

The Family Name

INT. MAKESHIFT OFFICE - DAY

Several housewives and old ladies sit at brown folding tables with mail trays in front of them. Their hands stuff items into envelopes in a streaming, constant motion while talking idly to each other.

This is the home of junk mail.

Alone at a table in the back sits ING, 60ish and uninvolved with the rest of the room. He collates his pieces, displaying the definition of monotony.

ING (V.O.)
Letter, brochure,
envelope. Letter, brochure,
envelope. Letter...

INT. SEALING STATION - DAY

Ing feeds stuffed envelopes into a machine which seals and stamps posting on them, then spits them on a conveyor belt.

He sighs as he dumps the finished letters back into their tray and wipes his brow. He checks his watch and cracks a hint of a smile.

JAMESON (V.O.)
Hey Ing, see to these too before
you go to lunch?

JAMESON, the well-dressed 40 year old boss, wheels over a metal cart with twenty filled two foot mail trays. Ing's face falls back to it's previous, depressing state.

INT. LUNCH AREA - DAY

Ing opens the garbage and pulls out a coffee soaked newspaper. He flicks off as much as he can and sits at a wobbly table.

He opens a brown paper bag, pulls out a sandwich, and starts to read the stained paper. Ing gives a quick look around and pulls a flask from his back pocket, swigging a sip.

Jameson enters, catching him, more annoyed than angry.

JAMESON
Dammit, Ing. We just got a job in
and I want to get it shipped out
today.

ING

Sure.

JAMESON

What kind of name is Ing anyway?

ING

It's a family name.

JAMESON

Since when do you have a family? Now knock off the booze and let's get going.

Jameson leaves without waiting for a response. Ing crumples the paper and throws it back in the trash.

INT. MAKESHIFT OFFICE - DAY

Ing resumes his stuffing routine on a "Welcome Package" job.

ING (V.O.)

Letter, brochure,
envelope. Letter, brochure,
envelope.

On a radio, a peppy 60's song plays. Ing's body begins to slightly bob along with the beat. He lifts his head, recognizing the song when...

CO-WORKER

Game's coming on.

A barge of a woman CO-WORKER changes the station.

Ing sags again.

ING (V.O.)

Letter, brochure,
envelope. Letter, brochure,
envelope. Letter, brochure,
envel--

He freezes, staring at the completed piece of mail. His eyes well up. His lips tremble.

Ing becomes aware of his condition. He looks around to see if anyone has noticed. No one has.

Carefully, he slips the envelope under the table and into his pocket.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ing enters the cramped, suffocating studio with the perennial city sounds of traffic jams and rowdy dwellers accompanying. You could cook dinner in bed the place is so small. Magazines stacked upon each other. Framed newspaper clippings from decades ago.

Ing tosses his keys on a small table, above which hangs a U.S. Army Honorable Discharge certificate for "Ing Shackelford" from 1972.

He sits in a splintering wicker chair and pulls out his flask and the envelope. With a large swig, he stares the letter down. He can't take his eyes of the printed name:

"ING SHACKLEFORD."

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Ing, now dressed in the best wool suit Goodwill Thrift has to offer, still focuses on the letter.

The train crosses a bridge from the city to the 'burbs.

EXT. 8TH STREET - DAY

Ing checks the upper middle class houses' numbers against the address on the letter. He spots number eighty-four.

The old man checks his lapel, takes a deep breath, and baby steps his way to the...

EXT. FRONT PORCH - DAY

...his finger shaking as it reaches for the door bell.

DING-DONG.

Through the beveled glass, Ing watches figures move, the littlest of which opens the door.

TOMMY

Hello?

Ing is caught off guard by six year old TOMMY.

ING

Um, hello. I'm, I'm looking for--

A sixteen year old girl, INGRID garbed in emo wear runs up behind Tommy, pushing him back.

INGRID

Tommy, what did I say about opening doors?

(to Ing)

Yeah, who are you?

ING

I'm, I'm looking for Ing Shackelford.

INGRID

Yeah, well?

ING

Um, is he home?

INGRID

I'm Ing. What do you want?

Ing's face reads disappointment.

ING

Well, I got this letter--

A MAN, 40's, walks passed packed moving boxes inside to behind Ingrid and puts his hand on her. Ing's face washes white, his breathing, faint.

MAN

Who is it Ing?

Ing looks deep into the man's eyes with recognition and his knees give. He collapses into the man's arms.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Ing fades back to consciousness seated at a kitchen table. The man fans him with a newspaper. Ingrid leans against the wall, hardly concerned.

MAN

Are you alright? Mister?

ING

What happened?

MAN

You fainted.

ING
I did? For how long?

MAN
A minute. Do you need me to call
an ambulance?

ING
No, no. But a glass of orange
juice couldn't hurt.

MAN
Ing.

