

Life As a Fairy Tale

Sophia Considine

PART 1¹

*"The fear of loss came up today, and GOD, I miss [my brother]. I can't believe he's gone... I looked up [his] obituary and started crying. I miss him so much. His laugh, his smile, laying in bed with him... A lot of times, I don't let myself dwell on his passing, but I really need to sometimes."*²

Once upon a time, there was a young girl named Sage, who grew up in a loving family with her parents and older brother, Sion. They were a happy family who played games, ate meals, and traveled together. Sion was mute and 16 years older than Sage, but despite their differences, they were two peas in a pod. They spent much of their time watching movies and listening to music together—laughing, crying, hugging, and arguing only about their favorite characters. In sign language, of course. After school, Sion would be reading when Sage got home from school and leaned on his shoulder to fall asleep. After dinner, Sage would pick a movie to watch, and Sion would pick a music album to listen to.

The day after Sage's 10th birthday, she came home singing as she walked through the door but stopped after seeing an empty couch.

"Sion?"

Sage wandered over to the couch and saw an open book on the ground. She walked quickly over to the kitchen.

"Sion? Where are you? I watched a new movie today that you would *love*."

¹ Cue "Wave" by ATEEZ (vibes of paragraph one):
<https://youtu.be/FIlnyEWWW-s?si=VrDVxGVbHxifd3VB>

² *Cinder* by Marissa Meyer uses a quote from the original "Cinderella" at the beginning of each section. These quotes are from Sophia Considine's diary entries.

She explored the kitchen and laundry room before moving to his bedroom door. She knocked.

“Hey, are you okay? Do our secret knock if you’re okay.”

She waited three long seconds before bursting through the door to see a large, transparent figure with long fingers and a ragged dress longer than its legs throwing a knife. As the knife left the Figure’s fingertips, it solidified and flew into Sion’s chest, who let out a short exhale and collapsed. He slumped against his dresser, head lolling to the side³.

“No!” Sage’s scream tore from her throat as she ran toward Sion, but the Figure slid in front of Sage, swallowing her into itself.

The room was quiet, with a messy bed, scattered papers, a quiet bookshelf, and Sion’s bloody body, limp against the dresser—eyes open.

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³ The trope of the death of a family member is frequently used in fairy tales, so it made an appearance here. Although it’s usually seen in a parent’s death, it made more sense to make Sage’s brother die because of the bond they share.

PART 2

"There are so many times that I remind myself to take it one step at a time, but sometimes it feels like that's not fast enough... I say 'one step at a time' but then I fall behind and the one step isn't fast enough, and I fall behind two steps again... I'm trying to stay positive, but it feels like everything is falling apart."

During the past eight years, Sage grew up in a large and empty castle⁴. Instead of the dresses she'd wear in childhood, she now wore baggy clothes made from drapery in the castle. Instead of her loving family, she had the dark Figure. The Figure was a cloaked mass made of shadows and ice—its face blurred with cold breaths flowing off its body. The Figure used its ice powers to create blustering storms and mazes outside its castle, keeping everyone out. After the Figure took Sage, it kept her hidden and trapped in the large castle. Sage only saw the world from the windows, illusion from the Figure, and the books she read.

Sage spent hours missing her family, hours crying, and hours reliving her brother's death. Later, she spent hours reading, hours watching through windows, and hours watching the illusions. Never speaking. There was no one to talk to. She spent hours wandering the castle, and hours writing. Eventually, she sang softly—the songs she remembered Sion sharing with her, the songs she shared with him, and the song requests her parents made while making dinner.

"You have a lovely voice, my dear," the Figure said, startling Sage. "Just like me."

Sage went quiet.

"No need to stop, my dear." The Figure caressed Sage's shoulders, which tensed under the touch. The Figure's transparent hands became solid ice as they made contact with Sage's skin. "Sing for me."

Sage kept her mouth firmly shut, wringing her hands in her lap.

⁴ A common fairy tale trope is including a castle of either the hero or the villain. Here, it is similar in use to *Beauty and the Beast* and *Rapunzel*.

