*UPDATE* HA. Hahaha. Ha. I wrote this when MTP was canceled a few years ago, before it was brought back, and then canceled again. I now have the privileged to know some of the performers and to have worked with them, so this story is hilarious to me now. I'm not going to continue it, but I still like the premise I started with. Much love and respect to all who inspired this, and may they forgive me for being the inspiration before I knew them! Nobody out me to the performers, there's a couple from whom I'd never hear the end of it.... And if you're a Disney local, keep giving love to them in DTD, Tomorrowland Terrace, and at their independent gigs. Int. fans, please give the former MTP crew your love. Their independent music and talents are really something worthy of that former Disney magic.

This story was written as a homage to the band ending the first time around and looks at the performers behind the stage. It was written in good humor, with much love, is completely fictitious, and in no way realistically represents the performers (oh my god they'd kill me). Take a look if you'd like!
Smoke filled out from standing room to backstage, tech crew working quickly to prep the mic, lights, and amps. People murmured in the crowd and shifted unsteadily, chatting amongst themselves. Most everyone knew the allusive singer who’d come to perform. It was a cult fandom, searching facebook links and refreshing feeds for news of this particular singer’s whereabouts. One girl in particular did not know what she was in for. There was always someone dragged to an event not knowing the artist. Isn’t it the way things are? The best moments in life are discovered accidentally, after all.

She waited patiently, in a puffy-sleeved design T with a haphazard black vest thrown over, amid punk rockers and hipsters and Abercrombie wannabes. In an attempt to fit in, perhaps hoping to meet someone. Though she nervously shifted her weight from foot to foot. Excited by the prospect of having a night out, trepidation lingered in her mind at how much fun she would actually have there. Her friend had dragged her along for a ‘fun night with her favorite band’ and so that’s what she was ready for. There was a platform with cds and shirts for sale in the back, so that seemed promising.

No sooner had she noted their early arrival and the emptiness of the venue, however that the room filled in, pushing her against the stage. Her first taste of redbull pounding in her veins. She had no idea how wild the night would become, with fans pushing her painfully against one another…. Her eyes watched the techies, noticing their checks and signals. Remembering when she was an actress watching her girlfriend make the same motions from the wings of their theater. It was comforting enough. The lights went down. The curtains opened.

Out stepped a slim, tall man whose confidence made him seem larger than life in that moment. Slanted eyes were made prominent by a cattycorner mole off his left cheek. Black jeans pulled tight across his hips and a David Bowie tour shirt hung around his waist. He gripped the microphone stand, closed his eyes, breathed in the smoke and began to sing. A deep, rich baritone that drifted into Adam Lambertesque high trills when called for. He left her breathless and entranced, the crowd dipping and thrumming with the infectious lyrics. She could swear she knew every word despite not having heard a note before.

As the song progressed he swiveled his hips and bent to and fro, owning the stage with every motion, the words belonging to him. The room belonged, rightfully, to him. When his eyes were open, they were roving the walls, but in a way that made him seem attentive to each and every fan. And his mouth was always smiling.

When the last song ended, she jumped and clapped and cheered with the rest of them.

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Cole walked out of the coffee shop, his hands comfortably rested in pockets. His hair was rumpled from pulling his fingers through the strands one time too many and his eyes remained downcast. A crumpled up casting call peeked out of his messenger bag, well read and pondered over. It had been two months since his last gig, and finding a good vocalist position in LA proved, well, cutthroat. It wasn't that his performance was lacking. Hardly. In fact most reviewers wrote him glowing articles and shows sold out. But how do you use that to your advantage when the same goes for every upcoming young rocker in LA? Cole wiped the sweat from his brow and took a moment to sigh at the bustling city street. Especially, he thought to himself, in a society where a pleasing face can earn you more than a strong core and measured voice. At that his eyes glinted and he rubbed his cheek to remove some dust from the edge of his eye. Though he certainly had both looks and talent, or so he was told… his inner voice muttered.

So he found himself scouring message boards and postings along Temple and Main in the dry evening air as he had for weeks. Hot for May, even by California standards. News of a record
drought showed prominent on every news station. As he made his rounds, he noted that some flyers were ripped apart and most had all their info tabs torn off. It was discouraging, to say the least, to see such visible evidence that you’re only one among the many.

Cole hummed to himself as he moved on. Couples kissed under the palm trees, ignorant of his trials. A taxi blared his horn at a pedestrian as a cop pulled over a speeding Honda. Something was always happening in LA. But someone hiring would see his potential, he decided. If he could just find the right address and forge on.

