

## A courageous and extraordinary story of one woman's journey through family trauma and self-mutilation, and her determined struggle to prevail into motherhood

**Irene Vilar** was born in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, in 1969. Her memoir, *The Ladies' Gallery* (Other Press, 2009) was a *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Detroit Free Press* notable book of the year and was short-listed for the 1999 Mind Book of the Year Award. She is a literary agent for Vilar Creative Agency and Ray-Gude Mertin Literary Agency, an agency specializing in Spanish, Latin American, and Portuguese authors, representing such notable writers as Nobel Prize winner José Saramago. Today, Vilar is the mother of two.



Gary Isaacs

### PRAISE FOR IMPOSSIBLE MOTHERHOOD:

"Impossible Motherhood is like a journey into a harrowing underworld but guided by Vilar's gifts and her light we emerge in the end transformed, enlightened, and oh so alive." —JUNOT DIAZ, AUTHOR OF *THE BRIEF WONDROUS LIFE OF OSCAR WAO*

"I have never read a book like Impossible Motherhood, Irene Vilar's disturbing, heart-wrenching, and ultimately triumphant memoir, for the simple and understandable reason that no one of her gender has ever summoned the brutally raw, transcendent courage to write such a book—and yes, confess to such a troubling story."

—BOB SHACOCHIS, AUTHOR OF *EASY IN THE ISLANDS*

### AN EXCERPT FROM IMPOSSIBLE MOTHERHOOD:

For years, it didn't occur to me that there was anything to tell about abortion. The opposite. There was much to forget. But I discovered that many other women were hungry to come to terms with a past scarred by cowardice and the need to cloak themselves in someone else's power. Many had a history of repeat abortions. They, like me, were eager to find a language to articulate an experience they had seldom spoken about. My testimony is not unique. Beyond the antiseptic, practical language of Planned Parenthood and the legalistic or moralistic discourse of *Roe v. Wade* and its pro-choice and pro-life counterparts, there are few words to articulate individual, intimate accounts. About half of American women having abortions in 2004 (of 1.5 million reported) have had a prior abortion. Close to 20 percent have had at least two previous abortions and 10 percent three or more. A considerable number of the repeat abortions occur among populations with high levels of contraceptive use.

My own account can't resolve the moral dilemma of my actions. Yet, I want to understand the spell a pregnant body exercised over me, my flawed desire to become someone, or something else. The diaries I kept guided me. My promise to the reader is to deliver an account of my addiction, a steady flow of unhappiness, the X-ray of a delusion, and ultimately, the redeeming face of motherhood.

Halfway through working on this book I got pregnant for the seventeenth time. I don't think I would have been able to give birth without the call to accountability and self-reflection that writing this story demanded. My daughter became the coherence emerging from the shameful mass of thirty-five years.

Yes, I was an abortion addict and I do not wish for a scapegoat. Everything can be explained, justified, our last century tells us. Everything maybe, except for the burden of life interrupted that shall die with me.

- Advance reading copies available
- National broadcast, review, and feature coverage
- Advertising in *The New York Review of Books*
- Online promotion on Shelf Awareness/Author Buzz
- Marketing to counselors, mental health professionals
- Library/academic marketing

