Short for Estrellita

My entire name is Maria Estrellita Gloria del Rio Fernandez, but almost everyone calls me Essie. One day, I ask Mama why I have so many names. “Why, you have as many names as you have aunts!” Mama answers, laughing. “When you were born, each of your aunts brought you a gift—and a name.”

First, I go to see Aunt Rosa, and as always, she greets me with an enormous hug. When I tell her that I’m interested in knowing the source of each of my names, Aunt Rosa picks up an old, faded photograph and then hands it to me. “That’s your great-grandmother Maria,” Aunt Rosa says, “who, of course, was my grandmother. When our parents died, Maria raised all four of us sisters. I wanted to pass her name on to honor her, and that’s why you are named Maria.” I thank Aunt Rosa and quickly head off to see Aunt Dolores.

Aunt Dolores walks over to the kitchen window and pulls the curtain aside. It’s become just dark enough for the first star to appear, and there it is, perfectly framed in the window. “The night you were born,” Aunt Dolores says, “I looked out this very window and thought for what seemed like an eternity about what name I could bring. Then I realized it was right there in front of me—Estrellita. The little star was shining like a candle. I think the name is full of promise, just as you are.”

I still have time to get to Aunt Ana’s house to find out about Gloria. “I was in the second grade,” she says, “and I just couldn’t seem to read the words. My reading teacher, Gloria Thompson, said I should have my eyes examined. Those glasses helped me learn to read and I never forgot about her.”

I thought I could shorten my name by choosing just one first name, but everyone of my names has a history I can’t ignore!