

From the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Something in the Water*

THE DISAPPEARING ACT

— A NOVEL —

CATHERINE
STEADMAN



BOOK CLUB KIT

LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Reader,

I don't know about you, but right now I could really use a holiday! Preferably one that doesn't involve the living room, the kitchen, or a one-hour, grey-skied mud-walk.

What I wouldn't give to feel the warmth of the sun soaking deep into my skin, the thrill of hot-stepping across a burning sun-baked tile floor, the cooling touch of a sea-breeze on hot, tanned shoulders and that seeming relic of the past . . . the scent of sunscreen. But most of all, I think we're all just looking forward to the thrill of something new once all this is over, a new country, a new routine—new places, people, experiences. And whilst unfortunately I can't offer you those things in real life, I can offer you the prospect of them in the future, and a little escapism in the meantime.

With that in mind I'd like to introduce you to the concept of Pilot Season, a very real, yearly event in an actor's life that takes place in sunny, palm-sprinkled Los Angeles, which is the inspiration and the backdrop of my latest novel: *The Disappearing Act*.

Every spring, thousands of the brightest, most ambitious, and promising young actors from across the globe migrate and descend on the smog and sunshine of Los Angeles. Between the months of February and March every cable network and Hollywood studio will be looking to fill its rosters of new television series with the best and most in-demand actors in order to outdo the competition. Thousands of fresh new faces arrive in L.A. and they move into temporary accommodation, they rent cars, and they make new friends. Everyone hoping to strike it lucky before the season ends. It's a very specific demographic: young, talented hopefuls; anxious, twenty-to-thirty-somethings, willing to do whatever it takes to make it. A petri dish of lone travellers stranded thousands of miles from home and eager to succeed in Hollywood, the heart of the beast.

Careers will be made, dreams will be realized, stars will be born. And some will be snuffed out.

We meet British actress Mia Elliot, with an acclaimed new TV series to her name and award buzz already building around her. She heads out from London to the great sun-drenched unknown, script pages in hand.

Then in an audition waiting room full of women almost identical to herself Mia meets Emily, a fellow auditionee. In an act of kindness, Mia offers to top up Emily's parking meter if Emily goes into the audition first—a decision that will change both of their lives forever. When Mia returns Emily is gone, leaving behind nothing but a wallet, a set of keys, and a rental car.

The Disappearing Act is a thriller about the choices we make and compromises we're willing to take to get what we want. I wanted to give the reader an insight into the world of Hollywood from ground-level, the glamor and the oddness of an industry built on make-believe. Most people's perceptions of Hollywood come through movies, magazines, and television shows. A sun-drenched, Rodeo Drive—shopping, pool-partying, Oscar-winning mecca of the beautiful and famous—and whilst that is certainly one side of it, as with everything, the mechanics and inner workings are arguably where the real fun takes place.

Hollywood can be both the magical siren song and the rocks that many run aground on—though for a lucky few the rewards far outweigh the risks. Acting is a strange job and L.A. is an even stranger place but then . . . wouldn't the world be a little less sparkly, a little less interesting, without it.

