

THE MANGO TREE LEGACY

The Complete Mango Tree Trilogy



Under the Mango Tree
The Shade of the Mango Tree
The Second Dig

ANTHONY STOVOLD

The Mango Tree Legacy

The Complete Mango Tree Trilogy

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BOOK ONE



UNDER THE MANGO TREE



ANTHONY STOVOLD

UNDER THE MANGO TREE

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 of Oz 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."

Letecia's heart thudded. She drew the box closer and lifted the lid. Inside, she saw envelopes yellowed with age, handwriting both familiar and foreign. Some bore stamps from France, others from England, and still others from decades long before she was born.

As she sorted through them, one bundle caught her attention, tied neatly with string, the paper brittle with time. Alma's eyes softened as she noticed.

"Those," Alma said, her voice lower now, "came from even further back. They were written by your Grandfather's parents, to your Grandfather and his wife. Some are from 1933, before the war. Some from after. They were passed down, and eventually, they came to me. He wanted you to have them one day."

Letecia touched the fragile bundle with reverence. She could almost feel the weight of years between the lines.

Her gaze returned to the box, to the letters, to the faint scent of old paper that seemed to carry with it voices of people she had never met but who had shaped her blood and the path she had been given.

It was addressed to her grandfather, K. S. Rawlins, British Air Commission, New York, USA, dated 1st. December 1940.

Chapter Two – The Letters

The wooden box sat in front of her on the kitchen table, its contents spilling a faint scent of dust and history into the air.

Letecia ran her fingers along the edges of the yellowed envelopes, each one like a sealed door waiting to be opened. Alma busied herself at the sink, humming softly, though her eyes kept darting toward her daughter as if gauging how much to say and when.

Letecia chose one at random, an envelope postmarked Farnborough, Hampshire, 1939. The handwriting was formal, steady, almost elegant, with ink that had faded to a deep sepia.

She read aloud, stumbling slightly over the careful script:

“My dear Kenneth,

I trust this letter finds you in good health across the ocean. We were glad to hear that you arrived safely and that matters are settling as expected.

The house feels quieter without you, though we keep

ourselves occupied. As you will already know, we have been at war with Germany since the third of September. Being so close to the aerodrome here at Farnborough naturally gives one pause for thought, but there is little to be gained by dwelling on such things, and we carry on as usual.

On the domestic front, I was obliged to replace the sash cord on the front room window last week, it having finally given way. While doing so, I discovered your grandfather's signature inside the frame, left there many years ago. I added my own beneath it, with the date, much as he once did. It occurred to me that one day, when the cord fails again and you find yourself making the same repair, you may wish to add your name in turn.

Your mother is out this afternoon with Mrs Davies from next door. I do not expect her back for some time, as the two of them can talk for England once they have found a pot of tea.

It is a comfort to know that the house stands much as it always has, quietly holding its own record of those who have passed through it. Never doubt, my dear boy, that it remains yours, and in time, will pass to those who come after you.

Take care of yourself and do not worry on our account. We manage well enough.

With all affection,

Dad

Mother adds her love. She hopes you are eating properly and keeping warm. Do write when you are able.

Letecia set the letter down gently, her fingertips tracing the uneven edge of the paper. The ink had faded to the colour of weak tea, yet the words carried an intimacy that time could not erase. She could almost hear the careful scratch of the pen, the weight of distance in each stroke.

In the box, beneath the bundle tied with faded blue ribbon, lay another envelope, its paper thinner, the handwriting more hurried. She lifted it carefully, noticing how the pages inside were folded and refolded, as if read many times over. A faint scent of dust and lavender rose as she opened it.

The date, 1942, written in a hand she did not recognise, caught her eye: "Bethesda, Washington D.C."

She began to read.

"Dear Mother,

I hope this letter finds you and Father in good health. I trust that you are managing as best you can under present conditions, and that the house has come through the winter without too much trouble.

I am glad to report that all is well with us. Doreen was safely delivered of our second daughter last month. We have named her Suzanne, and little Gillian is very taken with her new sister, following her about with great seriousness.

We have been moved once more, this time from Wisconsin to Bethesda, just outside Washington. I am now attached

to the British Purchasing Commission, assisting with the acquisition of American supplies. The work keeps me occupied, and while it is far from home, it feels useful.

