

PRIME TIME

by *Núria Casado Gual*

Translated by Marta Miquel Baldellou and Brian Worsfold

Characters:

Gloria Aran, television star (*seventy or more*)

Gina Guasch, soap-opera producer (*forty or more*) / Girl intern (*late twenties*)

Roc Biaix, head scriptwriter (*forty or more*) / Delivery man (*early thirties*)

Prime Time was first performed at Caixafòrum-Barcelona at the final conference of the SIForAGE project on 21 October 2016, with the following cast and rest of creative team:

Glòria Aran – Imma Colomer

Gina Guasch / *Girl Intern* – Núria Casado Gual

Roc Biaix / *Delivery Man* – Ferran Farré

Author: Núria Casado Gual

Director and video-designer: Òscar Sánchez H.

Composer: Jordi Cano

Translators: Marta Miquel and Brian Worsfold

Produced by Nurosfera for SIForAGE

Stage setting:

The building of a public television channel, at the script-writers' department office. A long office table to stage left, with two matching chairs. On the table, some dossiers, a laptop, and a few remote controls. On the right-hand side, a clothes-stand with a raincoat hanging on it and an umbrella. In the centre of the stage, a whiteboard covered with numbers and post-its displaying the descending curve of a graph. The backdrop can be used for projecting videos linking scenes, or even, in place of the whiteboard, with a projection of the graph (see emdnote, which also includes some information on the play's original cultural background).

Scene 1 – On the Way Down

The rain outside casts a bluish light onstage. Sounds of a storm from far off. A woman in her forties and dressed like a top executive is waiting for somebody to arrive, with certain nervousness. On the right, an attractive woman around seventy, wearing a light coat and boots, and carrying an open wet umbrella, walks slowly front stage. She addresses the audience while the other woman remains seated.

GLORIA – Look what word I came across today, as I was doing the crossword on the underground: six letters, across. “Just at the right time, opportune.” *(Pause)* “Tempestuous”! I would have never have got it if it hadn’t been for the way it’s raining, today... ! Some read cards. Other just read their stars to know what’s in store for them. I don’t believe in any of this, but I’ve always paid close attention to the messages hidden in words and in dreams. *(Pause)* “Tempestuous”! What a wonderful word... It’s as if ‘tempus,’ or rather ‘time’ had gobbled up ‘pe-stu-ous,’ with a bit left, still, at the corners of the mouth. *(With a glance at the woman in the office before going on, while the latter is looking at the numbers on the whiteboard with concern)* Today I have an appointment with Gina Guasch, someone whom I’ve practically seen grow up and turn into the successful producer you see in front of you. She’s been badgering me for days, with mysterious messages, saying we have to talk. She works too hard, just like her dad did... Today’s a good day to tell her that life ... is much more than this; that you can also have a good time, if you waste it a little stepping into puddles on a rainy day. It’s settled then: we’ll have a really ‘tempestuous’ chat.

The woman closes the umbrella and shakes it to get the water off, returning stage right to where she had come on. Meanwhile, the woman in the office rushes to her chair and pretends to be working. The woman with the umbrella comes into the office. The lighting changes.

GLORIA – I’m late, aren’t I?

GINA – *(She comes closer to kiss her on both cheeks. There’s an open familiarity between the two women)* Not at all...! On days like today, you know... Everything collapses...

GLORIA – *(She leaves her umbrella and her coat to one side)* Oh, no, I really like them... storms, I mean. Really dramatic.

GINA – They’re certainly that.

GLORIA – You're more of a sun person?

GINA – Mmm...? I don't know what I am...

GLORIA – Of course you don't! You spend all bloody day shut up in here, in this tower of glass...!

GINA – That's what I'm supposed to do, right? If I don't work now...

GLORIA – It might be. But you've got a life, too, Gina. When it's too late, you'll be like me, and then, you'll have to rush around like a headless chicken. *(To the audience)* Well! I've said it!

GINA – I know. It's what I think now and again...

GLORIA – *(Seeing her a bit down, to the audience)* Perhaps I've gone too far. *(To the heavens)* Forgive me, Pepito.

GINA – Actually, can we talk a bit about this, Gloria?

GLORIA – Oh, no, don't tell me? You want some days off?

GINA – Me? No way...!

GLORIA – Oh! OK. Well, you would'nt have asked me to come to speak about that, now would you? To tell you the truth, I'm mystified...!

GINA – Really?

GLORIA – Well, all those messages, and I still don't know what you want to talk to me about...

GINA – I wanted to speak to you face to face... Take a seat.

GLORIA – OK...!

GINA – Now it seems I have to tell you goodness knows what, when, in fact, you must have already guessed it... Let's see... Gloria... you... have been working in this series for how long?

GLORIA – *(Visibly taken aback)* Don't tell me you've clicked... next December... *(To the audience, feeling emotional)* Oh my god, don't say they're going to pay homage to my entire career!! *(Pretending not to take the hint)* You're not making arrangements for a celebration, are you?

I'm not the type who likes tributes, though thanks for the thought, uh...!!?

GINA –No, no, no...

GLORIA – Are you sure ... eh?

GINA – Sure, sure... Though it *is* a bit like that... It's all a bit about ... well, about anniversaries.

GLORIA – *(To the audience, excitedly)* I knew it! *(To Gina)* No wonder... 40 years!! It seems only yesterday we shot the series pilot... *(To the audience)* We wanted to take over the world... But... my nerves were killing me! I had never done any television before, and only the theatre people knew a little bit about me... *(To Gina)* And your dad, poor man...! You can't imagine the trouble he had convincing the bosses up here to OK the project. A soap opera, home-grown ... at *that* time! It wasn't easy like now, was it? Nowhere near! Now, soaps are produced two-a-penny...

GINA – Not quite... / For me, I have to keep my nose to the grindstone all the time..... The market is much more complex, more competitive...

GLORIA – It can't be that much more...! *(To the audience)* Young people ... always griping and moaning...! OK, sometimes they take off a show before anyone has hardly had time to see it... *(To Gina)* But in our case it's different ... right? 40 years on air! *(Looking at her with tenderness)* Girlie, your dad would have been proud of you ... the effort and courage you've put in to continuing what he started! Pepito, he was so brave, putting his trust in a bunch of unknown young actors like us...

GINA - ...and of all of them, you're the only one left, in the series...!

GLORIA – Well, yes. *(Pause)* That's right...

GINA – And... wouldn't you like to do something else, Gloria?

GLORIA – What do you mean?

GINA – Well, sure I'm not the first to ask you... You've spent forty years, with Maria Fortuny. Aren't you... well, just a little bit tired? As an actress, I mean. As an artist.

GLORIA – *(Suddenly, tense)* Don't beat around the bush, Gina. What is it you want?

GINA – Gloria, look... You've been a mainstay, for *LuckyEnders*, nobody'll deny that...

GLORIA – A mainstay? Excuse me, I've been in the series bible since the very first day, and you've just said that I am the only one left!

GINA – Yes, exactly, and that is why...

GLORIA – All sorts of families, homes, and neighbours have cropped up in this series, but Maria Fortuny's home is already better known than Casa Batlló, rest assured!

GINA – Yes, yes, no doubt, Gloria...! It's only that...