Catherine Steadman

Find me on Instagram @catsteadman

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Mia's recent, traumatic breakup is both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, she uses her heartbreak to push herself on to new challenges—which ultimately leads to fame and fortune (and Nick). On the other hand, the psychological toll the breakup takes on her pushes her into risky, abnormal, and sometimes dangerous situations. Do you think one side outweighed the other?
2. While *The Disappearing Act* is a work of fiction, it does shine a light on several important aspects of the film industry. What was the most impactful to you? Has the way you viewed the film industry changed since finishing the book? If not, why has it stayed the same?
3. Acting is central to *The Disappearing Act*. To Mia, everyone in Hollywood seems to be putting on a show: both on and off camera. Besides Marla, which character do you think put on the best "show" and why?
4. To avenge her best friend, as well as "make it" in Hollywood, Marla is willing to lose her identity and risk losing her life. What do you think makes something worth *everything*? Is there something you would risk everything for?
5. Mia repeatedly thinks and talks about being uncomfortable with what she sees as L.A.'s unstoppable drive for more and bigger. However, Mia has travelled to L.A. for just that reason herself. What do you think differentiates Mia's actions from the competitive, accumulative culture she disapproves of? Or is there no difference at all?
6. Marla commits countless crimes, including attempted murder, for the role of a lifetime. Do you think her main motive was getting revenge for Emily? Or was it gaining success for herself?
7. Even after being repeatedly thwarted and threatened, Mia continues to look for Emily—knowing she might be risking her own life. Why do you think Mia keeps searching for her? Is it out of compassion? As a distraction? Or is it something else entirely? Is the idea of sisterhood a nice idea but ultimately just that: an idea, one that no one really expects others to follow through on?
8. *Galatea*, the movie Mia auditions for, is about a creator falling in love with his creation. What do you think about the connections between the myth and Marla? Are there any other characters or relationships that come to mind?
9. Catherine Steadman is an actress herself, with roles in various movies and television shows like *Downton Abbey*. How do you think her work might have inspired her to write *The Disappearing Act*? How does this firsthand insider knowledge about the industry affect the book and your view of it?
10. In the end, Marla gets her breakout role and Mia meets the love of her life. Everyone except Emily gets what they originally wanted. What did you think of this ending?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo: Rachell Smith

Catherine Steadman is an award-winning actress as well as a bestselling author. Her debut novel, *Something in the Water*, became a No. 1 *New York Times* bestseller and a pick for Reese Witherspoon's book club. Her latest book, *The Disappearing Act*, was inspired by Steadman's own experience in Hollywood during pilot season. Over the span of 15 years, this versatile actress played in TV dramas like *The Rook*, *Victoria*, *Law & Order UK*, and *The Tudors*; comedies like *The Inbetweeners* and *Fresh Meat*; along with multiple critically-acclaimed stage productions. Her favorite food is pickles.

AUTHOR Q&A

Q: WHAT FIRST DREW YOU TO ACTING?

A: The idea of getting to try all the possible jobs. I remember pointing at the TV as a child and asking my mother what the man in the doctor's coat did for a job. I guess I must have liked the idea of being a doctor, but instead of telling me he was a doctor she told me he was an actor. I realized that an actor can be a doctor one day and astronaut the next; a dancer, a cop, an alien, even a talking donkey—and I was sold!

Q: WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST PILOT SEASON EXPERIENCE LIKE?

A: It was intense! I was 21 and I heading out to L.A. alone with a printer in my suitcase! I was in rented accomadion and I needed to print out about 15 pages of script sides to learn for every audition, and then drive to find random audition rooms dotted across L.A. It was so much fun, like the actor's version of *The Crystal Maze* or *Takeshi's Castle*.

Q: ARE ALL GIFTING SUITES AS GLAMOROUS AS MIA'S? HOW WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH THEM?

A: Sadly not, they tend to be mainly new companies and brands trying to get a foothold in the industry. Established brands tend to gift directly to actors/influencers through contracted partnerships, but I wanted to give the feel of that through a more immediate dynamic event in the book. In reality Mia would probably just get an email/package through her PR representative from the companies that wanted to gift to her.

Q: WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE DRINK?

A: Sparkling water and champagne.

