keith’s voice reverberates deep into his bones, weighed down by a charming lilt.

“Yeah. . . I suppose I was. Is that okay?”

Keith looks up now, half drunk and fully bemused. “I’ll allow it.”

“Hey, I really enjoyed your speech,” Shiro comments, including an added touch of sincerity.

“Very inspirational.”

He registers the slight shock on Keith’s face. “You think so?”

“Absolutely,” Shiro assures him. He offers Keith his hand, “I’m Taka—”

“Don’t bother. I know who you are.” He takes his hand anyways. “It’s me who should introduce myself. I’m —”

“Keith Kogane. Youngest Chief Commander in Garrison history,” Shiro boasts like an honor roll parent bumper sticker. “You’re all over the news, kid.”

Keith almost takes a pull from his drink as a deep blush broadens across his face.

“Ah, ah,” Shiro warns. “That shriveled up grape, the one that just left, slipped something in your drink.”
Keith straightens up and nudges the glasses back across the bar with a knuckle. “That’s pretty creepy. What, are you stalking me?”

It sounds to Shiro like Keith isn’t joking around. “No… No, I wanted to congratulate you is all. And it just so happened that I might’ve saved you a heap of trouble tonight.”

*You’re a sick bastard,* Shiro thinks to himself. If only the commander could’ve known what was about to happen to him. *Sick. Bastard.*

A beat passes between them as Keith watches Shiro, one eyebrow cocked.

“You’ve congratulated me already,” Keith adds hotly. “So what’s next?”

Shiro was losing his orchestrated grip on the situation so he quickly improvised. “Dancing.” He laughs nervously to himself. “I meant to come over here to ask if you wanted to dance.”

The alcohol Keith had consumed thus far had deteriorated his guard, making him a shade of fearlessness that only piloting an interstellar spacecraft could do.

Who’d say no to Takashi Shirogane? He had his pick of anyone in the room, and Keith felt like he’d won the lottery.

“I feel like you’ve never been turned down before, so why start now,” he responds.

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It was him. He was back at the Garrison. Keith never thought he’d live to see the day. He hadn’t seen Takashi since. . . But it didn’t matter anyway. Keith thought Takashi wouldn’t remember his face, let alone what happened that one night. And sure enough as he shouldered up to the bar, he introduced himself as a stranger.

Keith didn’t know what he was hoping for.

But it wasn’t this.

Before he knows it, he’s leading Takashi to the dance floor where visibility is questionable and morals even more so. The music is syrupy and heavy. It’s a song that makes anything feel possible, one that silently grants permission to do just about anything. Keith’s drunken nerves get the best of him as his hands grow their own consciousness and find their home on Takashi’s hips. Keith looks up at him for a sign of approval.

Would he remember Keith’s touch?

Takashi’s mouth moves, phantom words dribbling out. Keith points to his ears so Takashi leans down, his stubbled cheek rasping past Keith’s. His breath tickles his ear and stirs something deep within him. His heart pounds, empty as a beating drum.

“I don’t mind.”

Keith presses close to Takashi until their chests are flush together. Oh, how many times he’s played this scene in his head! Everyday for six years, Keith has felt Takashi’s fingertips in his dreams, the tissue ridge of his facial scar, the ocean-green veins of his arm. And here they stand, rib cages lining up and locking together. A zipper of heartbeats and hitched breaths. All at once, the space between them is too much and too little. A stout blonde woman sways alongside Keith, trying to chisel her way into Keith’s arms. Takashi plants a firm hand on the back of Keith’s neck, locking her out of all
potential prospects of entry. She nods apologetically as Takashi offers her a smile.

Keith doesn’t notice this, though. His eyes close and his head lolls back, the beat reaching in and commanding his body. Something cold grazes his chin and his first thought is that he must be drooling.

*Dying would be less painful than this,* Keith thinks.

But the coolness isn’t spit. It’s Takashi’s robotic prosthetic, his thumb and forefinger holding Keith’s chin in place. He tilts it up, and before Keith’s brain can catch up with his body, Takashi’s kissing him like it’s his day job. There’s no rhyme or reason to it. His tongue slides freely into Keith’s mouth, not even knocking to enter, simply charismatically distracting the doorman, stealing the keys, and letting himself in.

A robbery in broad daylight.

Keith’s body must remember every detail. By the end of the night he should be able to write an essay on how Takashi’s eyes reflect the gleams and glows of the dance floor. He needs to remember Shiro’s chapped lips, the fine cotton of his dress shirt. It’s nothing short of muscle memory when Keith’s hand coasts up him arm where it settles on the nape of his neck.