Though we are spared the air raids here, the war is never far from mind. News travels quickly, and one feels the weight of events even at a distance. I think often of England, and of Farnborough in particular.

Please give my love to Father. Tell him I think of the house more often than I expected, and hope it stands as steadily as ever.

With all my love,

Kenneth

Letecia turned the final page, running her fingers along the worn crease where the paper had been folded and unfolded countless times. The edges were brittle now, the ink softened by age and handling. She thought about the hands that had once held these pages, the waiting they represented, the long gaps between words sent and words received

With Alma beside her, Munchi leaned closer, studying the postmarks and the curious black stamp across the flap.

"Why are some of the letters opened before they were sent to Grandfather in America?" she asked, pointing at the strip fixed across the envelope. "It says, 'Opened by Examiner 5670.'"

Alma nodded. "It was wartime, sweetheart. Letters going

overseas were checked sometimes. They wanted to be sure nothing was written that shouldn't be."

Munchi traced the number with her fingertip. "So someone read them?"

"Yes," Alma said. "But they still went. That mattered."

They looked again at the envelopes spread across the table. Several bore the same heavy paper seals across their flaps, 'Opened by Examiner 5292,' 'Examiner 6894.' The glue had long since dried, the paper stiff and yellowed, still doing its quiet job decades later.

The label, white and stubborn, had stood the test of time. Its bold lettering looked almost defiant beside the delicate loops of handwriting on the envelope.

Letecia ran her thumb along the rough paper seal. It felt oddly official, impersonal, an intrusion preserved in glue and ink. She pictured the censors at their desks, reading other people's words in silence, deciding what could cross an ocean and what must remain behind.

"These," she murmured, "were the quiet casualties of war, letters that had to give up their privacy before they could find their way home."

Munchi watched as her mother began to close the box, tying the faded ribbon once more.

Around them, the afternoon light filtered through the window, warm and still. Dust motes drifted above the papers like tiny fragments of memory.

Letecia sat back, resting her hand on the lid.

For the first time, she realised that her family's past was not just held in memory, but in ink and paper, in words that had crossed oceans and outlived wars, in envelopes scarred by time yet stubborn enough to survive it.

"Mum," she asked quietly, "when did Grandad return from the U.S.A.?"

"He returned in late 1945, but from Germany, he had been sent there from the USA," Alma said. "I think your Grandmother and her daughters returned earlier, their house was at 18 Lammas Road. He'd bought it before the war, in 1937."

"But I thought Daddy was born in Maidenhead?"

"He was," Alma said. "Daddy's family were living at Lammas Road since 1937. Your father was born in 1947."

She smiled faintly, then added, "Your father never stayed still for long."

She went on, her voice steady now. "His parents sent him to boarding school. When he left, he trained as a hotel manager so he could join his sister, Gillian, at the family hotel in Cornwall. It was there your sister Rachel was born."

"When she was five," Alma continued, more softly, "her mother took her to California. That's where she lives now, with two children of her own."

Her voice faltered. "Rachel's mother, your father's first wife, died of cancer. She chose to end her suffering under California's End of Life Option Act. Gillian stayed in touch. She said the pain was very bad at the end."

Alma paused, then looked at her daughter. "Rachel was born in

1971, long before you. Your father always hoped the two of you would meet. Life didn't make that easy."

"Mum," Letecia asked, "the house in Farnborough, is it still there?"

Alma nodded. "The family owned it for more than a hundred years. Your father used to tell me about repairing a sash cord in the front window. When he opened the frame, he found his grandfather's signature, then his father's, left there when they'd done the same job. So he added his own. Three generations, quietly marking time."

"Yes. Great grandfather mentioned it in a letter I read. What else is there?" Letecia murmured, her curiosity no longer containable.

She lifted a thicker bundle, postmarked Cahors, France, early 1990s. The handwriting was quicker, more relaxed, full of affection.

"Dear Peter,

You asked me to keep an eye on St Martin, so I thought I'd write and tell you how things stand.

Olivier is doing well here. The farm suits him. He works hard, complains when it rains, complains when it doesn't, and still manages to smile at the end of the day. That's usually a good sign.

It has not been easy, but he has taken to it with the quiet stubbornness of someone who grew up with open fields under his feet. The land responds to him. I think you would have liked seeing that.

