

# INVISIBLE COUNTRY



**ANNAMARIA ALFIERI**

# **INVISIBLE COUNTRY**

*In memory of my father, Samuel Puglise,  
a World War II combat Marine  
who came home a pacifist  
and taught me to hate war*

THOMAS DUNNE BOOKS.

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Between 1864 and 1870, the small landlocked country of Paraguay fought against three major South American powers—Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay—the conflict known as the War of the Triple Alliance. . . . At the war's end . . . Paraguay's cities in were ruins, its economy destroyed, its male population reduced by upwards of 90 percent.

—Alyn Brodsky, *Madame Lynch & Friend*, New York 1975



In representing the courage, the fearlessness of death of the Paraguayans as so extraordinary, my statements are fully supported by everyone, of whatever shade of opinion, who has written or spoken of this singular people. . . . The story of their sufferings and of their heroism should not perish with them.

—George Frederick Masterman,  
*Seven Eventful Years in Paraguay*, London 1870



*Paz Y Justicia* (Peace and Justice)

—The Coat of Arms of Paraguay

## **Dramatis Personae**

**Francisco Solano López**, dictator of Paraguay

**Eliza Lynch**, his mistress

**Colonel Franz (called François) Von Wisner de Morgenstern**, Hungarian nobleman



**Comandante Luis Menenez**, minion of López

**Gilda León de Menendez**, his wife



**Salvador León**, head of the area's leading family

**Alivia**, his wife

**Xandra**, their daughter



**Padre Gregorio Perez**, pastor of Santa Caterina



**Ricardo Yotté**, close ally of López and Lynch

**Martita**, his sister

**Estella**, his sister



**Josefina Quesada**, village seer

**Pablo**, her grandson



**Maria Claudia Benítez**, devout parishioner



**Manuela Aragon**, village blacksmith



**Hector Mompó, Saturnino Fermín, Gaspár Otazú**, three old men of the village



**Tomás Pereira Da Graça**, Brazilian cavalryman



He wheeled his stallion round. "Bring up the wagon," he barked, this time in Guaraní, to the two men who were their only companions that day.

The driver beat a rawhide whip on the backs of the poor bullocks that had dragged their heavy load to this desolate spot. The creaking of huge wheels on wooden axles sounded like a wounded cat. López ordered the two men to unload the four heavy trunks. They sweated and grunted with each one but did with dispatch as they were bid.

"Cast them over the side," López ordered. He watched as they toppled the trunks, one by one, over the edge and out of sight, down the cliff, those precious possessions they had carried with them in their desperate retreat through the rough cordillera. Over they went, still nailed shut and bound with heavy leather straps, into the gully below where only jaguars walked.

As the last trunk fell, López drew his pistol and pointed it at the men who stood at the edge, their shirts soaked with sweat. "Now jump."

Uncharacteristically, they did not obey at once. The taller one looked enquiringly at his commander.

The Mariscal, who held the power of life and death over everyone in Paraguay, aimed his pistol. A shot whizzed over their heads. "Now! Jump!"

Without a word, the two men embraced and, still clinging to one another, went head first off the precipice.