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Autobiography & Memoir

Impossible Motherhood: Testimony of an Abortion Addict
Irene Vilar
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Fifteen abortions in as many years would indeed make motherhood seem to be an impossible dream, yet Irene Vilar is now married and, in spite of medical predictions to the contrary, the birth mother of two children. She is also an author who is able to take a scalpel to her soul, and, wielding it as capably as the best of surgeons, cut away delusion and artifice to reveal her dark and disturbing coming-of-age story.

Vilar does not mean to advocate on either side of the abortion debate; ranging far beyond the politics of abortion, her book is a controversial and intense tale of generational and national trauma. It relates how her conflicted and pain-filled childhood led to physical acting-out in suicide attempts and self-mutilation, and describes the author's seemingly hopeless search for affirmation of her gifts and very selfhood in relationships that were doomed to fail in providing either.

Born in Puerto Rico, Vilar is the granddaughter of revolutionary icon Lolita Lebrón, who once stormed the steps of the US capitol with a gun and a Puerto Rican flag in her purse. When Vilar was eight, her mother committed suicide by jumping from a moving car in which Vilar was also a passenger; her two brothers were addicted to heroin, and one died at an early age due to abuse of the drug. Sent away to college at the age of sixteen, Vilar took up a relationship with a fifty-year-old professor, who enthralled and dominated her. After they were wed, his insistence that there be no children led to multiple abortions. However, it was Vilar's own inability to find herself without a relationship to a more powerful man and her need to cause herself pain that were the sources of her suffering. She writes, "The threat of loss became the air I breathed. The dramatic, deadly power struggles that propelled almost everyone around me…wedged me into a corner of exacerbated obedience and compliance and action."

But more was born of the relationship than suffering; it was, after all, the professor who encouraged Vilar to become a writer, though he was unable to admit that she was capable of

writing without his editing of her words, thoughts, and emotions. That she has been able to bloom in her own way as a writer of brutal honesty and profound intelligence reveals the strong, courageous spirit of a survivor.

Kristine Morris