

# THE PROTECTORS OF THE WOOD

Written by John KixMiller

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*The Protectors of the Wood adventure series!*

*Join our story of misfit teenagers as they struggle to save the world from climate change.*

*Remember that everyone can make a difference and every action counts!*

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## Episode #87: The Spotlight Is on Us

### All These Rivers

Narrator: As Tuck waited outside, Abby changed her shirt and ran a brush through her hair. When she felt fully awake she joined him outside, and followed him through a side door of the vast old church building. Tuck led her to the small dining room she had seen briefly the night before. It was a formal setting with old wooden furniture, plates and dishes behind cabinet doors with leaded glass windows, and a chandelier above for light. Tuck carefully closed the thick wooden door. Abby felt awkward and claustrophobic in the unfamiliar atmosphere, but Tuck did his best to welcome her, speaking non-stop from the nearby kitchen as he piled a tray with cold chicken, cheese, a loaf of bread, jam, butter, and a few apples. As he poured apple cider, he said:

Tuck: Start right in! You must be starving! Eat!

Narrator: Abby could only pick at her food, but she followed every word Tuck said.

Tuck: I'm so relieved to have this morning's service and council meeting behind me. The vast majority of our congregation agrees with my decision, including most of the trustees. The community's anger and shock is focused on the leaders of the mob, who, by the way, are as yet unidentified.

Narrator: Abby did not mention that she had seen the church service, and the disruptive exit of perhaps thirty people. And she had heard Tuck's sermon, and knew he was preparing for a major conflict over the coming weeks, months, perhaps years. She

recalled her experience as a young teen member of Tuck's Youth Council, and remembered his habit of concealing serious problems from people who – at least in his judgment – were not ready for them. During a brief silence, Abby said,

Abby: You know... I think I need to hear about these difficulties... You know, like you spoke about last night.

Tuck: Ah, yes, we'll get to the hard part. You see, this stage of the game demands that you adapt to the dangers of our position. Always remember that there are people who will be looking for any opportunity to destroy our reputations. They'll try to manufacture a scandal, exaggerate bad behavior of any sort, even spin harmless behavior into the appearance of something bad. So please! Keep your distance from me, physically I mean. No hugging. Remember what I said about rules? You will be in a fishbowl, under a microscope. Keep a low profile. Be careful who you talk to, where you go, and what you say. Please, do not even leave the churchyard without telling me, and I want to approve any guests you may have.

Narrator: Tuck paused and frowned.

Tuck: I'm sorry to have to say these things... but we are both in a vulnerable spot, and so are all our friends. Right now, the spotlight is on us. I hope you can understand...

Narrator: Tuck was straining to find the right words, but Abby felt her energy and will power return. She was glad to have the bad news out on the table, though she suspected he was still hiding the worst of it.

### **Nightmare Truck**

Abby: I can take it. I've been under pressure for a long time.

Tuck: Well, now. That's much better. Okay... I'll begin by pointing out that you hide a lot more of your life than I do of mine. But all of us sharing this struggle have to be good at keeping secrets, and so far, with the grace of God, we've been successful. But we've got a long, long way to go. If you'll be frank with me, I'll be very grateful.

Narrator: Tuck leaned forward and continued very quietly.

Tuck: Though I will never refer to this except in absolute privacy, I believe you are Wendy's... student? Disciple? Almost like her daughter? You know far more than I do about Wendy's... what would you call it? Great enterprise? Grand project? I'm dedicated and determined, and will learn from you every step of the way.

Narrator: Abby looked down, and showed no emotion. Finally she said,

Abby: I can't pretend to understand Wendy. And people already think I'm strange, and are even afraid of me. Let's not give anyone the idea that I know or represent her.

Tuck: I understand. I'm a very careful man. But I must ask one question: Did Wendy send you here, to me, on purpose? Is this part of her plan, her mission? It will help me to know.

Abby: We agreed on it. Yes.

Tuck: Ah, this looks better and better. I may be slow to catch on, but please remember, I'm trustworthy. Not that I'm so naïve as to think you'll tell me everything. But the more I know, the better job I'll do. And I think the same goes for you.

Narrator: Abby picked at her food and tried to make a decision.

Abby: I heard your sermon today. I was behind the side door and saw everything. Before you get upset, please think about how I've been living my life over the past year. Some of the men who walked out of church today have been hunting for me for months, and I've been going around town, living at the abandoned house, going in and out of the forest, and I've been more than a match for them. I know they are not going to stop, though my being here will make it hard for them. And I'm sure you realize that a few of them...

Sound: Abby's voice drops to a whisper.

Abby: A few of them suspect I'm related to Wendy, and know a little about the vegetables, the medicines, even the stone. They will keep on until they get what they want, or somehow are defeated. Look, I'll promise to be frank with you, and be on your side. I'll help you save your job, and this church, but I have to play my part my own way.

Narrator: Tuck raised a hand as if he didn't want Abby worrying about that, but she waved him off.