It wasn’t just local postings he sought, of course. His longtime friend helped in finding whatever was listed online. Cole didn’t use his laptop for much more than writing songs. If he wanted to be social, he found dank bars and indie gigs to cozy up in and make conversation the traditional way. Not chatrooms or blogs, not there was anything wrong with those. That’s just the kind of guy he was. Currently, the kind of guy without a job or any prospects. He grunted and shielded his eyes from the sun. Unfolding his Samsung Galaxy from where it was tucked in his pocket, it showed one new message.

C, landed in Boston 12 minutes ago. Leaving for Tampa in ten then Red Eye to Vancouver. Got something for you. –A

He smiled to himself. A slight lilt to the left side of his mouth, not enough to show but a glance of his dimples. His best friend was a flight attendant on a fairly well known airline and was always out of touch. It was great to hear from her, even though it was only because he made her check in to make sure she was safe and had eaten. She told him it was the most annoying thing in the world and only complied because, otherwise, she’d disembark the plane to find dozens of messages demanding her whereabouts. Secretly she found it sweet. Not so secretly he knew. Often times her updates were the only thing he looked forward to. But today he was more excited to hear what she’d found. Two months was far too long between sets, he groused. It made him antsy.

Counting on you, A. Who do I email? –C He replied before continuing his walk with renewed vigor.

As a matter of fact, he was more hopped up on the small chance of work than if he’d had a triple shot of espresso. Which had only happened once, after asking a groupie out from a small band he’d filled in for. Their lead singer had laryngitis and he’d known the bassist. To his credit the guy was nice and a very informative conversationalist, but he proved so nauseating that Cole had been sick after their coffee date ended.

Across the country, at terminal B10, his friend grinned at her blackberry and gave it a good three minutes until she really had to go. She couldn’t keep her thoughts in California where they didn’t belong. Florida was calling.

Disney, C, Disneyland. No don’t delete this; here - Male Vocalist: (Lead) youthful, inspired by Hatter character, charismatic front person with ability to excite and energize an audience; strong pop/rock lead singer with—

He didn’t read the rest, and didn’t dignify an answer. She knew he wouldn’t. What was the point when she was already off again? Anyway, Disney wasn’t his ideal employer, to say the least. Cole wasn’t the kind to share a stage or his part, or to tone his act down for the kids. Besides, he’d barely seen one, maybe three Disney films and didn’t buy into their market. Still…. No, he put his phone away and walked off to his favorite dive, thoroughly crushed. It was growing late, and no new postings would be out until the morning. There was one that had caught his eye, the ad stuffed in his bag from a venue some three blocks down. He’d chase that later after a stiff drink, he thought as he turned onto an off-street.

Two tin bells chimed dully as he entered the room, shoulders slumped and frowning at nothing as he sat at the island bar. It was a small establishment, The Hearts Pub. Family owned. Made of
cheap materials and dimly lit due to the high price of fluorescent lighting. The owner, who knew him thoroughly, protested that it just added to its charm. Cole knew she was full of it and that her dream was to own a fancy restaurant uptown. The stools were padded but uncomfortable. The floor was always sticky. Its saving grace had to be the well-priced menu. He ordered a dirty monkey then over dramatically dropped his elbows on the counter and perched his chin on his hands. Ellie, one of the owner’s daughters, was working that night. Her boyfriend Jim wiped down a few glasses behind her.

“Are you going to play a song tonight?” El asked as she set his drink in front of him. It had a yellow umbrella, which he liked and pushed around the rim of the drink. They didn’t usually put umbrellas in drinks there. But Cole was a regular, and they treated him to it.

Grimacing more than smiling, though he was trying to be jovial about it, Cole lost his trail of thought as he played with the toy and didn’t register the question until another customer had pulled the young blonde away. He took a sip and glanced at the stage at the back of the room. Ah, open mic night. He didn’t usually come in on Thursdays. It made him guilty to admit this was because he couldn’t stand drunken renditions of Creep or Wonderwall.

Jim turned around then, and looked the sorry sot over. They’d gotten to know each other a while back when Ellie had first started bringing him around as a patron and he’d fawn over her every shift. “Still no luck?” he guessed. Cole didn’t nod so much as drop his head back down into his one still-free hand. Jim’s eyebrow quirked. “Tough shit, man.” And he pulled out a shot glass, effortlessly filling it with a smooth tequila and offering it to the sunken rocker.

“I’m getting too jaded for this business,” Cole groused, throwing it back. Or the business was too jaded for him. Or his prospects, anyway. Jim watched him in sympathy and then he began to think.