GLORIA – What? What is, the problem? 'Cos I'm not tired, of Maria, as an actress, as an artist, or as anything!

GINA – Maybe *you* are not...

GLORIA – Then, who is? They never quit stopping me in the street! *(To the audience)* It's of no importance, but without going any further, this is what happened to me the other day: I was having a nice cup of coffee in the café near my house, and all of a sudden, a lady comes up to me ... stares straight at me, stares, and then, stares at me again, and not saying a word, she grabs her friend's arm, who was sitting next to her, and starts asking her, as she was pointing at me with her finger almost up my nose: 'Is it really her? Is it? Is it???' Just how I'm telling you! As if I wasn't there! And she starts repeating herself, like a parrot, 'Is it her? Is it...?' And me, not knowing how, starts thinking 'Is it me? Is it me? Is it me?!'

Unexpectedly, a young man comes in stage right. He's wearing a base-ball cap the wrong way round, sunglasses, and workout clothes. He must be little over thirty, if he's that. He's carrying a very big cardboard box in his hands, and a folder to sign, with a ballpoint-pen. He's chewing gum in an exaggerated way.

DELIVERY MAN – *(To Gloria)* Ma'am, is it you who ordered some office supplies?

GLORIA – Me?!

GINA – No, *I did!* Sorry, Gloria, just a second. I didn't think they'd come so fast. (*Going towards him, but speaking to Gloria*) Someone else is coming and he'll take over my office. I'll move to a bigger one, next door. (*To the delivery man*) Where do I sign?

DELIVERY MAN – Here.

While Gina signs the folder, the young man stares at Gloria and goes on chewing gum.

DELIVERY MAN – You remind me a lot of someone.

GLORIA – Could be. My face is very... familiar.

DELIVERY MAN – Awesomelll! You're... you're... Wow, you're blowing my mind, right now, uh? You're... I'm flipping out, man!!

GLORIA – (*To the audience*) The passion of the youth... it's so touching...

DELIVERY MAN – You're... that granny from that soap opera that's older than Methuselah, right?

GLORIA – Well... (*To the audience*) My mind's gone blank: what's older than Methuselah, the series or me?

GINA – (*Pushing him out*) It's all OK, thank you... Bye-bye!

DELIVERY MAN – Hey, but you look much younger... in the flesh, uh?!

GLORIA – (*To the audience*) Well, me!!!

DELIVERY MAN – Give me an autograph for my grandma, or what? She's as deaf as a post and says she can hardly see, but, mate... she wouldn't miss your series for the world!

GINA – We're very busy, I'm sorry, can you leave the box in the office next door? Thanks...!!

DELIVERY MAN – (*Almost off-stage*) Just wait till I tell her I've seen that little old granny from the mountains...!

GINA – Now where were we?

GLORIA – The old granny, Methuselah... (*To the audience*) After such a flattering interruption... what could we possibly speak about?

GINA – Oh, yes... you were saying something about how people stop you in the street. Sorry to ask you about this... but how old are these people you're talking about?

GLORIA – How on earth would I know? Does it really matter?

GINA – (*She goes towards the whiteboard, thoughtfully*) The TV channel wants to change the time slot.

GLORIA – Of the series? But it's been in the afternoon for forty years?

GINA – They have to change the programming, and there are new ideas for the after-lunch schedule. In principle, they won't get rid of us altogether, but they want to try to move us... to the evening. In prime time.

GLORIA – And isn't that better for us... for our 'visibility,' as they say these days?

Gina looks at the numbers on the whiteboard.

GINA – Depends what it's for. Or for whom. We've made a study of the audience ratings for this new time slot. There are lots of curves on the graph...

GLORIA – Ah... I only see one here.

GINA – It's yours.

GLORIA – Mine?

GINA – Yes, it corresponds to the interest shown in your character and everything that happens to her. As you see... it's drooping down... a little bit... Gloria.

GLORIA – What kind of numbers are we talking about?

GINA – That's irrelevant... it's just a pilot study made by *focus groups*.

GLORIA – *Focus groups*?

GINA – Several groups of ten people.

GLORIA – How old are they?

GINA – What's that got to do with it?

GLORIA – As much as the age of my ‘fans’ in the street.

GINA – They’re between 16 and 50.

GLORIA – Between 16 and 50... ?!

GINA – This is the *age bracket* who watch prime time TV...

GLORIA – *Age bracket?*

GINA – Sorry, *age group*.

GLORIA – *(To the audience)* Why translate words that are the same in our language? It’s true words can make you sound more modern or more old-fashioned. That’s it, right? *(To Gina)* Well, I know a whole lot of people over sixty, and over seventy, and over ninety as well, who are hooked on the telly at this so-called *prime time* that’s so important!

GINA – That may be. But they’re not in the target group for that time.

GLORIA – *Target group?*

GINA – Yes, our future customers...

GLORIA – Come on, girlie, are we talking television or supermarkets?

GINA – Both. Don’t forget the first soaps were made to sell washing powder to American housewives...!

GLORIA – *(To the audience)* Young people today have a lot of this. Information. Instantaneous and about anything and everything. But far too superficial, to my liking.

GINA – That’s why they call them...

GLORIA and GINA - *soap* operas...!

GLORIA – Fair enough! And with all the information you have, tell me, what do you make these damned target groups say?

GINA – We don’t *make* them say anything. We sit them down in a room with a big screen, show them clips from *LuckyEnders*, give them each a remote control, and ask them to press a button every time they feel bored. As soon as more than 6 out of the 10 press the button at the same time, the response is saved.

GLORIA – *(To the audience, laughing)* I don't know why ... I'm imagining a bunch of robots pressing buttons like sadists...

GINA – This is no joke, Gloria...

GLORIA – *(Very cross, all of a sudden)* Of course not ... I know where you're going with this! Now you'll tell me that these clowns have been clicking away on their remote controls every time I show up on *LuckyEnders*, right? That this or that shift of *prime timers* got 'bored' with me? All this big production just to tell me that! All those 'loser' mails, making me come here, on a day like today, to tell me 'in person' that, oh, thanks a lot, my character, the character that I've lived with, grown up with, matured with, for 'only' forty years, has 'a bit of a droopy curve' and, because of that curve which a little band of ten, button-pressing minions have fashioned, now you're going to chuck me out into the street! Right? And it has to be you, you of all people, with a storm raging outside, who has to tell me?! *(Overacting)* Oh, Gloria, Gloria, you'll end up like King Lear, but not on the stage, as you would have liked...!!

GINA – Gloria, don't... not now...

GLORIA – *(Continuing to overact)* In fact, they kick you off the stage, and in what a way... Oh, Gina, in you I saw more of a Cordelia than a Regan...!!

GINA – For goodness' sake, don't come over all tragic, now...!

GLORIA – Tragic, me? I'm the Queen of Melodrama!! And *you* are producing it! It's a serial about the Pyrenees which your dad created for entire generations...!! *(To the heavens)* Oh, Pepito, Pepito, if only you could see this...! *(To Gina)* Do you really want to chuck out your star? To be lit up, instead, by the dubious taste of a bunch of yoboes, like that dimwitted parcel-carrier...? *(To the audience)* Why do we take it for granted that youth is synonymous with good taste, intelligence, or even brilliance...?

