THE PROTECTORS OF THE WOOD

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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 #84: The Challenge of Our Times

Reverend Tuck (gently, quietly, crickets in background): Have you fallen asleep?

Narrator: Reverend Tuck stood beside Abby in the darkness.

Tuck: It's been a long day, I know.

Narrator: Abby looked up and realized that she was still sitting outside under the stars. She shivered in the cool night breeze.

Tuck: I know we've got a lot of catching up to do, but for now I just want to mention a few things. Are you awake?

Abby: Yes, I'm just chilly.

Narrator: Abby sat up and rubbed her arms.

Tuck: Have you prepared a place to sleep?

Abby: Yes, it's all ready.

Tuck: Okay, this will just take a minute. Let me remind you that tomorrow we have our 11AM church service, and with all the uproar and publicity it will be packed. People will expect a response from me. Dr. Bear has taken the liberty of telling reporters and police that you are recovering from a traumatic experience. You already answered the major questions on television a few hours ago, and a video of that little interview has spread over the internet. I

think that's enough exposure for the present. Our job now is to keep you quiet and hidden away, and let this hysteria die down.

Narrator: Tuck looked at Abby, and she nodded.

Tuck: So tomorrow, fix up this cottage, or whatever you like, but stay inside, out of circulation. Dr. Bear will visit and handle the outside world. People have offered donations, and she will receive them for you. We will bring food. So stay out of sight. No visits, no interviews… Any questions?

Abby: Not now. Maybe tomorrow.

Tuck: Then get some sleep. I will see you after the morning service… No… it will be a little later than that. I have to meet with the church council. But I will be here as soon as I can.

Narrator: Abby stood up and looked at Tuck in the faint light from her cottage.

Abby: I don't know what to say, except thank you! I appreciate all you've done, so much I can't tell you.

Tuck: That's all right… I love my job. We're glad to have you as part of our family here.

Pause, short bit of music.

Narrator: Abby awoke as the light of the new day was beginning to creep through her windows. Darkness still covered most of the cottage. A group of sparrows, up early, began to chirp. She turned to the wall to go back to sleep, but her bed – nothing but a plywood shelf with a sheet and blankets – annoyed her. Slowly she realized that things were bothering her inside as well. Her mind kept returning to her interview with the reporter the night before, the part where she apologized to her parents in front of the TV camera as tears dripped down her face.

Abby: When was the last time I saw them? It's been months!

Narrator: Suddenly, she was painfully aware of how they might be feeling, perhaps seeing that interview on TV or someone's cell phone. The image of her parents, lonely, disconnected from their community, was agonizing. Doing something for them loomed in her heart as an immediate necessity. Lying on the hard bed, Abby's mind roved through her inner universe. Soon she encountered another moral failing. The memory of Tiny crying, 'Abbyyy, come back!' on so many occasions, now hit her with its full force. She knew that Tiny had bonded with her in some inexplicable way. This child – only four years old – already counted on her to provide an answer to the question: Is the world okay?

Abby: Why me?? I'm not her family. But she knows, she knows that the world is troubled, not okay. Her hopes for the future are already bruised. And she wants me to do something about it! I'm supposed to light the way. It's my future, my challenge, however impossible it may seem.

Narrator: Abby awoke later that morning in the full light of day to the noise of blue jays making a ruckus outside her open window. She felt cozy and lazy. The cottage was peaceful, a much-needed haven. True, it lacked furniture and a refrigerator, and needed an enormous amount of work. Despite a night of open windows, it exuded a damp, sour odor.

Abby: 'Cottage' is hardly the word for this place. More like a run-down cabin. But that's why no one else wants it. That's why it's all mine.

Narrator: Like the haunted house, the cottage had the scent of her sometimes flooded childhood home in the town of Rivergate next to the Wetland Preserve. Abby took great pleasure in her ability to live in these unusual places.

Abby: With a good cleaning and a warm fire in the wood burning stove, this will be like heaven. This is my outpost in the 'outer world' as Wendy calls it. My mission begins here… But… what about Wendy? Will she be lonely? Yes, most definitely. And I will be lonely without her. But this is my future; she's told me so many times. And I know she believes it. She proved it by letting me ride Hilda.

