

An Alphabet

by stephen hastings-king

A daydreams about a woman whose name he's forgotten next to B, who's been drunk since afternoon.

C, green-gray tinged and socially invisible, rummages through his pockets for a cigarette.

D looks into his beer while E talks about playing the horses and overhears F complaining about taxes and gun control to G who is not listening.

H looks over the summer menu.

I traces with an index finger the line between inside and outside that runs along the horizon that is visible through the window.

J dispenses advice about boat engines to K who is just passing through town.

L runs a rack full of glasses to the kitchen where M is holding a handful of clams.

N bursts through the other door and back into the bar as O pours Coke into a pint glass of rum beneath the image of P and his Action Team that is elsewhere.

Q looks at a cribbage board with melancholy intensity as R counts 15-2 15-4. S treats their game as a spectator sport. T is talking about wanting to have kids.

U diagrams an Amway plan on a napkin for V who takes it for a map of something else.

W is noticing that the music pours from a little speaker directly over his head.

X struggles silently to remain optimistic: Y surveys the scene to find fault.

Z alone watches the golf reruns on the monitor that dominates the space.

Every bar is an alphabet of loneliness.

