



Icy Sparks (Oprah's Book Club)

By Gwyn Hyman Rubio

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A **New York Times** Notable Book and the March 2001 selection of **Oprah's Book Club®** !

Icy Sparks is the sad, funny and transcendent tale of a young girl growing up in the mountains of Eastern Kentucky during the 1950's. **Gwyn Hyman Rubio's** beautifully written first novel revolves around Icy Sparks, an unforgettable heroine in the tradition of Scout in **To Kill a Mockingbird** or Will Treed in **Cold Sassy Tree**. At the age of ten, Icy, a bright, curious child orphaned as a baby but raised by adoring grandparents, begins to have strange experiences. Try as she might, her "secrets"—verbal croaks, groans, and physical spasms—keep afflicting her. As an adult, she will find out she has Tourette's Syndrome, a rare neurological disorder, but for years her behavior is the source of mystery, confusion, and deep humiliation.

Narrated by a grown up Icy, the book chronicles a difficult, but ultimately hilarious and heartwarming journey, from her first spasms to her self-acceptance as a young woman. Curious about life beyond the hills, talented, and energetic, Icy learns to cut through all barriers—physical, mental, and spiritual—in order to find community and acceptance.

Along her journey, Icy faces the jeers of her classmates as well as the malevolence of her often-ignorant teachers—including Mrs. Stilton, one of the most evil fourth grade teachers ever created by a writer. Called willful by her teachers and "Frog Child" by her schoolmates, she is exiled from the schoolroom and sent to a children's asylum where it is hoped that the roots of her mysterious behavior can be discovered. Here Icy learns about difference—her own and those who are even more scarred than she. Yet, it isn't until Icy returns home that she really begins to flower, especially through her friendship with the eccentric and obese Miss Emily, who knows first-hand how it feels to be an outcast in this tightly knit Appalachian community. Under Miss Emily's tutelage, Icy learns about life's struggles and rewards, survives her first comical and heartbreaking misadventure with romance, discovers the healing power of her voice when she sings, and ultimately—takes her first steps back into the world.

Gwyn Hyman Rubio's **Icy Sparks** is a fresh, original, and completely redeeming novel about learning to overcome others' ignorance and celebrate the differences

that make each of us unique.

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Icy Sparks (Oprah's Book Club) By Gwyn Hyman Rubio Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

The eponymous heroine of Gwyn Rubio's *Icy Sparks* is only 10 years old the first time it happens. The sudden itching, the pressure squeezing her skull, and the "little invisible rubber bands" attached to her eyelids are all symptoms of Tourette's syndrome. At this point, of course, Icy doesn't yet have a name for these unsettling impulses. But whenever they become too much to resist, she runs down to her grandparents' root cellar, and there she gives in, croaking, jerking, cursing, and popping her eyes. Nicknamed the "frog child" by her classmates, Icy soon becomes "a little girl who had to keep all of her compulsions inside." Only a brief confinement at the Bluegrass State Hospital persuades her that there are actually children more "different" than she.

As a first novel about growing up poor, orphaned, and prone to fits in a small Appalachian town, *Icy Sparks* tells a fascinating story. By the time the epilogue rolls around, Icy has prevailed over her disorder and become a therapist: "Children silent as stone sing for me. Children who cannot speak create music for me." For readers familiar with this particular brand of coming-of-age novel--affliction fiction?--Icy's triumph should come as no great surprise. That's one problem. Another is Rubio's tendency to lapse into overheated prose: this is a novel in which the characters would sooner yell, pout, whine, moan, or sass a sentence than simply say it. But the real drawback to *Icy Sparks* is that some of the characters--especially the bad ones--are drawn with very broad strokes indeed, and the moral principles tend to be equally elementary: embrace your difference, none of us is alone, and so on. When Icy gets saved at a tent revival, even Jesus takes on the accents of a self-help guru: "You must love yourself!" With insights like these, this is one Southern novel that's more Wally Lamb than Harper Lee. --*Mary Park*

From Publishers Weekly

The diagnosis of Tourette's Syndrome isn't mentioned until the last pages of Rubio's sensitive portrayal of a young girl with the disease. Instead, Rubio lets Icy Sparks tell her own story of growing up during the 1950s in a small Kentucky town where her uncontrollable outbursts make her an object of fright and scorn. "The Saturday after my [10th] birthday, the eye blinking and poppings began.... I could feel little invisible rubber bands fastened to my eyelids, pulled tight through my brain and attached to the back of my head," says Icy, who thinks of herself as the "frog child from Icy Creek." Orphaned and cared for by her loving grandparents, Icy weathers the taunts of a mean schoolteacher and, later, a crush on a boy that ends in disappointment. But she also finds real friendship with the enormously fat Miss Emily, who offers kindness and camaraderie. Rubio captures Icy's feelings of isolation and brings poignancy and drama to Icy's childhood experiences, to her temporary confinement in a mental institution and to her reluctant introduction?thanks to Miss Emily and Icy's grandmother?to the Pentecostal church through which she discovers her singing talent. If Rubio sometimes loses track of Icy's voice, indulges in unconvincing magical realism and takes unearned poetic license with the speech of her Appalachian grandparents ("Your skin was as cold as fresh springwater, slippery and strangely soothing to touch"), her first novel is remarkable for its often funny portrayal of a child's fears, loves and struggles with an affliction she doesn't know isn't her fault. Agent, Susan Golomb; editor, Jane von Mehren.

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From Library Journal

This enthralling story takes us into the heart and mind of little Icy Sparks, where we learn firsthand what it is like to grow up with a serious disability. Raised in backwoods Kentucky by her maternal grandparents, Matanni and Patanni, Icy would have had a hard enough life even without the onset of Tourette's syndrome

at the age of ten. The violent spasms, croaks, and popping eyes earn her the nickname "frog child," and we see how her childhood is marred by the humiliation of the illness. After an extremely bad episode, Icy is committed to a state hospital, where an attempt at diagnosis fails and a period of overmedication renders her senseless. It is not until college that the correct diagnosis is made, and Icy can reach true understanding. Her journey from childhood to adulthood, with all of its obstacles, is inspiring and truly touches the heart. This tale, read by Kate Miller, engenders love and empathy for the disabled, as it illustrates that while outwardly they may appear to be different, inside they are the same as everyone else. Highly recommended for all school and public libraries. Marjorie Lemon, SRCF-Mercer, PA
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Peter Wilson:

This Icy Sparks (Oprah's Book Club) book is absolutely not ordinary book, you have after that it the world is in your hands. The benefit you will get by reading this book is usually information inside this publication incredible fresh, you will get info which is getting deeper you actually read a lot of information you will get. That Icy Sparks (Oprah's Book Club) without we understand teach the one who reading it become critical in contemplating and analyzing. Don't become worry Icy Sparks (Oprah's Book Club) can bring whenever you are and not make your tote space or bookshelves' turn into full because you can have it in the lovely laptop even telephone. This Icy Sparks (Oprah's Book Club) having great arrangement in word as well as layout, so you will not sense uninterested in reading.

Michael Green:

Playing with family in a very park, coming to see the sea world or hanging out with pals is thing that usually you might have done when you have spare time, in that case why you don't try thing that really opposite from that. One activity that make you not sense tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you have been ride on and with addition of information. Even you love Icy Sparks (Oprah's Book Club), you could enjoy both. It is very good combination right, you still would like to miss it? What kind of hang-out type is it? Oh can occur its mind hangout folks. What? Still don't have it, oh come on its named reading friends.

Michael Carr:

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