



# *The Dead Go to Seattle*

LINKED STORIES BY  
Vivian Faith Prescott

In an Alaskan island's oral traditions, a baby's cry sucks in the northern lights, a man marries a tree, the muskeg swallows a restaurant, and the dead go to Seattle: discover forty-three linked tales in a story-cycle of life, death, and climate catastrophe in the frigid cold of Alaska.

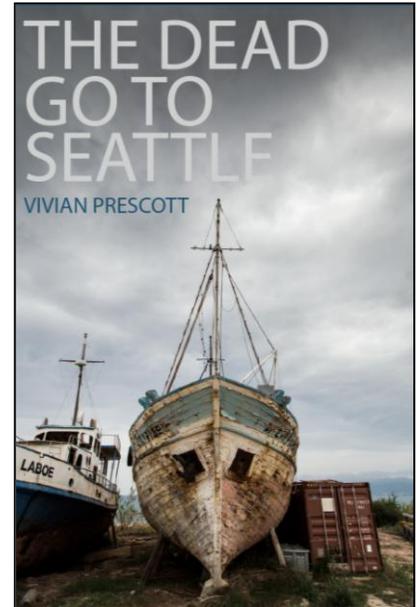
Tova Agard's world is literally falling apart: she's just been disowned by her father in a violent confrontation over her sexuality, and climate change is about to wreak havoc on the world around her. In the midst of catastrophe Tova meets Smithsonian Institute's ethnologist John Swanton on an Alaskan-ferry time machine, trapping Swanton on Tova's small hometown of Wrangell Island. Tova convinces Swanton that the island's contemporary stories are worth collecting despite their strangeness: in Tova's oral traditions, a woman becomes a bear, a man marries trees, a UFO hunts deer, and the dead go to Seattle. These forty-three linked tales in the story-cycle are not stories that the Smithsonian intended to collect, but by the time all the tales are told, their reconstruction of history will make a greater impact on the world around them than either Tova or Swanton could have ever imagined.

## ADVANCE PRAISE

"An enthralling, engaging, mind-bending, time-bending story collection that tells the old new and the new old and pulls everything apart and brings everything back together again . . . You will not find your cruise ship tour stop here; this is the way Alaska is passed down from generation to generation: unexpected, brave, lovely, unsettling. As one character says, "You might even get stuck here in our stories." Indeed. Start reading *The Dead Go to Seattle* and I promise: you will get stuck in these stories until you've turned the last page. Vivian Faith Prescott has given us an important, essential work that should be required reading for all thoughtful, imaginative people."—**Garth Stein**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Art of Racing in the Rain*, *A Sudden Light*, and *How Evan Broke His Head and Other Secrets*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Vivian Faith Prescott** is a fifth generation Alaskan, born and raised on the small island of Wrangell in Southeastern Alaska. A writer of Sámi, Suomalainen, and Irish descent (among others), and adopted into the T'akdeintaan clan, she is the founding member of Blue Canoe Writers in Sitka and Flying Island Writers and Artists in Wrangell, with an emphasis on mentoring Indigenous writers. She holds an MFA in poetry from the University of Alaska and a PhD in Cross Cultural Studies from the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Her stories and poems have appeared in a variety of literary journals and anthologies, and she is the recipient of a Rasmuson Fellowship and the Jason Wenger Award for Literary Excellence from the University of Alaska. Her Tlingit name is "Mother of Cute Little Raven."



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**FROM THE DEAD GO TO SEATTLE**

Date: 2000, June

Recorded by John Swanton

Assisted by Tooch Waterson

*The Girl with Pink Hair*

Tova's coming out party was not a celebration—she flew four feet through the air and slunk down against the wall. Her father, Karl, came at her again, and she raised her arm over her head to shield his next blow. As his hand came down, she jumped up and moved sideways and headed to the front door. Her father leaped to the door and blocked it with his large body. She turned and ran across the living room carpet and down the hall to the side door, slamming it open and running across the yard toward the woods.

Her dad ran after her. She turned slightly, saw him fall in the soggy grass onto his hands and knees. "Fuck!" he yelled. She turned back and her spirits followed her into the woods, crashing through the alder behind the houses. Soon she found the old deer trail leading to the roaring stream beside the Wrangell Institute, the old abandoned boarding school. There she sat on a rock in a large culvert beneath the road that had been her favorite place to play while growing up. Here she was a troll screeching at the occasional car speeding along the highway. She was a sprite, a stallion, and a Landotter-Woman—all the taboo creatures from her mixed heritages. No one talked openly about those creatures. They whispered their stories around town like they whispered hers.

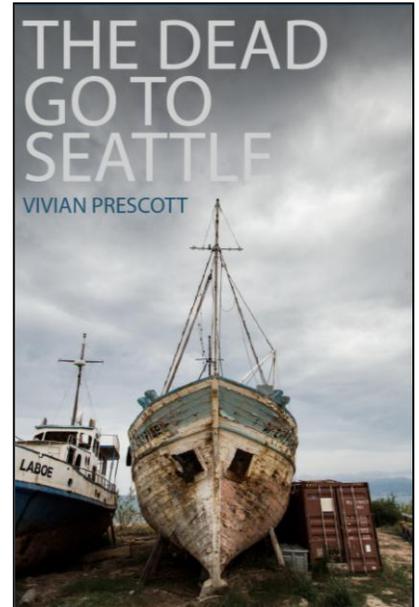
Tova sensed she was part creature, or something she couldn't name. Her Grandma Liv assured her she was two-spirited, had been since she was born and that was nothing to be ashamed of. By that count, she would have three spirits. Berta, her other grandmother, said she was "that way" because her daughter-in-law, Mina, didn't dress Tova in enough pink, nor enough dresses, when she was growing up. She remembered her mom defending herself, claiming Southeast Alaska was no place for dresses.

They said her two spirits were the Old-Woman-Who-Lives-Underneath, who lives along the Fairweather fault line, which extends along the Alaskan coastline. The other was Káa Litu.aa, a man and sometimes a monster, who lives at the entrance of Lituya Bay. His slaves shapeshift into bears. They shake the water like a blanket, causing large tidal waves.

Several times the spirit shook the ground and the Fairweather fault split and cracked and the mountain came down. In the fifties, the Manof-Lituya shook his blanket and her great-uncle rode the tidal wave, the largest on record, and survived to tell about it. This was also the place where her ancestors encountered the first white man in Alaska.

Two spirits? Female and Male. If she were an old man, and at the same time, an old woman, then what about her own spirit? Maybe that's why she was a bit unsteady on her feet. Grandma Liv said everywhere she went the ground shook slightly. It must be true because when she flew across the room, the hairs on her arms stood up, and when she landed, the ground beneath her body formed a fissure and the waves on the water in front of town rippled.

It had all happened so fast, Tova thought, dipping her hand into the cold stream and scooping up a drink. She was twenty years old and living on her own for a couple years. She was working her way through college—long shifts all summer at the canneries. She'd been staying at her parents' house. Her mother had handed her a letter she'd intended on mailing to her girlfriend, inviting her to come up and work in the cannery for the summer. It wasn't really a love letter. She'd written something about remembering the way her friend's skin tasted, like new spruce tips in the spring. Her mother had shown the letter to her father and that's when all hell broke loose.



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