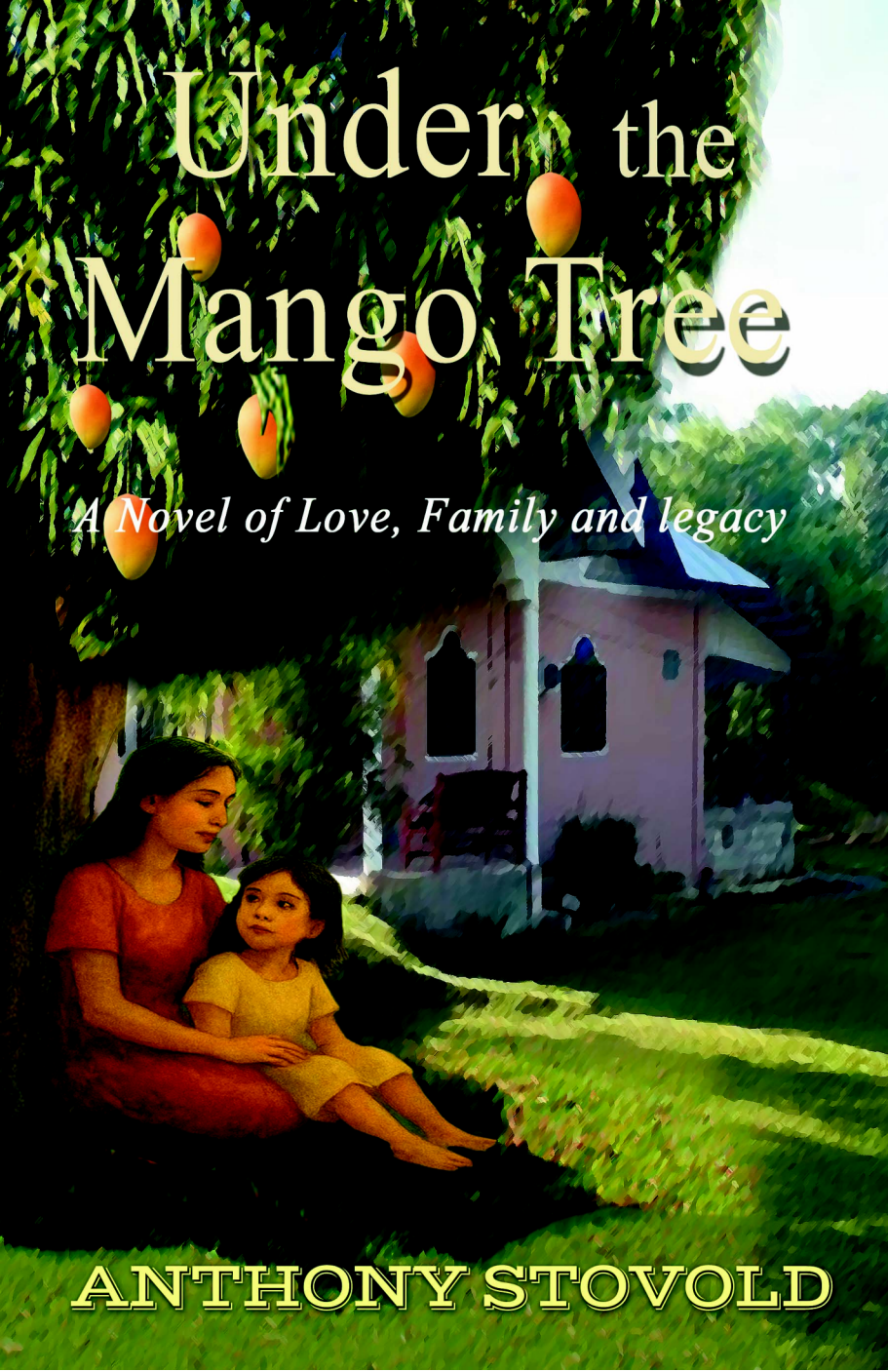




Under the Mango Tree

A Novel of Love, Family and legacy

ANTHONY STOVOLD

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Under the Mango Tree

By Anthony Stovold

Chapter One – Beneath the Mango Tree

The mango tree had always been there, at the edge of the garden, its wide branches stretching like arms toward the sky. To Letecia, it was more than just a tree. It was a witness, a confidant, a quiet guardian that had shaded her childhood and listened to secrets she dared not tell anyone else.

On this particular morning, as the sun rose and spilled gold over the leaves, Letecia sat cross-legged beneath its canopy. She unzipped the worn leather journal she carried everywhere, not her own, but her father's with Jasic written on the front, from his welding days. She had read his words so many times she knew them by heart.

"Life has surprised me," one page said. "At seventy-five, when I thought my life was coming to its end..." , but it gave me Alma, and then you, my little miracle. If you are reading this one day, know that you were the ultimate gift."

Her fingers lingered on the ink, faded but steady. She closed her eyes, imagining his voice. She had been only nine when he passed, too young to hold clear memories. What she knew of him came from her mother's stories, from photographs, from this journal, and from the mango tree, where she always felt closest to him.

"Munchi! Breakfast!" her mother's voice called from the kitchen.

A smile tugged at Letecia's lips. She would never outgrow that nickname, not in Alma's eyes. Her father had given it to her first, laughing that she was small like a Munchkin in the old Wizard film he'd loved. Even now, at twenty-one, tall and graceful, Alma still used it as if it were stitched into her soul.

"Coming, Mum!" Letecia replied, though she did not move just yet.

She pressed her palm against the rough bark of the tree. "I'm twenty-one now, Daddy," she whispered. "And I think I need to know more. About you. About where I come from. About the lives you lived before me."

The breeze stirred the branches. To anyone else, it was just the morning wind. To Letecia, it felt like an answer.

Inside, Alma had set out pan de sal and coffee, her hair tied back in its usual neat bun. She smiled as her daughter came in, the same smile that had steadied her through years of both joy and hardship.

"You were with the tree again," Alma said knowingly. "Always my Munchi."

Letecia laughed softly, reaching for bread. "Mum, I'm twenty-one. You don't have to call me that anymore."

"You'll always be my Munchi," Alma said, touching her hand. "And his too. He loved that name."

The words warmed Letecia's chest. "It feels like he's there, Mum. In the tree, in the journal. Like he's listening."

Alma's eyes softened. "He would be proud of you. He always said you were his miracle."

"Mum..." Letecia hesitated, lowering her voice. "You've told me about him here, the pub in England, the years in France. But I want to see it. I want to... I don't know, follow the threads he left behind."

Alma's smile faltered just slightly, though her gaze remained gentle. "It's a big world, anak," Alma said softly. "And it isn't always kind."

"I know." Letecia leaned forward, her voice steady now. "But it's part of me. France, England, even America. I need to see it for myself. For him. For me."

Alma studied her daughter carefully. After a long moment, she rose and went to the cupboard. From the bottom shelf, hidden at the back, she brought out a wooden box. She set it carefully on the table.

"These were his things," Alma said quietly. "Letters, documents. I was waiting for the right time. Maybe... maybe that time is now."

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Thank you for reading.

Anthony Stovold