There’s no telling if it was the alcohol or the pill that Takashi licked into Keith’s mouth that made him start to melt. He drooped against Takashi, his fingertips blazing hot on Takashi’s hips. Keith had never been kissed like this before. Like he was the first ray of sun after a cold night.

A knee comes between his legs, supporting his body as he falls.

He falls, he falls, he falls. The floor bottoms out, the music is suffocated, and the hot breath on his face turns into short gasps of physical exertion. There are no lights, then suddenly, like a sharp smack to the face, light floods in past his eye lids and jolts his brain. Keith senses a faint awareness of his blanched face staring back at him in a mirror and the tang of lemon urinal cakes and soap scum.

Cold air cuts his skin. The heels of his shoes bite into the tile, and he halfheartedly pulls against whoever is dragging him into one of the stalls. There’s a struggle trying to fit both of them into one stall, and Keith half squeaks, half moans as someone jerks down his pants.

For the first time in his life, he allows his mind to wander into unmarked territory. He lets it stray into the cavity that everyone has, the one that collects hideous fantasies and dark desires.

Keith trips as the fabric pools around his ankles. He hits the back of his head square on the stall door, knocking him out.

The last thing he remembers is the cool tile beneath his cheek, and the hot tears waiting to spring from his eyes.
It starts to snow two hours into the drive. Shiro grips the steering wheel, white-knuckled and squinting through the fat snowflakes slicing past the headlights. His focus wanders, pitching the truck across a patch of black ice. Shiro manages to straighten out the wheel before popping a capsule into his mouth and washing it down with a thermos half full of cold coffee.

The damn truck’s heater constantly cuts in and out, especially now that it was winter. Every five minutes or so, Shiro risks another bout with the slippery roads to remove his left hand from the wheel where he sticks it under his jacket, flannel, shirt, and into the crook of his armpit.

By the time Shiro makes it to the farmhouse, it’s four in the morning. The sky is a dirty grey. He leaves the boy in the backseat of the truck while he goes to unlock the house. Even before he makes it to the front porch he can see that something punched a hole through the kitchen window. Inside there’s a small accumulation of snow on the window sill and blanketed over the counters. Before he checks around for the animal that did this, he fetches a piece of plywood from the back shed and fixes it over the window. The kitchen is now bleaker than it was before, any natural light now blotted out of existence.

Everything (sans window) is just how he left it. Kettle on the stove, books piled on the kitchen table, and office locked. Shiro takes a breath at the top of the stairs leading to the basement. He steadies himself with a shaky hand on the door knob before his descent.

He tries not to squint when he makes it to the bottom step. It’s so cold down here that his eyes ache. The bare concrete floor with its mysterious chalky residue, the curbside couch pushed up against the wall, the rust bitten bathroom. And the cell.

It’d taken him a week to scrape up the supplies and another week to build it. 6 x 6, floor to ceiling. A thin mattress with its cast-iron headboard is only thing in the cell. Shiro doesn’t like looking at it for too long. This is a horror story scene where a killer tortures a victim for information that they don’t know. A psychopath painted this landscape, not him.

He quickly switches on the heat, gas, and water and bolts back up the staircase.

Δ Δ Δ

Keith’s cottonmouth is unbearable. He had a hallucination that a swarm of moths was stuck in his throat, that his lips had been sown shut entirely.

The second symptom that strikes him is the cold that hollows out his bones and buries itself inside. He’s about to give in to his tooth-crunching headache when he feels the cold metal biting into his wrist. The place where it meets his flesh turns white and bloodless. It feels… It feels almost like — his hand. Who’s hand felt like that? So cold?

Keith jerks awake so violently he strains something in his arm. One hand is handcuffed to a bed. In a basement. But the fear doesn’t set in right away. His brain is still sorting through his surroundings. When the fear does come for him, though, he wants to weep instead of scream. How could he have been so blissfully unaware just moments before?

He wants to go back to sleep and wills himself to be dragged back under. But the room is so cold and the air so thin. All he has on is a T-shirt and sweatpants; and no socks nor underpants he comes to find.
As a tear trails down his face, he purposefully bangs his head against the iron headboard. You’d think the bed would squeak across the floor from the forces behind the bashes, but the bed is bolted to the floor.

_Idiot. Idiot!_ he thinks.

