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# The Name

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## **The Name**

by S. Ray Granade

12/21/2010

The three sisters shared characteristics conferred by the prestige of family money and well-known name. The money came from entrepreneurial endeavors: their father's building housed the post office, a drug store, then a bank. The name's renown rested on glory gained on the battlefield, most notably the brigade of Alabamians who charged so bravely across the field at Gettysburg in the face of Union guns protected by a split-rail fence.

Letha, the oldest, snared the small town's most eligible male, a scion of Goshen's most important family named Charlie Howard. Her family was sure that it was a match made in heaven, and a coup for the socially sensitive Laws. When the first Florida land boom lured thousands onto the sands of the Sunshine State, Charlie and Letha headed for imagined riches, only to spend the rest of their lives in Miami rather than come home to Goshen and admit their limitations and diminished circumstances. Haunted by the disparity between the finances of her youth and of her married life, Letha would seed the road between Miami and Montgomery with small savings accounts in the vain hope that one would save her from being stranded, penniless, among strangers who knew neither her family's name nor their status.

Lois, the baby, chose the suave Sandford Lynn, who charmed her parents as well as herself. She found his salesman personality wonderfully suited to encouraging prospective car buyers but insufficient to meet the requirements of the style in which she had become accustomed to live. So Lois took to working and Sandford took to drink.

Ruby, the middle daughter, wound up teaching school. There she ran afoul of Rufus Ray, a quiet, mathematically inclined boy who had been picked by his father and dying mother as the hardscrabble farming family's hope and sent to school while siblings did his chores. He crammed four years of college into eight, dropping out when he ran out of money to teach school for a while and earn enough to return. Rufus asked Ruby to

marry him; her family disparaged the possibility; she agreed, but only if he committed to “bettering himself.”

Rufus took every civil service examination that came along, and finally found himself in Washington, DC involved in government work. He worked two jobs and went to law school at night, then served his time during World War I. Despite family objections, Ruby married him and they made their home in the nation’s capital. There they conceived their first child.

When Ruby’s time came, her older sister came to her side in Washington to provide whatever help might be required. The child proved to be a female. Ruby decided to name her Martha Elizabeth and call her Betty. Letha did not think the name adequate; she thought that the child should be named for her mother: Ruby Law Ray. Such a christening would, of course, perpetuate the Law name. Each was adamant about her belief in the appropriateness of her choice. The difference was that the mother supplied the baby book. In it, she carefully wrote the name she wanted her daughter to bear.

And so it looked like Ruby would best her sister in their contest of wills. But looks can be deceiving. It happened that when hospital officials came by to get all the information for the child’s birth certificate, Letha intercepted them. What was the child’s name, they asked her; why, she’s to be named for her mother, Letha replied. And so the child’s official, duly enrolled name emerged from the bowels of bureaucracy as Ruby Law Ray. Realizing defeat, but certainly not accepting it gracefully, Ruby took the new, empty baby book, lined out the name she had chosen and cherished, and replaced it with the one recorded in the hospital’s records.

Years later, the child wondered about that lined out name. She convinced herself that she was adopted, a replacement for a girl who died in infancy, before anything of her life could be recorded in the beautiful book. She hugged the secret to herself, simultaneously saddened and ashamed. Eventually she could stand the burden no longer. Tell me the story, she begged her mother. Nonplused, the woman quizzed her young namesake and elicited her secret belief. Finally the child learned the truth.

Coming to terms with the whole story led to an interesting undertaking by the teenaged Ruby. She decided that she needed to make a change, so she combined her first two names, emerging from the

experience a new person, Rubilaw. Thus did she, at long last, thwart the overbearing Letha. But, true to form, the thwarting was not complete; Rubilaw could not make the break; her choice was more a compromise than a rebellion.