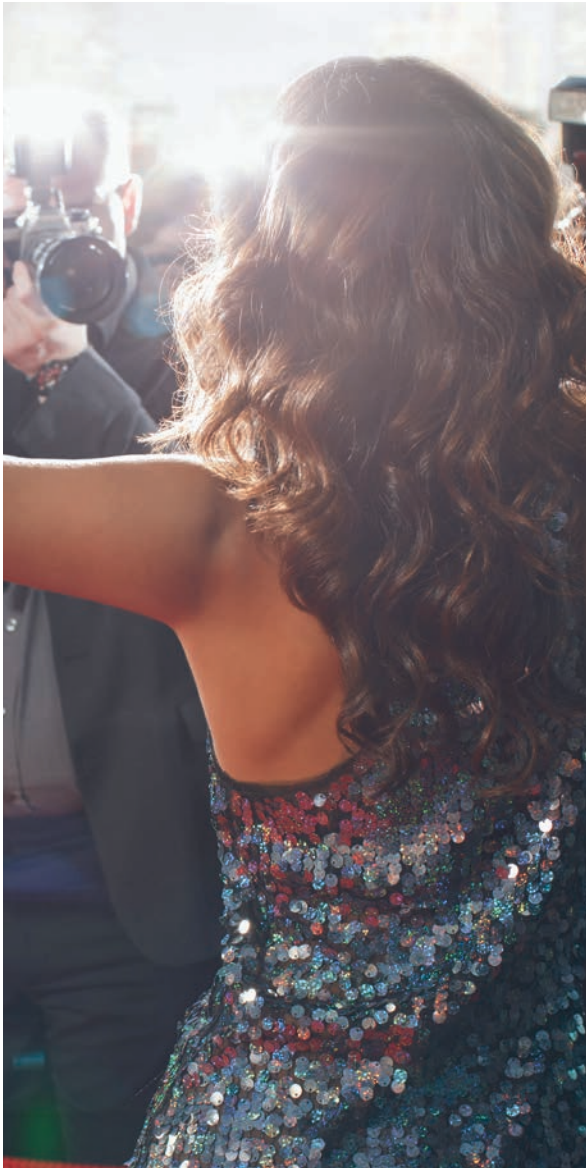
Q: HOW DO YOU THINK THE ACTING INDUSTRY HAS CHANGED THROUGHOUT YOUR CAREER?

A: It has become a lot more digital. Pilot seasons now take place more via video link and audition self-taping.

Q: WHAT KIND OF AN IMPACT DID THE ME TOO MOVEMENT HAVE ON *THE DISAPPEARING ACT*?

A: It's funny, the problems within the industry go further than Me Too, which is only one—albeit arguably the most extreme—symptom of a larger problem. The power differentials within the industry mean behaviour that would be considered unacceptable within other industries is permissible here.