He got this curious look on his face and put his finger up in front of Cole. “One minute, I think I’ve got something for you.” He kept talking as he turned away, “Ellie thinks it’s a great idea but I wasn’t so sure until now.” Then Jim disappeared into the small kitchen in the corner. When he came back, he was holding a crisp piece of paper. Across the top in bold letters read ‘Disney Parks Talent Casting’ and Cole groaned.

Sure, there were casting calls from Disney every once in a while that made the rounds in his profession, but most of his crowd avoided them. They weren’t usually long-term and almost never had an accurate description. His friends usually scoffed at them as much as he. He performed rowdy and loud, with flair and presentation. All things considered, Disney was too matchbox for him. Didn’t they know that by now? One thinks he doth protest too much.

The kicker was when his rivals Drew and guitarist Johnny walked in and sat beside him. Ordering a rum on the rocks and a juicer and chatting about their find of the night. Headliners for the same venue he’d taken the ad from earlier. How it was ‘in the bag’ and ‘going to rock’ then arguing over who’d get it first (AN: Oh my god they would kill me). Well, now that one glimmer of hope was gone. Cole wouldn’t compete with the two of them. Not that he couldn’t, but they both had a more subdued approach to their shows. A more marketable approach.

Cole gave a fair tug on his drink and motioned for another shot. He was a lightweight, see, but judged it a good night to just not care. He finished the dirty monkey and took a third shot, this time with salt and lime. I’m Only Joking crackled on over the speakers. The casting call blurred in front of him.

It was as Jim refused to pour another that Ellie came back over to take away his glass. She warned him to slow down, or he wouldn’t make it to the first act of open mic night. It wasn’t that
Cole felt like stopping, but he cared about Ellie enough to stop making her worry. It got him to thinking about A over the skies of South Carolina or so, and he pulled his phone out.

—lead singer with an affinity for, and experience in, singing classic rock material, and more contemporary material.
It's really your thing, C. I've seen it myself on a layover near Long Beach last month. Let me know. –A.

And, tired as he was, Cole opened the reply box at the end

Okay, fill the application. I'm in. –C

And that was that.
Auditions were held on Saturday, which was overcast and a glad respite in temperature from the long week. Cole arrived 24 minutes early to the Casting Center behind Disneyland after a confusing bus transfer and harrowing traffic. Unsurprisingly, though he was surprised, he was not the first there. Not by a long shot. In the medium-sized room he was led to there were already about 7 other excited applicants. Not just guys (5), either but there were also girls (2) auditioning for the lead female role. He’d already escaped preliminaries where there were rumored to be hundreds of young hopefuls.

Leather couches lined the walls and a small overhead TV played Dumbo for entertainment. Tentatively Cole edged closer to the groups by the door and overheard the two girls.

One was brunette, and slightly more reserved than the other; a blonde with enough energy to denote charisma. The blonde noticed him immediately and cut her conversation with the brunette short. To which the brunette was most disinterested.

“Hey,” the blonde gleamed at him, taking his hand and shaking it vigorously. “I’m Stephanie, but hopeful to be an Alice soon. Who are you?” Cole was delighted to have someone take note of him, though he knew they might not meet again outside the interview. She reminded him somewhat of his niece, the way she held herself and seemed so confident. The other girl looked him over but didn’t offer her hand.

Smiling and giving Stephanie a nod of the head he introduced himself. “Cole. Why ‘an’ Alice?” She had a choppy pixie cut covering one eye and had on a checkered black/pink skirt over black tights that caught his eye. As if that was any indicator of who she was trying for.

“Oh! He doesn’t know what the parts are, Jennifer.” Stephanie turned to her friend. “She’s also trying out for the part of Alice.” As if that answered anything. “I think you’d make a good Cheshire.” She looked at him squarely, no hesitation in her bright blue eyes as she fiddled with a copper-tone bracelet around her wrist. “You know, Alice in Wonderland characters. It’s the theme! Do you play drums, or guitar?”

Upon further inspection he saw the bracelet had the silhouette of the Cheshire cat from Alice in Wonderland hanging from it in a little disk. He refound her eyes. “Actually I sing.” And he was going to kill his friends for this.

“And anyway they aren’t casting Cheshire right now,” Jennifer declared pointedly. As if she had control of the conversation all along, and in some ways she did. There was just this air around her….

“Well, you don’t really look like a Hatter, but I’d love to hear you have a go.” Stephanie remarked, but Cole hadn’t looked away from Jennifer’s high cheekbones and silver forte earrings. He drank in her cream V-neck sweater and bell bottoms, wondering if the two girls had anything in common that they were trying for the same part.

Reminder that this was completely fictitious and won't be continued. For my sanity and the protection of the artists. Thanks for the laughs this story now gives me, guys.
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