Irene Vilar

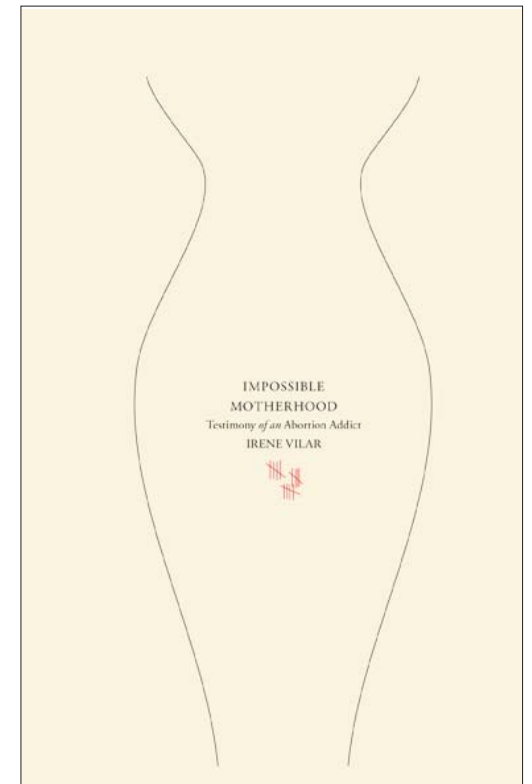
## IMPOSSIBLE MOTHERHOOD

TESTIMONY OF AN ABORTION ADDICT

With a foreword by Robin Morgan

Irene Vilar was just a teenager, a pliant young college undergraduate in thrall to a fifty-year-old professor, when they embarked on a relationship that led to marriage—a union of impossible odds—and sixteen abortions in fifteen years. Vilar knows that she is destined to be misunderstood, that many will see her nightmare as a story of abusing a right, of using abortion as a means of birth control. But it isn't that. Her nightmare is part of an awful secret, and the real story is shrouded in shame, colonialism, self-mutilation, and a family legacy that features a heroic grandmother, a suicidal mother, and two heroin-addicted brothers. Hers is a story that touches on American exploitation and reproductive repression in Puerto Rico. It is a story that looks back on her traumatic childhood growing up in the shadow of her mother's death and the footsteps of her famed grandmother, the political activist Lolita Lebrón. Vilar seamlessly weaves together past, present, and future, channeling a narrative that is at once dramatic and subtle.

*Impossible Motherhood* is a heartrending and ultimately triumphant testimonial of shame and servility as told by a writer looking back on her history of addiction. Abortion has never offered any honest person easy answers, and Vilar's dark journey through self-inflicted wounds, compulsive patterns, and historical hauntings revisits the difficulties this country has with the subject and prompts an important, much-needed discussion—literary, political, social, and philosophical. Vilar's is a powerful story of loss and mourning that bravely delves into selfhood, national identity, family responsibility, and finally motherhood itself—today, Vilar is the mother of two beautiful children.



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MEMOIR

Rights: World

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## A razor-sharp memoir about the allure of suicide for three generations of women in one Puerto Rican family and the frightening family secrets that haunt a grandmother, mother, and daughter in their search for self

**Irene Vilar** was born in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, in 1969. Her memoir, *The Ladies' Gallery* (Other Press, 2009) was a *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Detroit Free Press* notable book of the year and was short-listed for the 1999 Mind Book of the Year Award. She is a literary agent for Vilar Creative Agency and Ray-Gude Mertin Literary Agency, an agency specializing in Spanish, Latin American, and Portuguese authors, representing such notable writers as Nobel Prize winner José Saramago. Today, Vilar is the mother of two.



Gary Isaacs

### AN EXCERPT FROM *THE LADIES' GALLERY*:

MARCH 1, 1954. In the afternoon, a young woman together with three men entered the House of Representatives of the United States of America and opened fire. Next day, the front page of the *New York Times* would show the same woman wrapped in the revolutionary flag of Puerto Rico, her left fist raised high. What the *Times* would not quote were her words, "I did not come here to kill. I came here to die." An old battle cry of Puerto Rican nationalism. She would be sentenced to fifty-seven years in prison for assault and conspiracy to overthrow the government of the United States.

MARCH 1, 1977. On the twenty-third anniversary of the attack on Congress, her daughter commits suicide in Puerto Rico. The mother is flown secretly to the island for a day to attend the funeral.

FEBRUARY 1, 1988. A gray winter day: the daughter's daughter becomes a suicide patient at Hutchings Psychiatric Hospital, in Syracuse, New York.

Repetition informs my life. A teacher of mine once told me not to fear repetition, "Just don't be blacklisted by it." Well, I am the product of repetitions. Of family secrets. Every family has its own; usually it is the untold family story a child is destined unwittingly to repress, or to repeat. We inherit these secrets the way we inherit shame, guilt, desire. And we repeat.

