Introduction:

As the summer sun fades and autumn's cooler breezes begin to sweep in, many of us feel a mix of emotions. Some people love the summer—the warmth, the long days, the energy. They lament the loss of it as the days shorten, holding onto every last ray of sunshine. Others welcome autumn with its crisp air, vibrant colors, and the promise of a slower, more reflective pace. In many ways, our lives mirror these seasons. Tom's 40th birthday is tomorrow (9/20). In today's speech, he will share his reflections on this change of season in his life and invite us to think about our own. Please join me in welcoming Tom with his speech "From Summer to Autumn: A Life in Transition." "From Summer to Autumn: A Life in Transition", Tom Tan.

From Summer to Autumn: A Life in Transition

(Opening) Turning 40 feels like coming to the autumn equinox—bidding farewell to the bright light and the passionate heat of summer and saying hello to the golden hues of autumn. As my 40th birthday is approaching, I can't help but reflect on this change of season in my life—the transition from the high energy and excitement of youth to a period of harvesting and planting seeds for winter crops. Whether you're a summer lover or an autumn enthusiast, there's something beautiful in every season, and I'd like to share how I'm navigating this one.

(Harvest) Like many of you, I've worked hard over the years to grow my career, cultivate relationships, and develop my identity. Now, as I look around, I realize I'm gathering the fruits of that labor. In my career as a professor, I've reached a point where I can lead and mentor others, share my knowledge, and influence the next generation. It's a reminder that the seeds I planted long ago, while playing with my blackboard and chalk at home in China, have blossomed into something tangible and rewarding. Beyond work, I've cultivated meaningful relationships—friendships and family connections that have stood the test of time. I have learned to be less judgmental and more accepting. But not all those relationships are with me the same way anymore. Three years ago, I lost my grandmother, who was incredibly dear to me. On my birthdays, she would use her sweetest voice and say to me, "Happy Birthday, and be happy every day." Although she's no longer physically present, her love, her joy, and her warmth remain a part of the harvest and will continue to shape my life.

I imagine many of you feel this sense of harvest in your own lives. Whether it's professional success, the strength of long-term relationships, or personal growth, we all gather something during the autumn of life. What are you harvesting in your life right now? What fruits are you proud of?

(Winter crops) A season of harvest doesn't mean we stop planting. In autumn, farmers plant crops that will grow quietly over the winter, preparing for the following spring. Turning 40 reminds me that I need to keep planting seeds for the future to keep bringing me vitality and joy. For me, those seeds include setting new personal and professional goals, staying healthy physically and mentally, learning new skills and hobbies, and mentoring others more intentionally. For example, I am interested in contributing to the collaboration between divinity and business education. These are the 'winter crops' I'm planting. They will grow and ground me in the seasons ahead.

In our lives, seeds are sown for what's yet to come. The fruit may not be visible now, but we are laying the groundwork for future growth and fulfillment. We're all nurturing something for the future, with faith that our efforts today will blossom in the seasons ahead.

(Strawberry) As I transition into autumn, I start to realize that some things, like strawberries, aren't in season anymore. It is harder and harder for me to feel that excitement as a child. But that doesn't mean they're entirely out of reach. With effort, I can still enjoy those 'summer fruits'—the things that bring a sense of youthful joy and energy. For me, learning foreign languages and traveling are my strawberries. Exploring new places and cultures and occasionally staying at a youth hostel keep me connected to a sense of adventure and curiosity, reminding me of the boundless enthusiasm I had in my younger years. Though the demands of life may make spontaneous trips and immersive learning more challenging, I still make the effort. It's MY way of keeping that youthful, adventurous spirit alive.

I'm sure each of you has your own strawberries. Maybe it's a hobby, a relationship, or an experience that makes you feel alive. Even if it requires a bit more planning, cost, and effort now, those 'strawberries' are still within reach, helping us hold on to the vitality of our youth.

(Conclusion)

(Breathe and pause) We're all in different seasons of life. Some of you may be just entering your summer, full of energy and growth. Others, like me, might be feeling the onset of autumn, ready to reap what you've sown and prepare for the future. Wherever you are, this is the perfect moment to take action.

What are you harvesting? Celebrate your achievements, acknowledge the fruits of your hard work, and share your wisdom with those around you. What seeds are you planting for the seasons to come? Set your goals, learn new skills, and nurture what matters most to you—whether it's your health, relationships, or dreams. And don't forget your strawberries—the things that keep you connected to your youthful spirit. Find them, make time for them, and hold them close.

Now is the time to act. Make the most of your current season and prepare yourself for the ones that lie ahead.