GINA – It's just as difficult for me as it is for you...

GLORIA – I don't think so. To begin with, I'm thirty years ahead of you. And above all, you're not an actress. And even if you were: I don't know of any other actor in this country who has devoted more than

half her life to a single character; a character who, apart from anything else, gets into people's homes every day and grows old with them, and that's why you get to be known everywhere!

GINA – That's what I meant... Doesn't it all get very... tiresome?

GLORIA – *(Pause)* Does your life tire you out, Gina?

GINA – At times, yes.

GLORIA – But it doesn't make you want to end it all, does it? Or does it? Do *you* need help? *(To the audience)* I can tell you... the way I'm feeling now, I'd gladly strangle her!

GINA – Don't think I haven't thought about the consequences... You know I've always held you in such high esteem! You're like... an aunty, to me!

GLORIA – An... aunty? *(To the audience)* Why is it that Serrat's 'La tieta' has just come to mind ... and given me the creeps, when I always liked that song?

GINA – Gloria, please... I know all this must come as a surprise, but think about... everything that's in it for you... *(She starts counting, deaf to the interruptions)* Free to take up all the other projects that you haven't got the time to do now...

GLORIA – It's ages since I've considered another project... *LuckyEnders* took up all my time... *(To the audience)* Not me... nor the producers, who haven't rung me for years...

GINA – Talking about schedules, you'd get back your day... All that hassle having to get up at five to shoot...

GLORIA – Oh, yes ... especially that now I hardly need any sleep at all...!

GINA – More than that... having to get up early for the make-up sessions...

GLORIA – They put fewer and fewer curls every time. *(To the audience)* And, anyway, I get my hair done for free.

GINA – And what about not having to do those exterior scenes in Sort, in winter...!

GLORIA – *(To the audience)* What a cheek! Wasn't it me who taught her to ski when she was just a brat...!

GINA – Not to mention the long hours of study that you'll save to do what you want...

GLORIA – What business of yours is it to know what I do and what I don't do with my time? And my memory's never let me down, ever! Have you got a complaint from the directors? *(To the audience)* Look... I can't deny it's getting harder to keep the lines in my head, especially from one day to the next! *(To her)* Get to the point, Gina! What do you want to do, with me?

GINA – Kill you off, for heaven's sake! Your character, I mean!!

GLORIA – *(Pause)* When? And... who'll do it...?

Roc Biax comes in through the door. He is the same actor who played the delivery man, but now he is performing his own age, which is similar to Gina's. He's dressed in a very modern style, with a sweater and designer trousers. He is wearing glasses, he has got long hair, and he is holding a folder in his hand. He is enthusiastic by nature: it is plain to see that, up to now, he is used to having his own way and being openly well-liked. He rushes in, aware that he is late.

ROC- Here I am!!

GLORIA – Who the devil's this? *(To the audience)* Don't tell me: Goneril!

ROC- Sorry I'm late. I've been held up by the team, introducing them to...

GINA – No worries. You're just in time. Let me introduce you to Roc Biaix, Gloria. Our new plot director and head scriptwriter.

GLORIA – New head...? Aaah... He's the one who'll cut mine off, you mean?

ROC – I wouldn't go that far...!

GLORIA – *(To the audience)* Of course not. He'll just tell those nerds in the dialogue team to get rid of me.

ROC – Gloria, it's a real pleasure to meet you, at last...!

GLORIA – Get real... you're the one who has to do me in...

ROC – Me?...!

GLORIA ...at least talk to me on equal terms...!

ROC – My god, I wouldn't dare, uh? It's not your age, you don't look your...

GLORIA – *(To the audience)* What did he mean by that? 'I don't look my...?'
What? 'Is it me? Or is it not me?'

ROC - ... but because you're quite an institution!

GLORIA – *(To the audience)* The aunty, an institution... Why do I have the impression that they'll have me grafted onto a pedestal in five minutes, and shut me up in a museum?

ROC – OK, then... I'll treat you more familiarly if that's what you want...

GINA – Roc, Gloria is a bit upset by what we decided...

GLORIA – 'We'? *(To Roc)* Was it your idea, too? *(To the audience)* I knew it: she's Regan, he's Goneril... *(To both)* Where's my Cordelia?

GINA – Gloria loves *King Lear* ...

ROC – Of course she does! I saw her play the Fool, when I was just a nipper... And I got hooked on the theatre after seeing her perform...!

GLORIA – And now look, you're the one unhooking me from the tele...!

GINA – I've already told her that Maria Fortuny will die shortly...

GLORIA – Yes, I've just been informed. Now I need to know how.

GINA – This is up to Roc, but it's no big deal... he'll do a great job!

GLORIA – And what's in this for me...?

GINA – Well, Maria Fortuny isn't about to die any old way. Roc's been working for a long time as script-writing assistant to dramatists at the BBC, and as assistant to showrunners on Netflix...

ROC – *(He corrects her)* 'HBO'...

GINA – Oh, 'HBO'...!!!

GLORIA – No, now I get it: from the bottom of the top to the top of the bottom, eh, matey? So tell me how many months I have left?

GINA – She means her *character*... You know, mixing identities is very common with actors who've played the same character for a long time...

GLORIA – *(To the audience)* To me it seems I'm the least mixed up of the three of us, but whatever, let's hear what they have to say...!

ROC – Maria Fortuny'll have a spectacular... end.

GINA – As she deserves, Gloria, just as she deserves. And *you'll* start the new season...

ROC – Yeah, the new season starts with you. In fact, there'll be a new intro just for you! *(To Gina)* Have you got it here?

GINA – The intro... ? *(She goes to switch on the computer)* Ah, yeah, yeah...

ROC – We're gonna change the look... to celebrate our forty seasons... And to kill two birds with one stone, Gloria, we'll celebrate you, too... !

GLORIA – *(To the public)* 'Celebrate you, too'? Is this what they say on HBO, or am I now just a 'bye-bye' party?

The "LuckyEnders, season 40" intro appears on the big screen. It is the typical title sequence of a soap opera, with images of the setting for the drama, and a tune that suits this kind of programme. The title sequence ends with an image of Gloria as Maria Fortuny, with the countryside around Sort in the background, and with an announcement about the change in the viewing time.

ROC – What d'you think, eh? Maria Fortuny, heart and soul of *LuckyEnders*, telling us about the new time... And it's prime time!

GLORIA – Aaaaah, now I get it... I'm the icing on the cake to whet the whistles of the aunties and grannies... and like that you'll drag in all the aunts and granddads who've watched in the afternoon, and hey presto! they'll all become 'target consumers'... Or, who knows, maybe you'll get more sponsors for this new time slot! Now then... let's think: what products could 'my new audience' be interested in? No, don't tell me! False teeth makers? Or even better, pads for wee wee? Oh, brilliant, all bloody geniuses...!

ROC – You've lost me now...

GLORIA – *(To the audience)* Just what I said! Who's in his right mind, here?

GINA – Gloria, none of this has anything to do...

ROC – Ah, yes, that's it. We've got no control over the whims and fancies of those who give us the cash...

GLORIA – *(To the audience)* How this this bloke goes on... He's only just got here...!

GINA – But we, the creators, can tell you that...