He knew a target would be slapped on his back with wet red paint as soon as the referendum was announced. The Garrison’s training methods and policies aren’t exactly widely accepted. But they guarantee results, and that was the most important thing. The Garrison churned out more A-class fighter pilots than any other flight academy on the northeastern sea board. So if anyone had beef with the academy, Keith would receive the brunt of it.

But he already _knew_ that. Why wasn’t he more careful? He runs through the prior night, starting with the charity dinner. The speech, the club, the drinks.

And Takashi.

Oh, Takashi. His name alone rains buckets of misery down on Keith. He lies sopping wet on the bed, closes his eyes, and wades through the memories.

There’d been countless stories of Takashi, first of his class and even more popular with his fellow cadets. But Keith knew only of one. It’s the only one he’d ever be able to tell.

He’d been so possessive and naive as a kid, that when he found Takashi in his dorm that one night, he did what no sane person would’ve done. He closed the door behind him and didn’t call for help.

Keith had been a freshman, Takashi a graduating senior. But all that mattered to Keith was that his moment had arrived. Takashi would finally know his name.

However, now, as the cold seeps down into his porous bones, cursing his own existence, Keith wishes he would’ve left Takashi there to die.

Δ Δ Δ

Shiro wakes to the sound of broken bones. The shattering of glass and the splintering of wood. He lifts his head and stiff neck off the kitchen table where he’d dozed off reading a newspaper that he wasn’t even sure was from this decade. There are no clocks in the cabin, only his phone and watch. It’s almost noon.

The noise starts again as Shiro fumbles around for the keys to the basement. His hands aren’t his own. They fidget and quiver as he tries the lock. Even his prosthetic betrays him by freezing up. He takes one step at a time, but when what sounds like a jackhammer starts up, he practically flies down the stairs.

Keith’s awake alright. Even though his eyes are squeezed shut in concentration, he heaves the back of his head against the headboard with what appears to be strenuous effort.

“Hey!” Shiro shouts.

Keith’s entire body twitches with such a start that Shiro thinks he’s about to cry. He looks like a startled child, but what spews from his mouth is the bubbly fires of hell.

“What the actual fuck, Takashi? What the _fuck_ am I doing here?” Keith spits.

Shiro stares emptily at the blood spatters staining the white sheets. It almost looks black.
“Answer me!”

“I better not catch you doing that again,” Shiro responds with a tiresome drag to his words.

Something snaps inside Keith, and a spark lights up his dark eyes. “What? This?”

He snaps his head forward then back in an effortless motion, and Shiro mindlessly dashes to the bars.

“Stop it!”

Keith doesn’t. His hair is so wild and dark that Shiro can’t see the gash that is starting to open on Keith’s skull. Even Shiro doesn’t have the strength in him to willingly inflict such pain on himself.


“Why. Should. I,” Keith says through clamped teeth between each strike.

Shiro almost lets his voice slip into desperateness, but the Shiro running this psychopathic freak show holds his reigns tightly. He takes the gun from the waistband of his jeans and clicks off the safety.

The sound automatically registers with Keith as he stops stone cold.

“That’s what I thought.”

Keith scoots up to a sitting position and regards Shiro.

“What do you want from me?”

It’s a hair shy of a whisper. Heavy phlegm and grief hinder the poison in Keith’s words

“Think you’re ready for the answer?” Shiro asks, lowering the gun.

“Cut it out.”

Shiro holds his quivering gaze. “I really haven’t decided yet. It all depends on your cooperation.” Keith cocks an eyebrow. “I’m either going to save you,” Shiro says, searching his pockets for something, “or do terrible things to you on camera.”

A dark shadow passes through Keith’s hollow eyes. He pulls his knees up to his chest and tries to squeeze warmth into his chest. He dully thinks to himself, *I’m going to die down here. In the dark, in the cold.* He cuts off eye contact with Shiro and tucks his chin to his chest.

“I haven’t raped you.”

Keith’s wet face snaps up. “What?”

Shiro pulls out a fold-up chair from behind the sofa and drops it open with a loud clash in front of the bars. He takes a seat and studies the creature in the cage. Keith’s chest rises and shudders as it falls with shallow breaths. Dark, sleepless circles stain his eyes.

“You know exactly why you’re here.”

Keith lets the cold settle around him. He knows *why* he was here, but he doesn’t know where *here* was.
“You ever heard of a Judas goat?” Keith cocks his head. “It’s trained to lead animals to the slaughterhouse and calm them down. It’s always spared while the others die.” Shiro leans forward, elbows on knees. “You’re a Judas goat, Keith.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Oh my god,” Shiro sighs. “You have no idea, do you? Fuck.”

