

THE JOURNEY IS YOURS

BLUSHWOOD

THE  
NEARING  
DARK  
SEASON

JENNIFER LISS



## TO BEGIN YOUR JOURNEY...

In the kingdom of East Blushwood, not everything is as it seems. Sure, there's a queen. People work in the villages. The seasons change. Winter is cold. Flowers bloom in spring. There are caves, hills, and vast meadows. Birds fly. But here, dragons soar across the sky. Witches make deals with ghosts. Goblins beg for meat. In this extraordinary place, trees are guardians of secrets, and purple-winged owls speak half-truths.

You are the Soothsayer, or Truth-Teller of East Blushwood. Queen Rozala relies on you to keep the kingdom safe. She sends you on missions whenever there are threats. Your razor-sharp senses and powerful visions help you along the way. Your parents, who died a long time ago, also had special gifts.

In a small cottage in the woods, you were raised by your grandfather. He is old, but he still has the spirit of his youth. You two laugh often and share stories. But you keep quiet about your assignments from the queen.

On your missions, answers are not always easy to find. Tough decisions need to be made. The truth may be painful to face. But when you fail, you try again. When you get stuck, you look at things in a new way.

Ready to begin your journey? Go to page 3.

► **Your journey begins.**

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The people of East Blushwood are gathered at Crane Lagoon. You and your grandfather stand near Queen Rozala and her fox Syfer.

You are surprised to see the Time Witch among the crowd. She is thought to be one of the oldest witches. But her skin is free of wrinkles, and her hair is as black as midnight. The Time Witch's ability to adjust time allows her to keep her youth.

It is the nearing dark season. Leaves have fallen, the days are shorter, and rain arrives intermittently. The year is almost over. Snow will come soon.

Winter preparations have begun. That is when a new year begins.

But first, the two cranes must dance. The birds are brothers who soar high, swoop low, and then glide across the lagoon. Their annual dance is a ritual

believed to keep away bad luck in East Blushwood. It is the reason everyone has come to the lagoon.

Both cranes have bright yellow legs and thin, curved necks. Wen's feathers are as silver as the full moon. His brother Ari is the shade of a deep blue sky. They have danced through many seasons.

Wen flies low. He glides inches above the lagoon. Then he lands near the shore. The East Blushwood community steps forward. Dazzled, the people draw nearer to the water.

But Ari is nowhere to be found. The audience begins to whisper and mutter.

“Where is Ari?” your grandfather asks. “The brothers are always together.”

You look over at Queen Rozala. Her face is calm. But you sense that she's alarmed. She holds her fox tightly.

► **At the lagoon, you wait for Wen to share the news about his brother Ari.**

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Wen bows his head. His beak touches the water. The audience bows in return.

“I am deeply sorry,” Wen says. “We cannot dance this nearing dark season.”

The crowd gasps.

“This is terrible,” your grandfather whispers to you. “The year will be cursed. Bad luck will come.”

Wen sighs. “My brother is ill. I can only dance with him at my side.”

Queen Rozala lowers her head. “We are sorry to hear about your brother. How can we help?”

Wen carries a blue feather. “This is my brother’s. Bury it in cloud sand. It must be done by the rise of the full moon. Then he will be healed.”

The queen takes the feather.



Wen bows again. Then he spreads his long wings and flies back across the lagoon.

Queen Rozala addresses the people of East Blushwood. “Please, do not worry. Ari will be healed. The crane brothers will dance.”

Many in the audience nod. They trust their queen. Still, some are not reassured. A few whisper their doubts.

People begin to leave the lagoon.

Queen Rozala motions to you.

Your grandfather gives you a quick hug. “Go to her. Please, be safe.”

You start toward the queen, but you are stopped by the Time Witch.

“Time is of the essence,” she says. The witch pulls out her wand. “I can fast forward the hours. I’ll place you at the end of your mission. Let me help.”

To get orders from Queen Rozala, go to page 10.

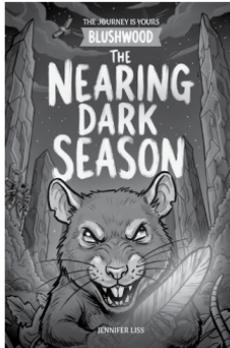
To let the Time Witch fast forward you to the end of your mission, go to page 59.

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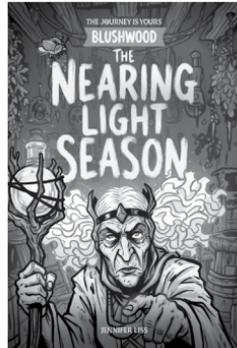
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BLUSHWOOD



## THE NEARING DARK SEASON

A special ceremony that brings luck to the kingdom of East Blushwood is stalled when one of its key performers falls ill. Soothsayer, you are sent on a mission to retrieve cloud sand, a magic substance that will heal the sickness. You must brave danger, make wise choices, and overcome obstacles of great height to ensure that all is made well again. Do you have what it takes to help secure good fortune in East Blushwood?

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