ROC - ...in the middle of an intriguing twist of the plot...

GINA- ...which Roc has just presented to his team... but about which we can say nothing yet...

ROC – *(Enthusiating)*... bang!! Maria Fortuny'll suffer a tragic and totally unexpected death, which, I bet you, will reduce the whole country to tears!!!

GLORIA – Ohh... I'll die in *prime time*... in the *prime* of my life...!!

GINA – Yes, right at the top, in a perfect climax, with all producers and directors licking their lips...!!

GLORIA – Yes...!! And they'll all start ringing me up, 'cos everybody wants the tragic *prime time* corpse... to play the *zombie* in the next horror series...! And people in the street, especially those in their twenties, will stop me and recall the over-made-up corpse, and they'll say: "Is it her? is it? is it?" as if I wasn't there!!! And then I'll think, "Am I, am I, am I really the walking dead?!!

GINA – *(Furiously)* Enough, Gloria, that's enough!!! Don't you see I'm doing this against my will?! Your character is finished, Gloria... down and out... KO'd... *finito*... *kaput*?!!!

GLORIA – Ahhhh... Now you're talking! At last!!

ROC – Yes, Gina's right... I've made an in-depth study of you as Maria Fortuny... Let's start from the beginning. Let's see now, since the beginning of the series bible, you've been through four husbands... two died, and two divorced, the first was gay and the second left for someone younger. And your children, the eldest girl went abroad, and you're not on speaking terms with your son... since the tenth season... after he had sex-change surgery. And now, your youngest

son will take over at the hostel, when you retire. As he can't compete with the new hotel chains, he'll soon have to shut up the place. What's left then? To turn you into the old village gossip? We've got loads of actors in their eighties for that! Anyway, you'd lose a lot of screen time, and that's not for a star like you! What else is on the cards...? We thought about giving you Alzheimer's, but as you've already had that earlier on in your career... it wouldn't make much sense to type-cast you at this stage of the game, right...!?

GLORIA – And you've got a lead scriptwriter who's sucked up to English and Americans to make up for his obvious lack of imagination just like that, with the blow of a guillotine?! You, you really take the cake...!!

GINA – Please! Roc deserves more respect! He's an excellent professional, and in England and the States...

GLORIA – In England they'd tear their hair out and in the States you'd get sued, because this 'professional' has just delivered a highly discriminatory tirade, in a word, undiluted ageism! (*To the audience*) That's given them a good telling to, 'in plain English'!

GINA – You're wrong... This has nothing to do with age discrimination!! But what else do you want, Gloria! You've been 40 years on air!!

GLORIA – Same number of years as you on this planet, dear! Let's make a study of audience ratings for under-16s to see what *your* curve looks like?!

GINA – Why are you doing this to me? My dad loved you!!

ROC – Gina...Gina...Gina...! Just a second... Maybe she's right...

GINA – I understand she's upset, and I don't like this way out... after all, I'm like her niece!

GLORIA – (*To the audience*) Serrat, here he goes again! Sending chills down my spine!!

GINA - ...but we've no choice, Roc...! They've made it pretty clear, the ones upstairs! Either we increase the audience ratings and widen our age range, or...

ROC – Or... or... or... or... or...

GLORIA – Seems like Roc's got something on his mind... *(To the audience)*
Either that, or maybe it's just a mental block. Anyone have a remote control, round here? *(To Roc)* Speak, damn you! ? 'If you lie, boy, we'll have you whipped.' *(A clap of thunder is heard. Roc and Gina look at each other, confused. To the audience)* Oh my god! Who'd have guessed, a short while ago, when I was stepping into puddles...that this storm would be so... 'tempestuous'?

The sound of rain. Black out.

Scene 2 – Prime Time

Sound of phone ringing, a fax machine, a computer keyboard clicking, incoming text messages, switching TV channels...and, penetrating this transitional soundscape, a news bulletin in which the name Gloria Aran and the title LuckyEnders is discernable. Then there's another excerpt advertising, almost unintelligibly, an English version of LuckyEnders in which the name Helen Mirren crops up. Finally, the sound of a TV turning off puts an end to these shenanigans. A warm morning light comes in gradually. On stage, the graph from the former scene has been changed for a different one: this one displays a curve going upwards with lots of arrows that clearly suggest a sharp contrast with the initial drawing. Roc Biaix, now wearing a summer shirt, his hair tied in a ponytail, and his glasses fixed on top of his head, is speaking on the phone, enthusiastically. If possible, the table and chairs should be placed in a different way from the former scene in order to reinforce the idea of change; both in terms of time and perspective. On the clothes-stand, which has also been changed to the other side, there is a sports jacket or a man's handbag.

ROC – *(On the phone)* Unbelievable, isn't it? *(Pause)* I know, I know! *(Pause)* Well, to be fair, it was actually Gloria Aran –yeah, our 'Maria Fortuny'... well, the twin sister, now, 'Lidia Fortuny', exactly... It was her that made me think of this twist, when she was supposed to leave the show last year. She said that my original plan was, in fact, "ageist"... Ageist, an activist of human rights like me?! Man, that... made me reconsider the whole thing! *(Pause)* Gloria? She is the new TV goddess! And yeah, it has been a blast for all of us since then! *(Pause)* Oh, no, no... But thanks again... *(Pause)* Of course I'm thrilled about the offer! And my colleague, Gina, the show's producer... She will go absolutely crazy when I tell her about it! By the way, do you have anybody in mind for...? *(Pause)* What?? No! No!! You're kidding me!!? Wow!! Meryl Streep would like to be the star in 'my' show?!!! *(Pause)* Ok, ok, sure, sure, sure, we have to talk about the terms... Yeah, yeah, let's stay in touch. *(Pause)* Right. Say hi to everyone for me, will you? *(Joking)* Including Meryl...! *(Laughing)* Bye, Alan! Talk to you soon. Bye! *(He hangs up, exhausted. He walks to and fro, anxiously. He looks at the whiteboard. He takes the phone. He makes a call. Judging from his look of disappointment, he gets an answering machine in response. He waits the seconds needed to leave a message).* Gina? Hey, this is Roc. If you're standing up, sit down and take a deep breath, please. Guess who's called me. Alan Ball!! HBO is also interested in buying the rights of the second part...!!! And wait, there's even more: what actress do you think they've almost agreed with to play their 'Lilith Fortune'? *(Laughing)* You should aim for the stars, uh? In truth, higher than

Olympus... Just in case it was not enough to have goddess Mirren for the BBC...! Call me as soon as you can, OK? Or even better, come to your old office, if you still remember how to get here, uh?! You haven't dropped in for days...!!

On the right, without him noticing her, Gloria Aran comes in. She is wearing summer clothes, sunglasses, a wide-brimmed sun hat or simply a hat covering half her face, and she's carrying a basket-cum-bag for the beach. She's holding a newspaper in her hand. She heads front stage, and addresses the audience, while Roc sits at the table and gets down to work at his computer with enthusiasm, pausing, from time to time, to check his cell phone and see whether they have answered his call, or simply to daydream on getting such good news.