“Know what?”

“Those manned search missions to Kerberos that you keep launching? You never found it odd how the Garrison keeps sending cadets there and they never return?” Keith still watches him, trying to map out the story he was hearing. “It’s a suicide mission, Keith. They collect data, reap the ion mines, and send ions back to the Garrison so they can get rich. And when the cadets try to break through Earth’s atmosphere, they burn up on re-entry. . . And the Garrison knows and still sends them.”

“What, no. There’s a colony set up on Kerberos. That’s where they are,” Keith testifies.

“Ever hear from them?”

“No, but we get their data.”

Shiro raises his eyebrows, and leans back. “Judas goat.”

“I don’t believe you. And even if I did, you don’t have access to that information.”

“You think I spent four years at the Garrison twiddling my thumbs?”

Keith sits up straighter. “I - I still don’t…” He begins to tally up all the cadets he’s sent since his position as Chief Commander. Eighty-four? Eighty-five? “No.”

“Hoh. And that’s not even the best part,” Shiro says. “Your Senior Commander is about to start a nuclear war with Japan over Kerberos’s ion mines.”

“Sendak?”

Shiro nods tersely. “So do you understand why you’re here now?”

Keith sharply looks up at him, turmoil beyond respite in his eyes. He hisses, “Where is here?”

He thinks about it for a moment. “A little bit bit southeast of godforsaken nowhere.” Keith shakes his head. “Well, you’ll find out soon enough.”

Keith is still falling apart inside on behalf of the homicides he’s already committed. Shiro rises and unlocks the door. Keith shrinks back on the bed.

“Don’t you fucking touch me.”

“Come on, up and at ‘em.”

Shiro reaches for his arm, but Keith hooks the heel of his foot under his jaw. Shiro stumbles back a few paces, bringing a hand to his face. He works his jaw back and forth with a wicked smile. With the speed of a striking snake, Shiro’s hand is around Keith’s throat. Keith spits in his face and in return Shiro pushes his thumb into his windpipe so that Keith’s back arcs over the iron headboard.
“Next time you do that I’ll shove a knife up your ass.” Keith’s lips turn purple. “Now work with me.”

Keith goes limp and waits in a shocked silence while Shiro unlocks his handcuff.

“Where are you taking me?”

“Bathroom. I know you have to go because you’ve been out cold for a day.”

He sees the opportunity of escape manifest before him. He allows himself to be led out of the cell and into the bathroom. Both he and Shiro stare at the toilet.

“Well?” Shiro raises his eyebrows.

“A little privacy would be nice. What kind of hostage hellhole are you running here?”

“I watch you or you don’t go at all. And I suggest you go now, because I’ll be gone or a few hours.”

Keith sidles up to the toilet, his back to Shiro, shoulders curled in. It takes an eternity to finally start, but once he does, all he can manage is a weak stream.

He read once that if you’re ever being attacked or kidnapped, more often than not if the victim pisses or defecates on the assailant, then they’ll let go, too disgusted to do anything else.

He’s thinking of this when Shiro puts a hand to his back, over his scars.

In that instant, no longer than the blink of an eye, Keith slips past Shiro and bolts for the stairs. But Shiro’s quick on his feet and spins on his heels to catch him. Keith’s bare feet slap up the stairs, but when he reaches the door it refuses to budge. His heart shatters into millions of technicolor shards.

By then, Shiro has his hand wrapped around Keith’s ankle and is dragging him back down. Keith claws at the handrail and then on the stairs themselves.

“Please! No! Please,” Keith begs.

Shiro stands at the threshold of the cell, Keith’s shirt tangled in his hands.

“If you’re smart you’ll never try that again,” Shiro warns.

With a stony, far away look in his eyes, Shiro attaches Keith back to the bed and theatrically slams the door shut.

“You know,” Shiro starts, “for a second there, a part of me was thinking it’d be weeks until your first escape attempt. But, boy, you just slammed right out of the starting gates, didn’t you?”

Keith curls in on himself, humiliated for the first time in a long time.

“And now that part of me is saying that you won’t eat until Wednesday.”

It was Sunday.

Before he’s about to ascend the stairs however, he pauses for a moment.

“Here.” Shiro throws something through the bars and it lands at Keith’s feet on the bed. Two black wrist sweatbands in a plastic package. “Put one under the handcuff. Won’t hurt as much.”

And with that, he climbs the stairs, hits the light switch, and noisily locks the door. Keith sits in total
darkness for what feels like weeks.

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