Narrator: 'Hilda' was Wendy's name for her carved wooden staff, shaped like a giant fork with three prongs at the end. Abby often annoyed Wendy by calling Hilda, 'the broom', since Wendy could ride Hilda like a witch. Abby wondered about the nature of Hilda, the spirit of the staff. In Abby's view, Hilda expressed a personality even though she could not talk. She listened and moved and obeyed. Her movements conveyed disagreement and annoyance, happiness and joy. But the dogs and the crows also did those things. When Abby asked about Hilda, Wendy had said:

Wendy: She offered me this favor long ago, when I chose this mission. She is my friend and companion. Always respect Hilda, she is smarter than you.

Narrator: Abby had been surprised by this rebuke, and retorted:

Abby: But is she a person?

Wendy: Angels are just people in a different stage of life.

Abby: But she can't talk!

Wendy: Hilda has many ways of talking. You just can't hear her. Someday you'll understand.

Abby: But what do angels do? Why are they here?

Wendy: That's the last question for today. They are messengers and caretakers, moving between heaven, earth, and the underworld. And you don't have to call them angels. I just use that name because people here understand it. Our ancestors and neighbors all over the globe have other names and ways of seeing them. I wish you knew more about that!

Narrator: As Abby was remembering this conversation, she was still looking out the window at the blue jays. They looked like small fragments of sky. Their color reminded Abby of another mystery: Hilda was very similar to a carved staff possessed by her father, something he called 'the mapstick'. As a child Abby had often surprised her father in the midst of studying the mapstick, sitting at his desk surrounded by books and an oversized sketchpad, with the gleaming wooden staff in his lap or on his desk. The brown wood had a bluish tinge, a faint glow the color of the sky. But he never responded to questions about the nature or history of the mapstick, and Abby felt sure that it could not fly or move like Hilda. It seemed to be just a beautiful pole of carved wood, covered with strange lines and tiny pictures. But there was definitely a special radiance about it. Abby's father treated it with great care, wrapping it in an old green velvet material, and keeping it hidden in his closet. He even made Abby promise never to touch it or speak about it except with him.

Abby: But the glow! The blue glow! It's so attractive… I just had to open the door a crack… and there it was! The wrapping had slipped off the very top of the staff, and there was the light! The blueish light illuminated every detail of the closet and the things in it. I had to struggle to pull myself away. That thing is not normal. It is definitely special, and some day… some day I will know more.

Narrator: Abby threw on yesterday's clothes and put a pot of water for tea on the old two-burner hot plate. As she sat drinking the hot, dark liquid she thought about the coming church service, what Reverend Tuck would say, and when he might begin. The wind-up clock in her duffel bag had stopped hours before. She looked out the window over the kitchen sink toward Bridge Avenue. There were now a handful of people on the sidewalk, and a few cars dropping off passengers. Everything looked normal. But Abby felt a storm on the way. A very warm breeze moved through the cottage. A hot day was coming up.

Abby: It seems… It seems like Tuck will have to mention me at this church service. I mean… he'll have to say something about all that has happened! And what about this church council? Won't they be the ones who have to approve Tuck's decisions? And I bet these reporters and people with cameras will come back… look there's one on the sidewalk now.

Narrator: A faint knock on the door made Abby jump as if she'd heard a scream.

Abby: Yes…? Who is it?

Dr. Bear (from outside): I hope I'm not disturbing you, dear.

Abby: Dr. Bear! Just a minute.

Narrator: Abby quickly brushed her hair, and then opened the door.

THE FACE IN THE MIRROR

Written By John KixMiller

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D E- F# D
The face in the mirror looks like a stranger
G A D
Can't recognize myself today
F# G A
Sometimes I think in your arms my fear would melt away
B- E- A
God help me find a way

G D
Can't you hear the sirens wail
Bm G F#
Can't you feel the oceans roll
G D
I need your hand in the darkest night
Bm Em A D
I need your voice in my soul

I could go eastward, I could go westward
And never find someone like you
I've see you disappear down a lonesome track
Each time I see you comin back

Can't you hear the sirens wail
Can't you feel the ocean roll
I need your hand in the darkest night
I need your voice in my soul

I've seen nice ones and dangerous ones but
They never showed me the right way

I listen carefully to everything you say
You change my life some every day

Can’t you hear the sirens wail
Can’t you feel the ocean roll
I need your hand in the darkest night
I need your voice in my soul

Outro