Abby: Oh, I've known about your problems since I was twelve years old. You have enemies here, and I do too. As time goes on our climate change campaign will make powerful people more and more angry and afraid. Our small town battle turns out to be part of a global war. They've probably got an unbelievable fortune invested in

companies making money by destroying the planet, and you are basically telling them that they are sinful.

Narrator: Tuck nodded.

Tuck: Yes, it's all too true. But... I'm glad to hear you say *our* campaign.

Abby: Yes, I'm on your side. But you'll be making a mistake if you don't trust me to do what I need to do. I'm glad I saw the service today. That was something I needed to see.

Narrator: Abby pointed her finger at Tuck and raised her voice.

Abby: You probably don't even know that I spent the first ten years of my life in Rivergate. I remember Pastor Banks and her sons, and I know they are, well... very important people, probably more important than you realize.

Narrator: She was getting emotional, but Tuck only smiled and nodded his head.

Tuck: See! I've got to learn from you. But don't forget that my family has a long history here too... You know Abby... I may look like an absent-minded fool, but I do know that Wendy is partly descended from the same people as those in Rivergate, and therefore you probably are too. It makes perfect sense that you grew up there.

Narrator: Abby's face became expressionless, and she looked down. Tuck waited, and finally said,

Tuck: All right, we'll close that subject for now. But remember! You've got to listen to my advice too. I know about this church, and its friends and enemies. And I'm telling you: Don't start inviting your friends to spend time in your cottage. Don't ever let anyone spend the night there. One click of a camera and it will be in the newspapers, on television, shared on the internet.

Abby: It's probably worse than I imagine... But I will find a way to talk to my friends. They are our partners too.

Tuck: So talk on the phone. Use my phone here! Or get yourself a cell phone. Milton Morphy's taking credit for the new tower up on Highway 71, maybe the only good thing he's ever done. That new store, Phones and More on Main Street, just opened to take advantage of it.

Narrator: Abby was thinking that Wendy would never allow cell phones in the forest.  
Tuck went on with his list of issues:

Tuck: I must tell you, we face an extremely important decision over the next few days. You recognized people in that crowd walking out of the church today. You and Phoebe may know that a few of them were leading that mob that could have killed both of you last night. If you're going to work with me on these problems, tell me what you and Phoebe intend to do. I hope you'll want to hear my views before you act. Chief Santiago and maybe others will try to question you tomorrow or the next day.

Abby: Yeah, I've been worrying about that, and I'm so glad Geraldine is protecting me. By the way, did you *recognize* any of that crowd as leaders of the mob? What did *you* tell Chief Santiago last night?

Tuck: Ah! A good reply. (Tuck laughs) You certainly are not a child.

Narrator: Tuck poured more apple cider and took a few swallows.

Tuck: Okay. Here's what I told Chief Santiago. I reminded him that it was pitch dark except for the strange light of the torches, and I wasn't a hundred percent sure. I told him I'd think it over.

Abby: Can Phoebe and I put off our decision as well? At least one more day? I'd like to discuss this tomorrow after another night's sleep. I'm recovering from post-traumatic stress.

Tuck: Good idea. And I don't think you're joking. I believe it is affecting you.

Abby: I do panic over things. And right now I'm panicking over a subject you are avoiding: This coming trustee election. I am very happy that the current board voted to hire me as the church gardener. But how will the board vote after the coming election you just announced this morning? It's only two weeks away.

Narrator: Tuck opened his mouth, but could not put a sentence together, or look Abby in the eye.

Tuck: Well, we're not sure... I haven't had time to really... Oh, it's true, I hoped to avoid this discussion today. You've hit the sore spot, our biggest worry on the horizon. I only learned of Jean's retirement a week ago, and received the bishop's instructions only

three days ago. We haven't had to elect a new member of the board for twelve years. The bishop knows about the conflict in our community, and wants the election over as soon as possible. He's afraid the politics of the board will tear this church apart. There are deep wounds in this congregation, and indeed, in this town and the whole river valley.

Narrator: Abby was thinking:

Abby: So... our jobs here at the church are in danger. But I've learned all I need for the moment, and this conversation has gone on long enough.

Narrator: Abby pushed her plate away and stood up.

Abby: I really can't eat. It's not right. I should be calling my parents, Glenda and Tiny. They will have seen me on television. They'll hear I'm injured or something. I keep thinking of them worrying about me!!

Narrator: Tuck stood up with her.

Tuck: I absolutely agree. Follow me.

## I Need You

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D E-  
Sometimes I'm walking on rainbows

G D  
Sometimes I'm locked underground

B- D  
But if I hear you say, It's all okay,

B-                      A                      E-

There's nothing compares with that sound

F#          G          D

D E-

G D

B- D

B-                      A                      E-

F#      G      D

## CHORUS

G D

B-                      A

God help the shape that I'm in

G D

Just come back to me, I'll be yours for free

B-                      A                      E-

I'll do all the good I can do

F#      G      D

D E-

G D

B-                      D  
There's nothing I can see,

B-                      A                      E-  
it's dark as can be Hold my hand and see me through

F#              G                      D  
I'm lost if I don't have you

CHORUS

Outro