PROFILE



Name: Mia Elliot

Age: 28

Hair color: Brown

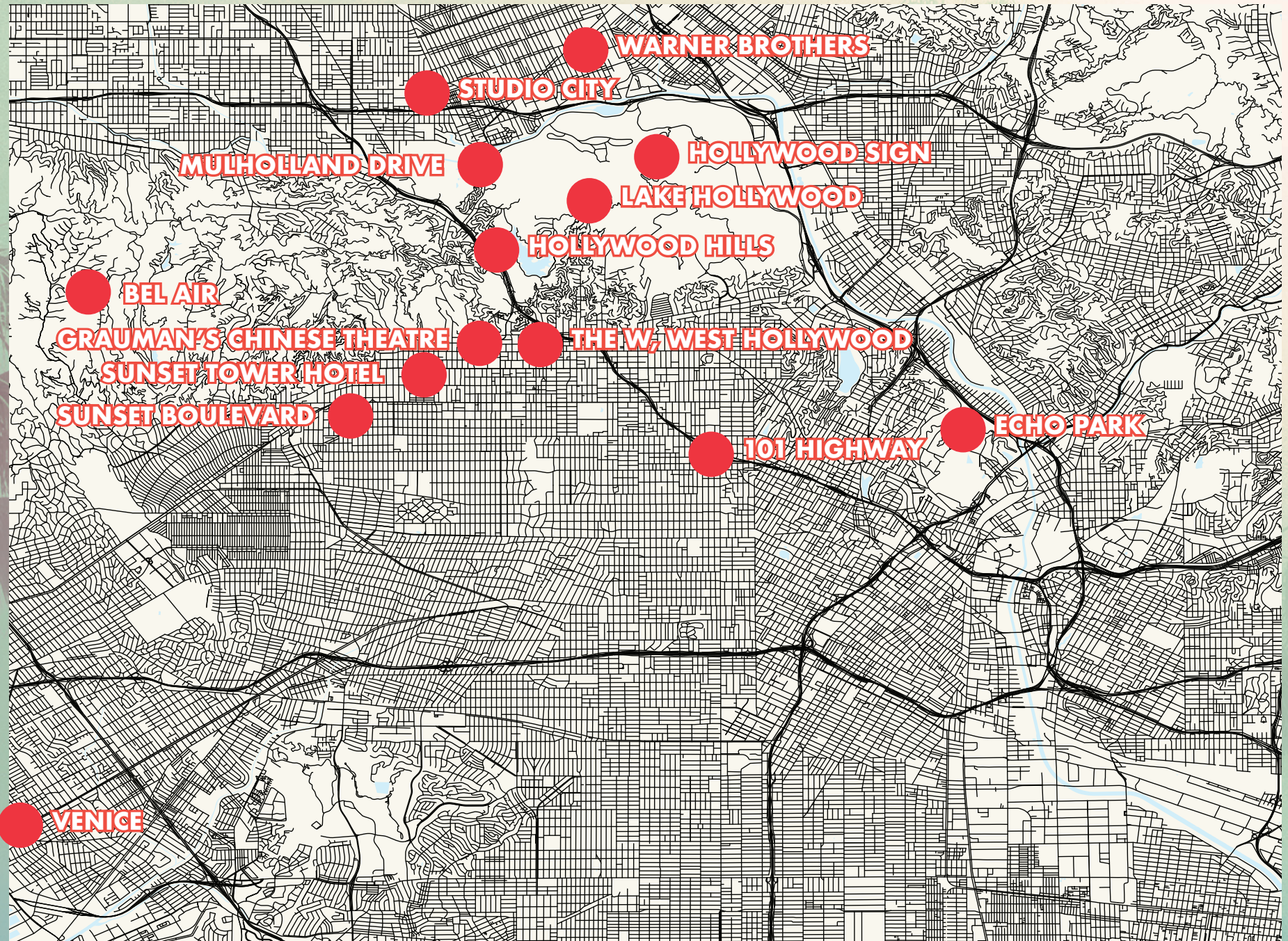
Occupation: Actress

Filmography: *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (2015), *The First Crusade* (2019), *The Doll's House* (2019), *Eyre* (2019–2020)

Likes: Chocolate, swimming, fajitas, beaches, Charlotte Brontë, London, acting, cheesy tours, Nick Eldridge
Dislikes: Injustice, body-shaming, avocado rice cake, corrupt patriarchy, unreliability, cheaters

Description: Smart, funny, compassionate, empathetic, intuitive, professional, confident, loyal, resourceful, diligent





WARNER BROTHERS

STUDIO CITY

MULHOLLAND DRIVE

HOLLYWOOD SIGN

LAKE HOLLYWOOD

HOLLYWOOD HILLS

BEL AIR

GRAUMAN'S CHINESE THEATRE

SUNSET TOWER HOTEL

THE W, WEST HOLLYWOOD

SUNSET BOULEVARD

101 HIGHWAY

ECHO PARK

VENICE

RECIPES



CHILI-FLAKED AVOCADO ON RICE CAKE

Ingredients

- ¼ avocado without skin & seeds
- 1 dash of salt
- 1 dash of pepper
- ½ tbs of paprika
- 1 brown rice cake

Instructions

- Peel the avocado and remove the pit.
- Cut the avocado into four parts and then into thin slices.
- Lightly toast the rice cake to get an extra crispy crunch.
- Layer the avocado slices across the rice cake and add spices.



HIMALAYAN SALT TEA

Ingredients

- 2 tbsp. of pink Himalayan salt
- 1 tbsp. of matcha green tea powder
- 1 small jar
- 2 cups of hot water

Instructions

- Put the salt and matcha powder in a small jar and shake to combine.
- Pour 2 cups of hot water over the mixture and mix well.