GLORIA – *(To the audience, showing the crossword page of the newspaper)* Down, seven letters. 'Good results, acceptance, accomplishment.' Can you guess it? *(Pause)*. 'Success.' Look here, when I hit on this word early this morning, I thought my holidays had got off on the right foot... But later, this same sequence of seven letters – which I'm supposed to have known about from way back – came back to me, like an echo, with a very different meaning. 'Success'... If it's never too late to learn, it is never too late to revise everything we've always taken for granted. *(She folds the newspaper. She glances at Roc)*. Today, after reading the oracle of my newspaper, I've come to pay a quick visit to this television madman. Since he changed my character from top to bottom last season, I've had to live through a storm of public adoration. Up to now, it's been great for me, hasn't it? I've welcomed it like someone embracing an unexpected dream come true, when, at this stage of the game, I'd lost all hope of dreaming. But, today, as I started the day calmly, doing the crossword by the sea, I turned the page of the newspaper... just here *(she opens the newspaper on a new page)* and, without expecting it, the blazing sun lit up a headline and some photographs that shattered my dream into smithereens. *(Closing the newspaper)* It's odd, isn't it ... this whole thing about getting old? Not even a year ago I was about to leave this office like poor old King Lear... Since then, I thought I'd got over being forced into an endless decline into nonentity with a new, surprisingly-big hit...! But what did 'success' really mean, for me? What 'good results,' what 'accomplishment' were we talking about? Whose 'acceptance'? Today I've realised that my 'accomplishment' in the last few months, my 'acceptance,' has been just another farce. *(She puts the newspaper in her bag)* That's why I'm coming back onto this stage, but this time, instead of Lear, I'll be a sensible Fool. *(She moves a few steps forward towards Roc,*

who is still working, concentrated, at his computer, and speaks to him with a note of sarcasm) ‘If a man’s brains were in’s heels, were’t not in danger of kybes?’

ROC (*jumps up, startled*) – Gloria!! I didn’t expect you today!!

He gets up to kiss her on both cheeks, but she eludes him, discreetly, while she takes off her hat and sunglasses.

GLORIA – I didn’t think I’d be back til September either, but sometimes, life, like soaps, takes unexpected twists.

ROC – Well, look, I love this new surprise in the script! Don’t tell me that, twenty-four hours after shooting the last episode of the season, you’re already missing your Lidia Fortuny?

GLORIA – Missing her...? No, that’s not the word... I already felt like having a bit of a break from her... (*To the audience*) A bit of a break from everything! These past six months, my new character, I mean, this humble servant, ‘to serve her,’ has tramped all over the Pallars Sobirà at the wheel of two racing cars, a quad, two planes and three helicopters. She’s been rock-climbing, played paintball with the Sort fire brigade, parachuted, paraglided, white-water rafted, bungee-jumped ... all that crazy stuff any lunatic can imagine... Ah, and most important... she’s been shooting ‘near-the-knuckle scenes’... up in the church tower, up to yer neck in the cold and turbulent waters of the Noguera Pallaresa, even on top of the Pala Pedregosa at Llessúí, 2,800 metres up... audience ratings peaked way off the graph! Wow, how you notice the changes in censorship from the afternoon slots to that damned, late-evening *prime time*... You can’t imagine the hours spent in the gym... and the umteen massage sessions... all to stand the strain. My personal trainer’s more dead than alive, and the insurance people are terrified! (*To Roc, with affected kindness*) No... Yes, Lidia Fortuny is a gem of a part for any actress, Roc... Thanks to your skill, of course...! (*To the audience*) ‘Cos, we must admit, killing off my lifelong character, and then, four episodes later, having her twin show up – someone no-one in the whole county had ever met before – isn’t that original, you know... However, when you think about the inner life, and above all, the outer life of this off-road, wonder-woman you’ve created to bring me back from the dead, I admit it took some imagination!

ROC – Oh, Gloria, OK... so the super-lady is mine, but all the credit for making her so *grand*, or rather, for making her so *young*, making her so *young*... (*he laughs at his own joke*) goes to you, to you...!

GLORIA – Yes, I’m here to discuss this, precisely...

ROC – (*happy as a sandboy*) You’ve got *more* to add? You want even more? It was clear to me when I met you...! I don’t think you realise just how swamped our communication department has been over the past year with messages addressed to Lidia Fortuny...! The channel’s even been thinking of launching her as some kind of brand name!

GLORIA – Really? What do they have in mind? (*To the audience*) If he says anything about anti-ageing skin cream, I’ll throttle him...

ROC – They can’t make up their minds... it’s between marketing 5,000 green wigs the same colour as Lidia’s hair, which would come out for Mardi Gras, or bringing out an intimate diary of her sexual fantasies, which could be published in time for World Book Day...

GLORIA – (*To the audience*) The TV superstore never ceases to surprise...!

ROC – (*He laughs. He looks at her, mesmerised*) Since you’ve been back in the series as Lidia, we’ve been... ‘in the Glory’... pun intended! (*He goes on laughing*).

GLORIA – (*She laughs at his joke. Suddenly, she turns back, serious, to face the audience*) I’m starting to feel sorry for this numbskull... in five seconds, *he’ll* be the one in free-fall. (*To Roc, who keeps on laughing*) Look, laddie, right now I’d like to save you the shock... But you’re old enough to know, in life, it’s impossible to avoid upsets.

ROC – Eh?

GLORIA – I’m quitting the series.

ROC – What?!!!

GLORIA – I decided this morning... a personal epiphany. Of course, I first called Gina, but I got her answering machine all the time, so I told myself, ‘go and see Roc before he hands in the plot script for the new season...’

ROC – Wait a...

GLORIA – “and so, he’ll still be in time to think up one of those impressive endings he likes so much for women like me.” Even though, coming here in a taxi – (*to the audience*) it’s months now I haven’t even been able to take the underground – (*to Roc*) I came up with a great ending! Listen: Lidia decides to

say ‘goodbye’ to this world as she’s cross-country skiing on the mountain slopes! And she leaves just like that, like a hero, disturbing nobody, just vanishing into a snow storm and fog... Hey, you’ll find me a good double... for the final downhill stampede, won’t you? But I don’t mind doing the close-ups myself... I’m not afraid of them!

ROC – You’ve taken my breath away... I’m at a loss for words!

GLORIA – Well, if this is what happens to the lead scriptwriter, *I’m* at a loss! *(To the audience)* You can understand it, poor bloke, he’s going to go downhill all the way now, faster than on an Alpine ski slope, only now my curve is not to blame!

ROC – They’ve made you another offer, right? Look, I told Gina they ought to sort out your contract, now you’re in more demand than ever...

GLORIA – No, deary, it’s not that, though it’s true I’ve had offers... of all sorts... Iziar Bollain wants us to make a mockumentary about a woman traveller who gets tattooed in freaky places... Jaume Balaguero wants me as a robot with superpowers in his new science-fiction film. *(To the audience)* At least, he doesn’t want me as a *zombie!* *(To Roc)* And you’ll love this, Amenábar’s agent has asked me to be in a mini-series on the lines of *The Bionic Woman* set in an old people’s home! *(To the audience)* Whatever... no comment...!

ROC – Awesome, Gloria... and it’ll mean even greater publicity for *LuckyEnders!* Gina can make sure your film stuff won’t interfere with our shooting schedule... we’ll do everything we can to...