He sometimes says his family's roots stretch a long way, England, France, places beyond, but that they all belong to the same tree. That sounds like Olivier talking.

We keep an eye on him here. You don't need to worry.

Write when you can.

Phil"

Letecia looked up. "Olivier?"

Alma nodded. "Your half-brother. He was born in Cahors, France. You haven't met him either."

Letecia leaned back, the weight of it settling in. England. France. America. Half-siblings she had never known. Generations leaving marks in window frames, tending vineyards, crossing oceans in search of something better.

Her father's life was no longer a single line, but a web, stretching across decades and continents. And she sat at its centre now, the letters in her hands like a map.

"Mum," she said, surprised by the steadiness of her own voice, "I need to see it all. Farnborough. Cahors. California. I need to meet them."

Alma reached across the table and took her hand.

"I knew this day would come," she said. "Your father believed you would carry the family forward. Just promise me one thing, anak. Always come home."

"Always," Letecia said. Then, more quietly, "But first, I have to follow the letters."

She turned back to the box, her heart quickening with the knowledge that her journey, her real journey, had begun.

Chapter Three – Threads Across the Sea

The letters had taken root in her mind. Even as she helped Alma sweep the veranda, feed the chickens, or walked through the village, Letecia carried them in her thoughts like a heartbeat. Farnborough. Cahors. California. Places that were more than names, they were pieces of her, scattered across oceans and decades.

That night, she sat again beneath the mango tree, the journal open in her lap, the bundle of letters beside her. The crickets sang in the grass, and the warm air smelled faintly of guava and woodsmoke.

She flipped through her father's journal until she found the page she had marked the day before:

"If you ever wonder who you are, Munchi, remember that you are not only of one place. You carry England, France, and the Philippines in your blood, and America in your kin.

You come from me, and you'll go on longer than I ever could."

The words seemed to lift off the page, threading themselves into her chest.

"Munchi," Alma's voice called softly from the veranda. "Are you dreaming again under that tree?"

"Not dreaming, Mum," Letecia answered, rising to her feet and brushing dust from her skirt. "Planning."

The next morning, over breakfast, Letecia spread the letters across the table. Shafts of sunlight fell across the paper, turning the faded ink to gold. She had sorted them carefully by place: "Farnborough", "Cahors", "California". Each bundle was tied

neatly with string, like little parcels of destiny waiting to be opened.

"I want to go," she said suddenly. The words tumbled out before she could soften them. "I want to follow these threads, start with England, then France, and finally... California."

Alma set down her cup with deliberate care. Her face remained calm, but her eyes searched her daughter's.

"You are still young, anak," she said gently. "The world is wide. Travel takes money, strength, courage."

"I'm twenty-one now," Letecia said. "I've come into the trust. The one Father set up... how long ago was it?"

"Sixteen years," Alma replied softly. "Yes. It's yours now."

Letecia nodded, then paused. "Where did it come from, Mum?"

Alma looked past her, toward the empty chair by the table. For a moment it felt as though he might still be there, laptop open, notebook beside it, pages crowded with arrows and half-finished thoughts. He used to work late, the room lit only by the glow of the screen, stopping now and then to scribble something down as if afraid the idea might escape him.

"Your father was a complicated man," she said quietly. "He built websites, but they never brought in much. So he began writing instead. About his life. About me. About you. He liked the idea that words could keep earning their keep, even when he no longer could."

A small smile crossed her face.

"Later, he became interested in a different kind of money. Bitcoin, he called it. Money without a country, only rules. That appealed to him. He never trusted banks much, but he trusted ideas. Especially ones that promised independence."

She traced the rim of her cup, thoughtful.

"He read endlessly. Tested things carefully. In time he found a way of working with it, something he called arbitrage trading. He partnered with a firm that handled the technical side. Once it proved reliable, he directed the returns straight into your trust."

Alma looked up at her daughter then.

"Not as a gamble," she said. "As a way of keeping doors open. So that when you were ready, you wouldn't have to choose safety over curiosity. You'd be able to go where your questions took you."

Letecia felt the weight of that settle, not the money itself, but the permission inside it.

Letecia was quiet for a moment, then spoke softly. "Mum... while I was looking through the box, I came across something else." She reached into her satchel and unfolded a creased document, its edges yellowed with time. "It's a divorce certificate. It says Daddy was married to an American woman, and that he lived in Indiana for a while. Is that true?"

