



AGE OF REASON

STEVEN SPARLING COMES EYEBALL TO EYEBALL WITH A NEW DECADE...

Time, or rather the passage of it, has been on my mind since we flipped the calendar to 2011. The fact that 2010 seems to have passed by in the time it took me to down a G&T is sharply contrasted by the significant milestone that 2011 brings. But before I reveal all, let me tell you about a recent night at the theatre. I had heard the buzz about *Love Story* at the Duchess Theatre – a production by Michael Ball, this is the musical version of the 1970 film with the score this time by Howard Goodall. I'm giving away nothing that isn't revealed in the opening number by telling you that it's a boy-meets-girl story where the girl dies rather suddenly at 25. Just barely into married life, her life is cut short by leukaemia. The show is classy, well-acted, well-directed and the score is beautiful – but pack a hanky or two, 'cause you'll need them. It made me think what a casual relationship I have with time. I always assume there is plenty of it. I've always counted on a long life in which to pursue all of my interests, have multiple careers, see the world, engage with a large social base and still have time to stay youthful and fit. I'm waking up to the fact that this is a bit like betting it all on Vegas. It might happen, it might not, but it's a pretty high-stakes wager. I have had a good ride with time so far, but it's the cocky gambler who usually loses his shirt. So, I recognise that I need to start measuring time with a bit more care. Like the old carpenter's motto – *measure twice, cut once* – I need to start using time with more precision.

Why the added pressure? Well, 2011 brings my 40th birthday. To my shock, while desperately clinging to the idea that I was still in my twenties, my entire thirties have slid right by. But it's time to grow up, stop shopping at Topman and get on with striving for what I really want out of life.

Statistically, I am moving into my middle age. With a life expectancy for men in the UK of about 77 years, there's no fooling myself that I haven't passed the median. While I don't expect it to be all downhill from here on, there does come a time when you have to loosen your grasp on youth or risk looking like some pantomime dame strutting her stuff on Old Compton Street. It does feel like I'm at a crossroads. One road surrenders to age, getting older with dignity and grace – call it the George Clooney road – allowing the grey hair full reign,

dressing in handsome, sombre classics and embracing the finer things in life. The other road is the rock 'n' roll road which relishes in growing old disgracefully – call it the Nicky Haslam/Ronnie Woods road – carrying on as if one can do anything at 65 that one could have done at 25. I know which path seems more respectable and I know which path seems more fun...

Then there are the Dorian Grays of the world whose faces display no passing of time. People such as Tom Ford, who did not look like a man about to turn 50 when he appeared at the recent BAFTA awards. Does he sleep in a cryogenically sealed bubble to delay the ravages of time? Did he buy it off the Michael Jackson estate? The seriously dishy Mr Ford could easily pass for 30, though it is slightly creepy that he seemingly hasn't aged at all over the past ten years in the spotlight.



Besides contemplating whether to dye the grey, there are larger issues about dreams and goals. It's time

to weed through dreams to decide which are worth pursuing and which need to be abandoned by the side of the path.

My nephew wants to be a geologist and Egyptologist when he grows up – this seems charming in a seven-year-old; such ambition in a 40-year-old starts to seem delusional. This means that each goal, each dream, each desire needs to be taken off the shelf, dusted off and thoroughly assessed. If it is still important and worth fighting for, then it's time to come up with a killer plan to achieve it, otherwise it needs to go into the dumpster of discarded dreams. That's got to be part of the reality of becoming a middle-aged man.

Likewise with all those doubts and fears that plagued me all through my teens, twenties and thirties... enough! *Basta!* I have no time to indulge them any longer. So they too can go into the dumpster.

What's left? Well, I hope it's a middle-aged man with purpose and direction,

so that if the thread of my life is cut prematurely short, like in *Love Story*, my life has been lived with meaning. What more can you ask from your 40's? Well, maybe *that* and another G&T?

Oh, and just as we were going to press, I read that they'd posted closure notices for *Love Story*. Another reminder that nothing lasts forever... ●

TURNING 40 MEANS YOU CAN'T PUT OFF THE PURSUIT OF GOALS ANY LONGER...