GLORIA – *(With rage)* You don’t get it, do you... I’m not interested in these projects?!

ROC – Not interested?

GLORIA – No!! I don’t want to play the same old super-Lidia-Fortuny script again! No more wonder-woman going up and over walls, seducing men who could be her grandsons, who never gets hurt, never makes mistakes, who’s never afraid of losing everything, and who’s been programmed only for seeking pleasure, winning, and endless success!

ROC – But... I still don’t get it... What’s wrong with all that?

GLORIA – That’s the problem! Nothing! There’s nothing wrong with it! Don’t you see? You... do you think it’s normal they ring me up to ask me to be Bionic Woman? At this rate, I’ll be in *Basic Instinct 3*!

ROC – Let’s see, Gloria... I... I don’t understand... Well, on the one hand, yes... Now you’re getting all these proposals... which, in truth, many actresses would pay to have... But, of course, you... You’re a true artist... And, as a good actress, you don’t want to be type-cast... But, but listen, listen, Gloria... Don’t you realise that, with Lidia Fortuny, what we’ve done, or rather, what *you*’ve done is, precisely, precisely, to change the script that is expected... expected... of...

GLORIA – of... what... buddy?!

ROC – Of... of...

GLORIA – Come on! Out with it, damn you!

ROC – Of someone... someone... someone who...

GLORIA – Now you’re really stuck! Dust the ‘kybes’ off your brain, young man!

ROC – ...of someone of your age??!

GLORIA – *Eureka!!!!* The magic word has shown up! (*She grabs the newspaper from her bag and slaps his face with it*) Like this one here, not so?

ROC – (*He stands bewildered, looking at the newspaper*) Yes... Ah... I see you’ve read the news from the BBC... I hope you’re not upset we didn’t tell you personally, about the remake, I mean? Well, it’s not something that affects you directly, really... And, if it does, it’s only in passing... in a positive way, right? I mean... if Helen Mirren takes your part in the BBC version... it’s because the character... is really worth it, right...?

GLORIA – (*Angry*) I couldn’t give a monkey’s if Meryl Streep herself wants to copy me ... from the top of my worn-out head down to my cute, little toes!

ROC – Well, precisely...!

The cry of a young woman is heard as she runs on stage right, dressed in casual clothes and wearing a green wig. She’s the same actress who plays Gina, but she looks younger and wilder.

GIRL INTERN – Aaaaaah!!!! They told me they saw her come in...!!! And... Yes...no??? It's her, isn't it?! Isn't it? Isn't it? Isn't it?

GLORIA – (*To the audience*) This is what they call 'déjà vu.' Mind you, the way it looks, I can't tell whether it's 'déjà vu' or a nightmare.

INTERN GIRL – (*To Roc*) Is it her or not?!

ROC – Excuse me... I don't know who you are, but you can't just burst in here like this...

INTERN GIRL – Sorry, sorry, sorry! I'm new, from the communication department... and President of Lidia Fortuny's Fan Club!! *In person*!!!! We were unpacking copies of your wigs in the office, when my colleagues saw you pass by like a flash of lightning...!

ROC – So, they finally opted for the wigs...

GLORIA – And so, 'is it me, or is it *not* me?'

INTERN GIRL – Oh my god! Seeing her up close... with no wig and no make-up... The truth is... I don't know what to say!! Wow!

GLORIA – 'Dost thou know the difference, my boy, between a bitter fool and a sweet fool?'

INTERN GIRL – I'm flipping out... (*To Roc*) Is she going a bit crazy, or what?

ROC – You'd better leave... We're in the middle of an important meeting.

INTERN GIRL – (*searching in her pocket for her cell phone*) OK, OK... But before... (*standing next to her*) Just to make sure my mates'll believe me, OK...? It's only a second... (*taking a selfie of the two of them*) Liiiiii...diaaaaa!

GLORIA – (*Over-voicing her*) Leeeeee...ar!!

INTERN GIRL – That's it! (*She leaves, recording herself with her cell phone, ignoring Roc and Gloria*) Hey, 'you bunch of losers', guess who I've just seen, right now...?!

ROC – I'm awfully sorry, where were we?

GLORIA – That one... on another planet, but me, right here! (*Reading from the newspaper*) "Highly-acclaimed English actress Helen Mirren will play the role of Lidia Fortuny in the BBC version of *LuckyEnders*. Seventy-year-old Gloria

Aran embodies this character in the original version of the series, bringing to life a charismatic woman, who, *in spite of her age*, becomes irresistible to everyone who comes before her. Aran, like Mirren and other actresses of *her generation*, are showing that, nowadays, women in their *seventies*, or even, in their *eighties*, like Judi Dench, can be just as sexy as those in their *thirties*, or even their *twenties*...!” You, who know so much about the media world... tell me ... *Qu’est-ce que c’est que ça?*!!

ROC – I don’t know what you mean... Are you upset they’ve published your age? Is that it? Or is it that you don’t want to be thought of as irresistible, or *sexy*?

GLORIA – Look, young man, what I’m about to tell you might be difficult to take in, for what’s between *your* ears. But let me try, at least. (*Taking a deep breath*) I have no problem telling you how old I am. In fact, I’m really proud of having reached this far, and that’s why I get mad when they tell me I’m ‘great for my age, or that ‘I don’t look my age.’ But what I really can’t stand is when who I am and what I do is considered exceptional precisely because I’m as old as I am. I’ve worked too hard to end up belittled in this way. Do you understand? (*Pause*) Not yet? (*To the audience*) Good heavens... ‘The hedge-sparrow fed the Cuckoo so long / That it had it head bit off by it young’ (*To Roc*) Am I right in thinking that, for some time now, we’ve found it offensive the mention of the race, sexuality, or religious persuasion of a criminal, on the news? Don’t we find it repulsive when, even now in some news channels, they talk about the ‘casualties’ of a disaster, adding later, just to clarify, ‘including women and children,’ as if they were not part of the human race? It’s high time we reacted the same way, when they categorise people overtly only according to their age! Why do we insist on mentioning someone’s age when this information, no matter how important it is, never tells us anything about who we truly are? Would they ever say, ‘Gloria Aran, who weighs 65 kilos...’, or ‘Gloria Aran, who’s allergic to gluten...’? Would they? How come we’re not offended when we’re trapped in clichés, whether they be depressing or ridiculously optimistic, only for being the same age as millions of people totally different from us?

ROC – I think you’re overstating an issue which is beside the point, Gloria...

GLORIA – You’re wrong!! But no wonder, because we’re so used to it, to this way of ostracising, we’re not even able to see it! But you should read between the lines, Roc: in this report, the news is that I can do what I do precisely...

because I'm as old as I am! Don't you see? "in spite of her age"! And, on reading this, I come to realise the success I've enjoyed these past months has little to do with my virtues as an actress... but it's all down rather to the low credibility I have for the audience as an old woman... *(to the audience)* and rest assured, I'm not afraid of saying so, old, old, old, as I'm not afraid of saying I'm a woman, or of having been born where I was born! *(To Roc)* And do you know what my incredulous audience most admires about me? That someone like me can do what she's doing, because, in truth, they never thought it possible... or, even worse, they never thought it possible that my character could live... as those button-pushing *target groups* you're always paying heed to... would like to live!