Alma's hand froze around her cup. For a moment she said

nothing. Then, with a long sigh, she nodded.

"Yes, it's true," she said quietly. "It was long before we met. He was very young, and it ended in divorce. He never spoke of it much, it made him uneasy, your father had a very full life but he carried those years inside him, as people do with the parts of their past they can't quite forget."

Letecia studied her mother's face, then the papers scattered across the table.

"I think he meant for me to find these," she said. "All of them. Maybe this was his way of trusting me with it."

Alma reached across and took her daughter's hand, her grip steady.

"Then maybe it's time you stop putting them back in the box," she said.

The words hung between them.

"Go," Alma said finally. "You'll learn more out there than you ever will sitting here."

But before you go, we need some more rice!

On her way back, she stopped at a small shop and bought a world map, folding it carefully into her bag. That night, she spread it on her bed, pinning it flat with books at the corners. She marked three places with a red pen: Farnborough. Cahors. California.

Three dots on a vast canvas. Three threads across the sea.

The days that followed took on a different quality. Nothing outward had changed, yet everything felt altered. Letecia still rose early, still helped Alma with the small rituals of the house,

sweeping the veranda, feeding the chickens, walking to the shop for rice or oil. But each task now carried a sense of counting, as though she were quietly measuring how many times she would do these things before leaving.

As she rinsed her hands beneath the steady stream of water, Letecia became aware of how settled her life was here, how little effort it took to be held by it. Leaving would not mean hardship, she knew, but it would mean surrendering the comfort of the known.

In Farnborough, she imagined streets of familiar houses, their pasts unreadable from the outside. In Cahors, she pictured vineyards and stone walls warmed by a different sun. In Cahors, she pictured vineyards and stone walls warmed by a different sun. California remained the vaguest of all, a place shaped more by absence than certainty.

At night, Alma noticed the change. Her daughter sat longer with her thoughts, quieter, more watchful. Sometimes she would take the letters out again, not to read them closely, but simply to hold them, as if reassurance might seep through the paper into her hands.

"You don't have to go all at once," Alma said one evening, as they folded laundry together. "You can take your time."

"I know," Letecia replied. "But if I don't start, I think I'll never stop wondering."

Alma nodded. She understood that kind of restlessness. She had lived with it herself, in different forms, at different times. Wanting her daughter close and wanting her free were two feelings that sat uneasily together in her chest.

Later that week, Letecia took the journal back under the mango tree. She read not for facts this time, but for tone. For the pauses between sentences. For what her father had chosen not to explain. The margins were full of small notes, reminders to himself, fragments of thought that never became paragraphs. She realised then that even in writing, he had been circling something, never quite naming it.

The tree above her dropped a leaf at her feet. She picked it up, turning it over in her fingers. It was imperfect, spotted, already beginning to curl at the edges. Still part of the whole, even as it fell away.

That night, she packed and unpacked her bag twice, not because she needed to, but because it made the idea real. Clothes, shoes, the journal, the letters wrapped carefully in cloth. She placed them in order, then took them out again, as if testing how it felt to let go.

Sleep came slowly. Her mind moved ahead of her, walking streets she had never seen, standing in rooms where her father had once stood, touching walls that still carried his absence. She wondered who she would be when she returned, and whether returning would ever mean quite the same thing again.

By morning, hesitation had settled into something firmer.

Letecia folded the map and slipped it back into her bag, smoothing it once more as if sealing the decision. Farnborough first. Then Cahors. California last. Some places, she sensed, needed distance before they could be faced.

Outside, the mango tree stood as it always had, unmoved, patient.

"I'll be back," she said aloud, unsure whether she was speaking to the tree, the house, or the life she was leaving for a while.

The leaves shifted softly in the breeze.

That night, she lay on her bed with the map spread beside her, tracing the red marks until her eyes blurred. For the first time, she felt her father not only beneath the mango tree, but somewhere beyond it too, standing in places she had yet to see.

She spoke quietly, as if the darkness itself might listen.

"I'm coming, Daddy. I need to see where you stood."

And with that, the decision stopped being something she carried in silence.

It had begun to move.

Chapter Four – The Departure

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