Chapter 1

It was Fall time in Earthampton.

Leaves tumbled from the trees and covered the yards. The mornings were darker. The winds coming down from the neighboring hills had a chill in them.

Jackets, sweaters, and shawls came out of closets.

Summer was leaving.

Aaron Brown liked watching the seasons change. Every year it happened in almost the same way, but somehow it never seemed exactly the same.

There was only one thing about fall that Aaron did not like.

Actually, there was one thing his entire family did not like.

Aaron's cold season.

Every year, when the weather became colder, Aaron seemed to catch one cold after another. His nose would get stuffy. Then came the sneezing. Sometimes the coughing kept him awake at night. Occasionally, he even developed a fever and had to miss school.

Sharon and Nathan had tried all kinds of things over the years.

Nothing seemed to make much difference.

Most of the cold medicines available in Earthampton came from Hortianna. The company sold just about everything a person could imagine for a cold—liquids, lozenges, rubs, drops, and more.

Sharon hated seeing the medicine cabinet fill up every winter.

"Every year, the same thing," she would complain.

Aaron had noticed something too.

His colds seemed to follow a strange pattern. They came during the colder months, disappeared, and then sometimes returned again.

Once spring arrived, however, they were gone.

Completely.

And so, every year when October arrived, Nathan knew what else was probably coming.

Sneezes.

Coughs.

Tissues.

And lots of complaining.

Unfortunately for Nathan, October also brought something else.

His birthday.

That year was special.

Nathan Brown was turning forty.

Sharon bought a cake.

On top, in large icing letters, she had written:

40 YEARS: YOUNG AND BALD

Aaron stared at it.

Then he stared at his father's head.

Then he looked back at the cake.

"Mom," he said, "that's perfect."

Nathan gave both of them a look.

"Thank you very much."

"Happy birthday, dear," Sharon said. "You are now officially the oldest and wisest person in this house."

Aaron shook his head.

"Definitely the oldest."

Nathan turned toward him.

"Excuse me?"

"You're only ten years away from fifty, Dad."

Nathan stared at him.

"Wow," Aaron continued. "You are one old person."

Nathan grabbed him and pulled him into a hug.

"Come here, you little monster."

Aaron laughed and tried to escape.

After breakfast, they gathered around the cake. Nathan lit the candles and blew them out.

"Did you make a wish?" Aaron asked.

"Of course."

"What did you wish for?"

Nathan smiled.

"Secret."

"Come on, Dad."

"No."

"Just tell me."

"If I tell you, it won't happen."

Aaron had never understood this rule about birthday wishes.

How did wishes know whether someone had talked about them?

"Please?"

"Nope."

Sharon joined in.

"Nathan, just whisper it to him."

Nathan shook his head.

"A secret is a secret. I'm not telling Aaron. And I'm definitely not telling you."

Aaron thought for a moment.

Then he reached for the matchbox.

"What are you doing?" Nathan asked.

Aaron relit the candles.

"My turn."

He closed his eyes.

He made a wish.

Then he blew.

Sharon smiled. "What did you wish for?"

Aaron hesitated.

"Can I tell you?"

"Of course."

"But Dad said it won't happen if I tell."

"We'll make it happen," Sharon said. "Whatever it is."

Aaron looked at both of them.

Then came his mischievous smile.

"I wished for..."

He paused.

Nathan waited.

Sharon waited.

"...a whole season without a cold or cough."

Nathan immediately said, "Forever."

Aaron looked at him.

"What?"

"Don't wish for just one season. Say forever."

Aaron narrowed his eyes.

"Was that your wish too, Dad?"

Nathan smiled.

He said nothing.

"Dad?"

Still nothing.

"Nathan!" Sharon said. "For heaven's sake, stop acting like an eight-year-old and answer the eight-year-old."

Aaron laughed.

Finally, Nathan nodded.

"Yes."

Aaron's eyes widened.

"You wished the same thing?"

"I did."

Sharon picked up the matchbox.

"Then we're doing this properly."

She lit the candles again.

Nathan leaned toward the cake.

So did Sharon.

So did Aaron.

"Ready?" she asked.

"Ready."

Together, the three of them blew out the candles.

Aaron looked at the little trails of smoke rising from them.

Three people.

One wish.

No more colds.

He hoped birthday wishes really worked.

Because October had just begun.