Ingrid grabs a glass from a cardboard box marked "KITCHEN" and pours the juice with great annoyance. She passes it to the man who passes it to Ing, then she plods off.

MAN
That age, you know.

ING
Ing? That's an interesting name.

MAN
Ingrid really. Called her Ing
since she was a baby. She was
always crawl-ing, sing-ing, do-ing.

ING
Brood-ing.

MAN
Lately. Plus it's kind of a family
name.

ING
Oh?

MAN
My father was named Ing and, where
are my manners, so am I. Ing
Shackleford. Call me
Irving... and you are?

Ing stutters, his words stuck.

ING
Bernard, and this must be for you.

Ing hands the envelope over to Irving.

IRVING
Thanks. How did you--

ING
Uh, it came to me by mistake. I live over on 8th ave. It always happens. I tell them but the guys at the post office are never gonna believe this. They're convinced they're "infallible."

IRVING
Thanks. Mail's been messed up since the move. Well, looks like just junk mail. Could've just trashed it.

ING
Figured I'd come by and say hello. It's the start of a new relationship.

IRVING
That's odd. It's not postmarked.

Ing squirms. Tommy runs in, jumps into Irving's lap.

IRVING
Careful, Tommy. You almost hit something important.

TOMMY
That man fell down.

ING
I sure did, little man. Hey, you wanna see what I can do?

Tommy nods.

ING
What's your favorite animal?

TOMMY
(imitating one)
Tiger.

Ing grabs the envelope, opens it, and pulls out the letter.

ING
May I?

IRVING

Sure.

Ing starts to fold it with precision. Tommy watches in wonder as does Irving until something registers. He squints at Ing, recognizing the man.

ING

Ta-da.

Ing places an origami tiger on the table.

TOMMY

Wow. More. More.

IRVING

No more. We have things to do, Tommy. Bernard has to leave.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - DAY

Irving and Tommy stand on the porch. Ing extends a hand which Irving shakes.

ING

Well, welcome to the neighborhood.

Tommy shakes his tiger at Ing.

TOMMY

Roar!

ING

Roar back to you.

An awkward beat passes.

ING

Well, see you around.

Ing heads down the walkway, smiling. Irving shuffles Tommy inside the house the jogs over to Ing.

IRVING

Hey, Bernard. Wait up.

Ing turns, holding his breath.

IRVING

Figure this whole mail thing'll go both ways. What'd you say? Eighty-six 8th Avenue?

ING
Avenue. Yes.

IRVING
Funny that mail for eighty-four 8th
Street would go to eighty-six 8th
Avenue... dad.

Ing sighs with admission.

ING
It was the tiger. You always used
to pick a tiger too.

IRVING
What the hell are you doing here?

ING
I just wanted to see how you were.

IRVING
So what? You're stalking
me? Stealing my mail?

ING
No. I guess I just confused a
coincidence for a sign. I won't be
back. I'm sorry.

Ing begins to walk past the front fence but is stopped by
Irving's words.

IRVING
You know, it's hard enough to be
five and have you mother tell you
your dad is dead. But you have no
idea how obliterating it is to be
nine and find a letter, written by
him, saying he's too much of a
coward to stay.

ING
You weren't supposed to see that.

IRVING
A kid'll find a lot of stuff when
his single mother is constantly
working double shifts. I never
told her I knew. I never told
anyone.

ING

I was no good for you two. Still
no good.

Ing sheepishly pulls out his flask for a sip.

ING

And after the war--

IRVING

Is this your explanation?

ING

No. I guess it's my excuse. I
sent checks... whenever I
could. Then you two moved. I
didn't know. But I'm glad you done
well. Two beautiful kids,
beautiful house, and with the
ring...

Irving, reminded of his wedding band, squeezes a fist.

IRVING

She's at the market.

ING

I bet she's beautiful too. I'm
just glad that I didn't bring you
down with me.

Irving storms towards him, throwing the fence gate aside,
and grabs Ing by the collar.

IRVING

Don't you dare. Don't you fuckin'
dare confuse my success with you
inability to put your family over
your demons. To care about anyone
but yourself.

ING

You think I didn't care? Didn't
love you?

IRVING

Little to show otherwise.

He releases Ing. Ing slowly brings his flask to his lips,
carefully watching a fuming, trembling Irving. He drinks.

ING
You know what the highest mountain
in the world was before they
discovered Mount Everest?

The question releases Irvings tension, and tears.

IRVING
What?

ING
Highest mountain?

IRVING
I don't know.

ING
It was Mount Everest. Just cause
you don't know something's there
don't mean it don't exist.

A sniffing half-cough, half-laugh escapes Irving.

ING
Ingrid. Ing. If you hated me so
much, why'd you name her that.

IRVING
'Cause it's the only thing you left
me. It's the family name.

Ing nods, turns, and the two men walk back to their separate
lives.

FADE OUT.