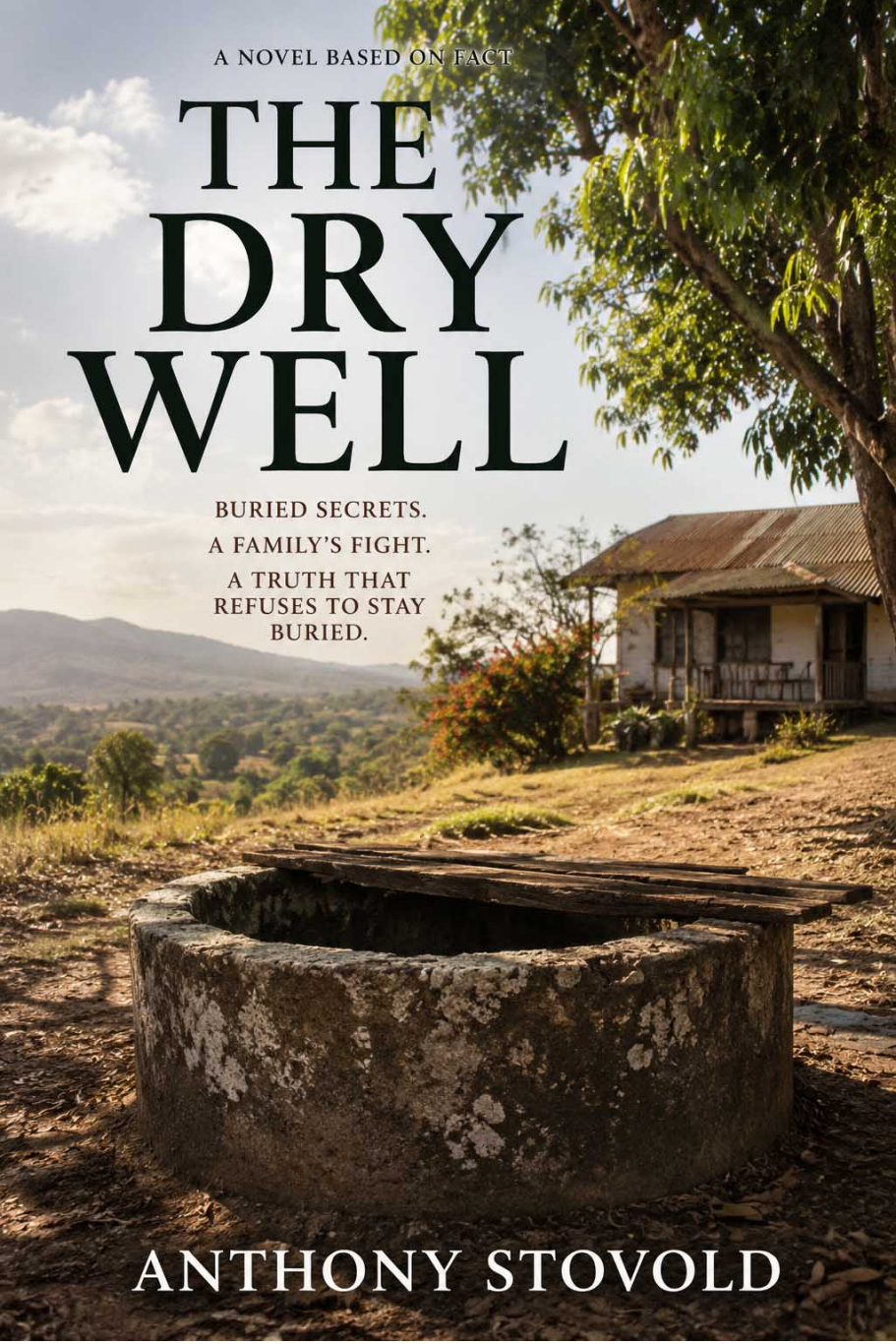




A NOVEL BASED ON FACT

# THE DRY WELL

BURIED SECRETS.  
A FAMILY'S FIGHT.  
A TRUTH THAT  
REFUSES TO STAY  
BURIED.