The Figure leaned down, lips near Sage's ear, and whispered in a raspy voice, "Don't test me, girl. *Sing.*"

Like a wind blowing through her lips, lyrics were forced from Sage's throat, and tears formed in her eyes.

"Lazy afternoons~ Every day is a new journey. Smiles and laughs with you, nothing else feels better to me⁵." Tears rushed down her cheeks and into her mouth, but she couldn't stop singing. The Figure's icy touch made Sage shiver.

"I just wanna be here by your side, like time's held still. Let's not worry, no need to hurry. I'll always be right here, when you need me." Sage's voice cracked before she ripped her body away from the Figure, running from the room.

"Really," the Figure admonished as it glided across the room, following Sage. "How hard is it to sing one song? After I've kept you safe for all these years?"

Sage clutched her book tightly to her chest and kept running—out of the room, down the corridor, and down one step of the main staircase, when the Figure appeared and snatched her wrist. The book fell and tumbled down the stairs.

"Only one step? You have to be faster than that, my dear."

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⁵ "Sunlight" by Jay Chang, one of Sion's favorite songs: [Sunlight \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

PART 3

"I ate breakfast today, but I decided to just have applesauce for the rest of the day. And I'm thinking about how I won't eat much except for rice cakes and veggies when I go home... That whole 'barely eating' plan lasted two days, and I was nauseous, and my stomach was hurting the whole time."

Sage was locked in one room in the tallest tower of the castle after running away from the Figure, refusing to sing. The room wasn't her usual bedroom—there were no windows, a dusty rug rolled up in the corner, a child-size table and chair, and a large mirror with an ornate, golden frame. The Figure still had no plans to let her out, but it would slip her food and water, and sometimes a new book.

"Run away like a dog, be treated like one." The Figure spoke these words every time it brought her something. "It's your fault. You're so stubborn."

Day one, Sage read a book, slept on the rug, hummed a song, ate the food and drank the water.

Day six, Sage looked in the mirror, slept on the rug, ate some food, drank the water, and looked in the mirror.

Day 12, Sage looked in the mirror, looked in the mirror, looked in the mirror, drank some water, and looked in the mirror.

Looking in the mirror after 13 days of solitude, Sage's sight blurred. She ran her fingers through hair, wincing when they caught a knot.

"Ow," she croaked. Her hands began shaking. She attempted to stand but fell to the ground, scraping her hands on the rough, stone floor.

Sage raised her head as if it held the weight of the world, and made eye contact with herself in the mirror. For a moment, she caught a glimpse of Sion in the reflection.

“Sion?” Sage asked, frantically searching the room with her eyes, but he was only in the mirror. She dragged herself across the floor with her remaining energy. Her fingertips gently touched the mirror’s surface. “Sion.”

Then, he signed her name. ‘*Sage.*’

With that, Sage burst into tears.

‘*Please don’t cry,*’ Sion signed hurriedly. ‘*I’m right here.*’

“But—but you *died*. I saw you die!” Sage said, attempting to sign with weak hands.

‘*I don’t exactly know what happened, but I am dead.*’ He kneeled down. ‘*Sage, you need to get up. You need to fight. Remember all the songs we’d listen to while sword fighting with sticks?*’

Sage let out a broken laugh that sounded more like a hiccup. “Yeah. ‘Wonderland’⁶ was the best.”

‘*Yes! Come on, you can do this.*’

“I don’t think I can,” Sage said.

Sion touched the glass before signing, ‘*I know you can—you have to. There is both danger and hope coming. You need to be ready for them.*’

“I’ll try, but—” She took a deep breath and used the table to steady herself as she stood up, watching the world tilt and blur. “Sion, what do you mean danger? I can barely stand, much less defend myself.”

From behind the locked door, they heard the clang of keys.

‘*I don’t have time to explain. Stay strong, and remember—I love you.*’

“I love—” Sage couldn’t finish before Sion disappeared from the mirror, and the Figure opened the door.

⁶ “Wonderland” by ATEEZ: https://youtu.be/Z_BhMhZpAug?si=6EVKN_Pr7B34YOLh

“Hello, dear. Are you ready to do as I say?”