ROC – But Gloria, that's not the way it is... All your fans adore you just as much for what you do, as for what you represent, and for what you are...!

GLORIA – What I am? What do the spectators know about that? Wouldn't that be the result of the fantasy we've created for them? Have you seen this photograph of Helen Mirren, in which she's showing her boobs? And the one of Judi Dench... they describe her as 'the latest Bond girl'... next to a photo of me climbing? What's up if being seventy is not the same – and we don't want it to be the same – as being thirty or twenty? What if being seventy is much more than that? Especially, for women, eh? Here we go again! Is it that if we don't go on seducing, we no longer exist? Is growing old, after all, a failure?

GINA – *(Coming in, suddenly)* Of course not... quite the opposite.

ROC – Gina! Thank goodness you've come! I was on the point of collapse!

GINA – *(Not listening to him)* Growing old is a success, in itself. Dying before you get old... That is really, in a way, a kind of defeat... at least, in our world.

GLORIA – *(To the audience)* What's up with *her*, now?

ROC – Gina, did you get my message? Never mind, we've got a crisis on our hands. Gloria...

GINA – ... is quitting the series. Yes, I've heard the message she left on my phone.

ROC – Then thank goodness you've reacted so fast, because you're the only one who can convince her that this is madness! *(Pause)* Come on, tell her,

Gina, tell her that no actress in her right mind would give up a character like hers that's doing so well... not even for... I don't even know what for, to be honest! *(To himself)* Just a second... 'No actress in her right mind...' *(Discreetly, to Gina, as if Gloria couldn't hear him)* Shhh, don't tell me she's going gaga already...?

GINA – Gloria is in tip top shape, Roc, both here *(pointing at her head)* and here *(pointing at her ear)*.

GLORIA – *(To the audience)* The way it stands right now, I wouldn't go that far... I'm not the Bionic Woman, for Pete's sake!

ROC – *(To Gloria, recalling her presence)* No doubt, no doubt! What it all boils down to is...

GINA – ... what it all boils down to is that you're facing up to an idealistic woman. My dad admired her because, in her youth, she never wanted to be the 'starlette.' Why would she betray her ideals now, tell me?

ROC – Why is it, then, if you're thinking like that, her current character is bringing hope to people? Because it shows us that there's another way to grow old! I don't get it, Gloria! Even you made me realise that not everything ends with Maria Fortuny's downward curve!

GINA – And what if some people don't even get to that curve?

ROC – Ouch, Gina, whose side are you on? You're not helping at all! This is a vital moment, for us! Did you get the message I left you...?

GINA – Yes, and I've come for this. And for hers. I'm also quitting the series. And the channel.

ROC – You're kidding...

GINA – I'm afraid I'm not. I've been diagnosed with a degenerative disease, one that's admittedly rare and affects very few people. But minorities and rareties also have physical bodies, with names and surnames. And this one will have mine.

ROC – Oh my gosh, Gina, what are you talking about...?

GLORIA – My Cordelia...

GINA – The doctors say it's really a pity I've come down with it while I'm still young... the younger you are the faster it moves. Right now, Gloria, you can't imagine how much I wish I was as old as you are.

GLORIA – *(To the audience)* And all of a sudden, I become Lear again: "I feel this pinprick. Would I were assured. Of my condition."

Sudden black out.

Scene 3 – Test Card

The stage set has been changed: the table and the two chairs now occupy a central position, with the table mid-stage and with the two chairs further back, on both sides of the table. Roc/Delivery Man and Gina/Girl Intern sit on the chairs, relaxed, each holding a remote control. Items of clothing of the four characters hang from the clothes-stand, now at centre-back-stage, behind the two chairs. New props include a camera on a strategically-placed tripod that will allow framing the main actress in a close-up at a given moment of the scene. Next to it are placed a sound recorder pole and headphones. But now, a mixture of graphic images are projected on the screen, combining designs of the rising and descending curves we've seen before, the word 'tempestuous' that breaks up, syllabically, into 'tem,' 'pes,' 'tu,' 'ous,' the words 'ageist' and 'success,' which are given shape and dissolve, letter by letter. The same happens to the words 'Maria' and 'Lidia,' which become muddled and blur, and 'Fortuny' and 'Fortune,' and 'Lucky' and 'Enders,' which are mixed with 'Gloria' and 'Aran', and the words 'prime' and 'time.' This latter pair appear, separately, approaching each other, one from each side of the screen, until they unite and then separate again, blending in with the words 'maximum,' 'audience,' and 'ratings,' and, superimposed, slowly becoming dominant, appear the pairs 'better' and 'time,' and, briefly, 'the prime of life,' until the image of the old TV test card ends the visual effects. The constant, high-frequency note that characterised the test card goes on until Gloria Aran comes on stage and stands centre-front-stage. She is wearing a combination of clothes and accessories from the two previous scenes, as if she had wanted to combine two seasons in one, or as if she had dressed for a sunny and rainy day all at once. She is wearing the sunglasses she wore in Scene 2. The acting tone in this scene leaves the natural tone of the earlier scenes behind, and comes closer to television farce, inspired by the histrionic gesticulations of TV presenters and spectators in a false 'reality show,' which will give the whole scene a dream-like and fanciful aura that this ending requires.

GLORIA – Excuse me, I think you've gate-crashed my dream. Well, never mind. After all, I've spent over forty years getting into your house through your TV set with no permission except that of your remote control. No worries, it won't happen again. For days and nights now I've done nothing but think of the options, but now I've made up my mind: Not only am I quitting the series, but I'm quitting television, as well. *(Groans from the two actors sitting behind. She tells them to shut up, with authority)* Shhh, hush, targets! *(To the audience, gently)* Don't worry... I'm not giving up acting. But I'm changing where I perform.

The two actors behind get up quickly and try to tempt her with offers.

SHE – Are you going back to theatre? (*Sound of applause*)

HE – Or will you try cinema? (*Flash-photography*)

GLORIA – Neither of those! A bit of everything. (*She goes to the clothes-stand and takes the base-ball cap and the green wig*) I think I'm getting a penchant for performance work... from now on. I adore it's satisfying, emotional spontaneity, (*while speaking, she places the base-ball cap back-to-front on the actress's head*) its sense of commitment, (*she places the girl intern's wig on the actor's head*) its imaginative and radical mix of languages... (*She looks for the effect*) But it's all still up in the air. Me... I'm an artist, and the way of the artist is along the path of creativity.