ANTHONY STOVOLD

# The Dry Well

by  
Anthony Stovold

# Copyright

The Dry Well

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# Prologue

Eastern Bohol  
September 1945

The rain had stopped shortly before dawn, leaving the hills above Jagna shrouded beneath drifting cloud. Water continued to fall from the jungle canopy, striking the canvas roofs stretched between the limestone outcrops with a slow, relentless rhythm.

Deep inside the tunnel, the generators still hummed.

They would not be running for much longer.

Captain Nakamura stood beside a table covered with geological maps while Filipino labourers hammered the lids onto heavy wooden crates. Japanese military inventory markings had already begun to blur beneath the damp that seeped into everything. Samples of ore, survey records and transport ledgers lay neatly arranged beneath electric lamps powered by machinery that had become as exhausted as the men who operated it.

Only weeks earlier Tokyo had spoken confidently of victory.

Now nobody used the word.

A civilian administrator emerged from the outer passage accompanied by two Filipino officials from Manila. Their pressed

white shirts and polished shoes looked strangely out of place among mud-stained engineers, weary soldiers and sweating labourers.

"The final transfer lists are complete," the administrator said quietly.

Nakamura acknowledged him with a slight nod but kept studying the maps.

Beyond the tunnel mouth, the occasional rumble of distant artillery drifted across the sea. The fighting had ended, yet its echoes remained. American forces were returning to the Philippines. Japanese authority was disappearing almost by the hour.

Soon these hills would belong to someone else.

The question was whether they would inherit only the land... or everything that had been hidden beneath it.

One of the visitors leaned over the survey maps.

"These deposits are confirmed?"

"Our geologists believe so."

"Iron?"

"Yes."

"And the rarer minerals?"

For the first time, Nakamura looked directly at him.

"They are significant."

The visitor allowed himself the faintest smile.

Around them, more crates waited to be sealed. Others contained rock samples wrapped in waxed paper, carefully labelled despite the humidity. Nearby, soldiers fed bundles of documents into an iron drum where the flames consumed records that would never leave the mountain.

Smoke drifted slowly through the chamber.

Pinned to one wall was a map marked with fresh annotations.

Civilian removals completed.

Transfer stabilisation pending.

The second visitor read the notes before asking quietly,

"And the local families?"

The administrator hesitated.

"Most have been dealt with."

"Most?"

No one answered immediately.

At last Nakamura rolled one of the geological surveys into a metal storage cylinder and secured the lid.

"History," he said, almost to himself, "is never buried as deeply as people imagine."

Outside, the rain began again.

It fell across the jungle-covered hills above Jagna, washing the entrance to the tunnel clean, while far below the sea continued breaking against the shore, as it had for centuries, carrying away every sound except the ones history refused to forget.

# Chapter One — The Claim

The message came without context.

Not unusual in itself. Messages rarely arrived with the clarity people imagined they deserved. What made this one different was the name attached to it.

Mark.

I had not seen him in over thirty years.

For a moment I assumed it was a mistake, someone else, the same name, the kind of coincidence that happens often enough not to be remarkable. But the wording was too familiar, too direct, stripped of anything unnecessary.

"I'm coming out to see you..." "I've got something you'll want to see."

No explanation. No attempt to persuade.

That was Mark.

I read it again, then put the note down and stepped out onto the veranda.

Morning had already settled into the day. Heat rising slowly from the wet ground after overnight rain. Somewhere nearby somebody was working, metal striking metal in a steady rhythm

that carried further than it should have through the humid air. Beyond the trees the barangay road remained mostly quiet, though that never meant very much here. Movement happened without warning in Bohol. A motorbike appeared. A truck arrived. Cattle wandered where they pleased. Boundaries existed mostly in theory.

I stood there longer than necessary.

Thirty years.

People changed in that amount of time. Or disappeared into whatever version of themselves life eventually cornered them into becoming.

Mark had always resisted that.

Even when I first knew him he had been restless in a way that did not quite fit his age. Younger than me by a good margin but never comfortable remaining where convention expected him to stay. Curious, but not always careful. The kind of man who followed an idea further than was sensible simply because he needed to know where it ended.

We had lost contact without any real reason. Life tends to do that. Years pass unnoticed until reconnecting begins to feel strangely artificial.

Later, in this case, had taken three decades.

When he finally arrived it was without ceremony.

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Thank you for reading.

Anthony Stovold