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PART 4

“I want, in some ways, to forget [my ex] and our relationship. I know it taught me things and changed me since I was with him for so long, but I just feel so broken because of it. I wish I didn’t have the broken impact from his words and actions throughout our relationship. I want to date, and be comfortable with myself, and to know what I want out of life and feel like I can get it.”

“Try a different one, dear.” The Figure grabbed Sage’s wrist with its icy grasp and flung her behind the folding screen. It snapped its fingers and a dress hung over the top of the screen.

“That one.”

Sage shakily changed into the new dress, still confused by the dramatic change in the Figure’s demeanor. She stepped out from behind the folding screen and onto the platform.

“This one suits you well, dear.”

Sage fidgeted with the dress and her hands. The dress was light green with a solid underskirt and light tulle overtop, both fabrics far too long. Without the platform allowing the fabric to sit prettily, it would be bunched up around Sage’s feet. The sleeves flowed down past her hands, and the open back and a-little-too-deep sweetheart neckline were decorated by roses and vines. The Figure blew Sage’s hair and froze it in place with icicle pins and snowflakes. It slapped her cheeks with wind to force a blush. When a tear slid from Sage’s eye, the Figure quickly froze it to her face.

“You look perfect.”⁷

⁷ “Part of this obsession over perfect appearance comes into play in traditional and contemporary fairy tales, as Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and even Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* must be dressed up to

Sage took a deep breath and asked, “What is this for?”

The Figure rose up behind Sage, becoming a looming presence as Sage gazed into the mirror.

“Your sale, of course.”

Sage faced the Figure, stumbling over the dress. “My *what?*”

“I have been preparing you to be perfect for all your possible suitors. They have a plethora of castles, money, and music. They’ll love how you look, which is enough. ‘Love at first sight’ and everything.”

“No! That’s not love.” Sage turned to run, but the Figure’s tendrils of shadow slithered around her wrists and mouth.

“Now, that’s no way to behave. Especially when these men are looking for, well, a *quieter* woman.”

Sage’s face paled, no matter how much blush the Figure had blasted into her cheeks. A knock sounded at the castle doors.

“I will not,” Sage stated.

“You will, dear,” the Figure spoke softly before the tendrils of its smoky body lifted Sage and set her on the platform again, holding her feet down, her hands by her sides, and her mouth shut.

go to the ball. Sleeping Beauty is a passive, docile figure, and while we often figure Cinderella to be as well, she is, in fact, quite rebellious. Cinderella defies the totalitarian system of her life... There, at the ball, through the use of fashion, the dress she was *not* supposed to have or wear, she gains the attention of the prince,” (Montz 114).

Meanwhile, *Cinder* reinvents this trope by making Cinder a cyborg, and her outfit to the ball a wrinkled silk dress, grease-smudged silk gloves and wet boots (Meyers 324, 325, 329), showing that the “perfect appearance” trope is not necessary to fulfill the prophecy of the lead woman in a fairy tale. This section shows the “perfect appearance” as seen from an outside perspective, but Sage herself feels uncomfortable and hates the appearance. I interpret this part as bringing the cyborg nature to Sage’s inner appearance and the typical “perfect appearance” trope to Sage’s outside appearance.

One by one, suitor after suitor entered the room, their intense gazes settled on Sage's form.

The first three suitors stepped forward, complimenting Sage's outfit and body.

The fourth suitor was about to speak when the window shattered.

A man stood tall holding a sword—the sun shining behind him like a halo, shadowing his face. “Leave the lady alone.”

The Figure flicked wind toward the man, causing him to stumble, but he dodged and moved forward, slicing through the Figure's shadow form. The Figure grabbed the man's wrist, and once the man noticed the solid ice hand, he grabbed it and swung the sword, chopping off the Figure's hand. The Figure screamed, frustrated. The man put his hand on the Figure's chest area and stabbed. The Figure froze in place, only to shatter into icicles a moment later. The man carried Sage bridal-style, and took her upon his white horse, riding into the forest.