- Promotion in conjunction with *Impossible Motherhood*
- Advertising in *The New York Review of Books*
- Online promotion on Shelf Awareness/Author Buzz
- Academic marketing

### PRAISE FOR *THE LADIES' GALLERY*:

"Lolita Lebrón's granddaughter, heir to the most public female embodiment of heroic self-sacrifice in Puerto Rico in this century, has written a memoir full of searing, intimate truths, silences broken open to reveal the personal costs of public mythmaking . . . A momentous act of courage."  
—*THE WOMEN'S REVIEW OF BOOKS*

"This memoir introduces us to a writer bound to make an impact . . . An autobiography as fantastic as any novel . . . It is a mark of Vilar's art that her story seems warm and alive."  
—*BOSTON GLOBE*

"Just as artist Frida Kahlo's splintered self-portraits and diaries personify Mexico's proud yet fragmented self-image, Vilar's intimate accounts about herself and her family personalize Puerto Rico's political, social, and cultural wars for its identity."  
—*ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH*

Irene Vilar

## THE LADIES' GALLERY

A MEMOIR OF FAMILY SECRETS

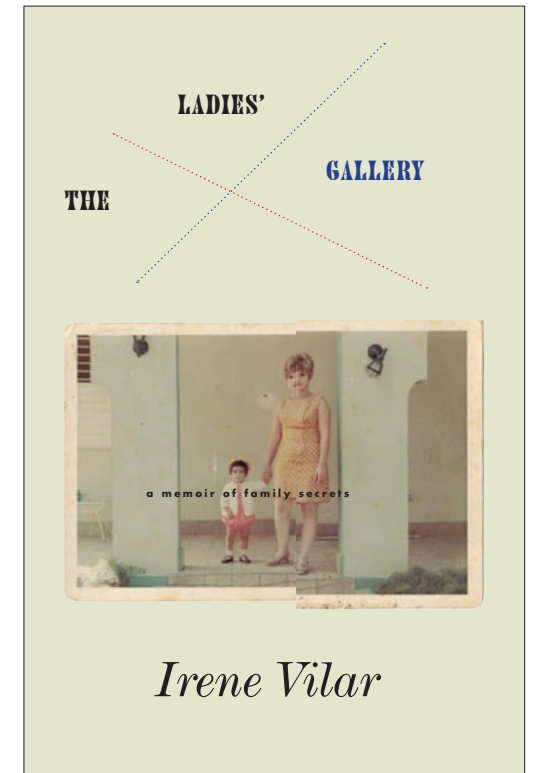
With a foreword by Carlin Romano

A shred of black lace. A broken hand mirror. A spidery strip of false eyelash. These are the fragments left to Irene Vilar, granddaughter of Lolita Lebrón, the revered political activist for Puerto Rican independence who in 1954 sprayed the U.S. House of Representatives with gunfire, wounding several congressmen, and later served twenty-seven years in prison. In *The Ladies' Gallery*, Vilar revisits the legacy of her grandmother and that of her anguished mother, who leapt to her death from a speeding car when Vilar was eight.

Eleven years after her mother's death, Vilar awakens in a psychiatric hospital after her own suicide attempt at the age of eighteen and begins to face the devastating inheritance of abandonment and suicide passed down from her grandmother and mother. The familial pattern of self-destruction flung open the doors to her national inheritance and the search for identity. Alternating between Vilar's notes from the ward and the unraveling of her family's secrets, this lyrical and powerful memoir of three generations of Puerto Rican women is urgent, impassioned, and unforgettable.

"Startling, raw, and affecting, a painful exercise in which memoir as therapy becomes memoir as art."  
—*PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER*, NOTABLE BOOK OF THE YEAR

"Stunning. A lyrical and visionary memoir of depression, Puerto Rican identity, and young womanhood."  
—*KIRKUS REVIEWS* (STARRED)



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