SHE – And you'll get to act King Lear... in the end? (*Bells ring*)

HE – Or, better, the Fool? (*A horn sounds*)

GLORIA – Maybe I'll be Kent... somewhere in the middle. Now I can end it all with... "I have a journey, sir, shortly to go." But, ah!... now it's me, not Kent, that calls... and "I must not say no." So, for me, no more acting out other people's scripts. From now on, I'll be the interpreter of the meanings behind my own words. But, first, a short survey for my *focus groups*. Ready? (*The two actors sit down, nodding*) Let's see now, of my two television characters, who's liked Maria Fortuny best? (*The actress, wearing the base-ball cap, presses a button on her remote control and sets off a screeching sound*) And who plumps for her sister Lidia? (*The actor presses a button on his remote control and sets off a different noise. Gloria goes on speaking to the audience*) You see? Always divided! To be or not to be? Grow old like this (*she points at the actress behind, who is making the mask of tragedy with her body*) or like that? (*she points at the actor, who's doing the same with the mask of comedy*) (*The two actors look at each other, still with their finger on the remote control*) With Maria, it was clear... even the longest-running soaps, sooner or later, have to end up badly... (*Sound of the actress's remote control again, who has now abandoned her previous body position, and is now pointing the remote control up in the air.*) Lidia, on the other hand, has taught me that, the older you grow, the more necessary it becomes to conquer impossible peaks (*The actor has now abandoned his previous body position, and he, too, is now pointing the remote control up in the air.*) But what do I do, as Gloria Aran, if I want to defend them both... and especially if Maria and Lidia also stand for what I don't want to turn into?

SHE – *(Trying to get her back, taking off her base-ball cap, embracing her, while the first notes of Serrat's song are heard)* You're like an aunty, to me!

HE – *(Without the wig, and showing the newspaper from the previous scene, he jumps over her, while the first notes of the James Bond theme are heard)* You'll be the next James Bond granny!

GLORIA – *(Trying to throw both of them off)* Well, yes, it's fascinating... this growing old business... And never stop 'being' *(she throws the actress off)* and 'not being' *(she throws the actor off)*, at the same time, while you're travelling through Time. In the end, though, there comes a day when, inevitably, you look into the mirror for a long time, and you ask yourself, in wonder...

SHE – *(Looking into an imaginary mirror)* "Ah...

HE – *(Looking into an imaginary mirror)* then...

GLORIA – ... is that all there is?' *(The two actors go towards the tripod and pick up the filming equipment. They place it in a strategic position around Gloria, as if Gloria were on a film set).* Yes, I've spent my whole life making myself invisible behind a character's mask and, why hide it, enjoying fame this has brought me. From now on, I want to make myself visible through the characters I choose to play. I want to find out who I really am, at this delicate and exciting moment in my life. No one said it would be easy... but it wasn't easy to be a child, or a teenager, or young, or middle-aged, especially, above all because of what was expected of me at every moment. *(The actors have positioned themselves as cameraman and sound technician and are getting ready to shoot)* In the fullness of my life, I want to 'occupy' my age, I want to feel it in all its ripeness to find out, truly, who I'm able to 'become', now. Will this be my greatest performance? The moment to express myself freely, at last?

HE – Sound ready!

SHE – Camera ready! Action!

GLORIA – *(Gloria speaks to the camera, which is now on air, and a full-face close-up of the actress is projected on the screen. Lively music sounds in the background, while Gloria takes off her sunglasses)* My name is Gloria Aran. I have a dream... to start my own project. It's a "work-in-progress" which has still to be defined, like me... I am just learning how to grow old. But I depend on a wealth of knowledge, created by opinion groups of all ages, who think of themselves as 'little' and 'big,' 'old' and 'young,' and many of these, all this at the same time. Some even

call themselves ‘age queers’... not classifiable by age...! I’ve asked each and every one: what surprises you about growing older? And what would you never give up? You’d be astonished at the answers they’ve given, even of those who are registering in this auditorium at this very moment. This is the beginning of a time of splendour... a true *prime time*, for me and for all of you. And, what’s really stimulating about it is that the script which is awaiting us, in fact, is as yet unwritten. Can I count on your complicity? (*She winks at the camera*) Will I be able to count on my own when I wake up... ?

The stage is in darkness as the camera takes a close-up of her eyes. The screen fades to black and the music ends abruptly. High-pitched note of the Test Card sounds. Blackout. High-pitched note stops.

NOTE ON THE VIDEOS:

Projections of the video projections are complementary and totally optional. In a longer version of the play, short cuts may be included of camera tests of Gloria Aran as Maria Fortuny (before the first scene) and as Lidia Fortuny (before the second scene). The rising and descending graphs of Scene 1 and Scene 2, respectively, or a ‘LuckyEnders’ curtain to open the play, or the scene titles, may also be included. In any event, the use of these videos is recommended since they might serve as a prop that integrates the ‘on air’ camera shoot that ends the play.

NOTE ON THE PLAY’S CULTURAL REFERENCES:

The play is set in an imaginary TV series-producing company in Catalonia, north-east Spain. The characters’ names are drawn from several important Catalan figures from the worlds of soap-opera and theatre:

Glòria’s surname “Aran” is a tribute to Anna Lizaran, who died in 2013 and who was considered a “theatrical goddess” in Catalonia. Lizaran was also a friend of Imma Colomer’s, the actress for whom Prime Time was originally written.

“Pepito” is an indirect reference to Josep Maria Benet i Jornet, the so-called “father of Catalan soap operas” and, also, a well-known playwright in Spain, who is often referred to as “Pepito” by his friends and colleagues.

Roc’s surname, “Biaix,” is another indirect reference to Joan Bas, the first producer of Catalan soap-operas. (In addition, “Roc” means “big stone” in Catalan, something that has to do with the characters’ incapacity to understand Glòria’s position. ‘Biaix’ also suggests ‘Bias’).

Glòria is, of course, “Glory” in Catalan, and is also an indirect reference to Gloria Swanson in Sunset Boulevard.

Gina’s surname, “Guasch,” is the playwright’s personal homage to Balbina Guasch, a most dramatic aunt with a theatrical surname, whom she loved dearly and who passed away only a few months before Prime Time was written.

The cultural (ageist and sexist) archetype of the (unmarried) older woman who, in Catalonia, is often associated with the figure of “the auntie,” and is referred to in the play through the nostalgic and extremely popular song that the Catalan singer Joan Manel Serrat devoted to this figure: “La tieta.”

As for place names, ‘Sort’ (where the play’s soap opera is located) is a well-known village in the Catalan Pyrenees, the main town of the Pallars Sobirà region, which is famous for its beautiful landscape, the practice of extreme sports, and, also, for its lottery administration office, which has won the Christmas lottery on many occasions, for which it is well-known all over Spain. Sort means “Luck” in Catalan, and it is based on this pun that the play’s soap-opera is entitled “Gent de Sort” (People from Sort, People with Luck). The title has been adapted into “LuckyEnders” by the play’s translators, also as a tribute to the British soap opera EastEnders, the main referent of Josep Maria Benet i Jornet in the creation of the first soap opera produced by Catalan public TV.

Casa Batlló is a very famous building in Barcelona designed by Antoni Gaudí. La Pala Pedregosa de Llessú is a mountain with a stony and very difficult peak to climb in the Pallars region.

Famous personalities of the American and Spanish film and TV worlds are mentioned. Whereas Helen Mirren, Judi Dench and Meryl Streep are evoked as emblems of ‘successful female ageing’ in mainstream cinema, Alan Ball is referred to as an important HBO figure, and the filmmakers Izúcar Bollain, Jaume Balagueró, and Alejandro Amenábar are associated with the very different film styles that they have developed at some point of their

careers (cinema vérité, horror and fantasy, respectively). Any of these names may be changed if the cultural context of the play is also modified.

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*Núria Casado Gual
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(Queries on performance rights should be sent to: ncasado@dal.udl.cat)