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PART 5

"Really high s- - - - - ideation and self h- - -... felt overwhelmed by feelings and life. Relationships felt fake...

'let go of your worries, [they say]...'"

The man was Prince Edward, the prince of a nearby kingdom. Sage, against her better judgment, fell for him quickly. It started out as a beautiful relationship, with Prince Edward complimenting Sage and lifting her up. She learned new things about herself and her identity.

But after a while, Sage realized that he wasn't taking care of himself, nor his kingdom. He sat around and lamented; he wrote poems for her; he told her about plans for the kingdom but never implemented them. Eventually, his lack of care transformed into hurting Sage.

"You never help out," "Do you even love me?" "Well, I can't do everything around here," "You're such a hermit," "I wasn't yelling *at* you, just *around* you. There's a difference. Let it go."

Words escalated to physical. A light slap on the arm when he was annoyed progressed to slaps across the face and holding her wrist hard enough to leave bruises. A loving touch on her chin for a kiss progressed to gripping her jaw tight enough to force her. "*I love you*" turned into "*I love your body.*"

One autumn day, Sage sneaked out to the wishing well at the edge of the forest and threw in her engagement ring, saying, "Please help me escape." A single tear fell into the well, bringing forth Sion's reflection.

"Sion!" Sage exclaimed.

'Sage,' he signed, *'I know how much you've been hurting. Do you remember what I said about hope and danger?'*

"Why didn't you warn me specifically?" Sage asked while signing.

'We ran out of time,' Sion signed. 'But I can help, now. With one bite of this apple, you will sleep until true love wakes you.'

"True love? But—"

'That's me,' Sion signed with a smile. He let go of the apple, and it floated to the surface.

Sage picked it up.

'I need to tell you what really happened the day you found me,' Sion signed.

"But, I saw what happened. What do you—"

'No, you didn't. Just listen. I died hours before you returned from school. Some guy came to rob us, and I was home alone. He stabbed me so he wouldn't get caught—kind of stupid. You saw me lying dead on the floor, and your mind conjured reasoning from your trauma and fear. That came to life as the Figure who imprisoned you.'

"You mean..." Sage whispered, "... it was all in my head?"

'Not all of it. Just how you saw me die. Your mind literally brought the Figure to life.'

"Oh my goodness."

'Now, take a bite of the apple, and throw it back in the well. I'll take it away, so Edward and the kingdom will think you're dead.'

Sage took a bite and dropped.

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PART 6⁸

“Update: I like falafel, my professor told me I’m a really good student, I’m learning more about the menu at work, and I’m in a good mood today. I’m gonna SLAY my homework. 화이팅?!”

Once upon a time, there was a woman named Sage, who bested her trauma and fear, faked her death, and found a home on the sea. She wore baggy black pants, leather boots, an off-white button-up, and a black corset around her waist as she led her pirate crew of eight.¹⁰ They sailed the seven seas with hope in their hearts, freedom in their spirits, and songs in their lungs. These women found Sage right when she needed help to escape the prince, and they quickly became a family of fugitives, never leaving another behind. And as Sage stood at the wheel of the ship, she thought of Sion and sang:

“We can be whatever we want, just follow us. Raise your hands up high. You and me, under these burning lights, to the bright place.”¹¹

⁸ Cue “Pirate King” by ATEEZ: [ATEEZ\(에이티즈\) - '해적왕\(Pirate King\)' Official MV \(Performance ver.\) \(youtube.com\)](#)

⁹ Korean, pronounced ‘hwa-ee-ting,’ means “fighting” in English. Used as an expression similar to, “you/I got this!” “let’s do it!” or “good luck!”

¹⁰ The outfit and eight members of the crew is inspired by ATEEZ’s performance of “Wonderland” on the show “Kingdom: Legendary War” [\[풀버전\] ♪ Symphony No.9 “From The Wonderland” - 에이티즈\(ATEEZ\) \(youtube.com\)](#)

¹¹ English translation of the pre-chorus for “Pirate King” by ATEEZ (translation by: [해적왕 \(Pirate King\) \[English Translation\] – ATEEZ | Genius Lyrics](#))