

Green River

by H. W. Moss

INT. DAY -- Aboard the passenger train California Zephyr en route. Conductor approaches Cathal, also known as Charley, who offers up his ticket. Conductor punches, places in overhead clip.

Conductor: Green River? You want off at Green River?

Cathal (who clearly has an Irish accent): Well, yah, I do.

Conductor: You sure you want off at Green River, Utah?

Cathal: Well, yah, I do.

Conductor: Nobody ever gets off at Green River. There's nothing there.

Cathal: Well, whyzzat?

Conductor: Water tank for old steam engines is why it's even on the map of the line. You know someone in Green River?

Cathal: Nope

Conductor: Forty years working this route, can't say as I remember anybody request gettin' off at Green River.

Cathal: I had to pick a stop on my Amtrak International Rail ticket. Green River sounded good.

Conductor: Yah, I know it ain't like Eurail where you can get on and off as you please. But here, you want me to make a minor adjustment. Let you off in Salt Lake?

Cathal: No, it's okay. It'll do. I'll be the first. I like small towns. I'll find a hotel before the sun goes down.

EX. DAY -- EVENING.

Conductor: Walk perpendicular to the tracks, not parallel. You oughta run into something if you go that way.

EX. DAY -- EVENING. -- Cathal on train platform which is abandoned. Boarded up doors and windows, no one working, no cars in the parking lot. Cathal sees the highway, in the distance a gas station. Resigning himself he hefts his back pack and, with a book in one hand -- we read the title: "At Swim-Two-Birds" by Flann O'Brien -- sets out for the distant destination.

EX. EVENING -- Gas station is next to a single story clapboard building with a sign: Ray's Place -- Bar/Eats

INT. DIMLY LIT -- Five rough hewn men in various stages of drinking are in heated conversation shouting at one another from different places in the room: Two are at the bar, two are at a pool table, one is coming out of the restroom yelling.

Restroom Guy: Aw shuddup you Clod. This state ain't gonna Californicate and legalize smoking dope fer fun. No way. Never happen.

Bar Guy One: Nope. Not on your life.

Bar Guy Two (lowers beer bottle to speak): Well, hell no.

INT. DIMLY LIT -- Cathal enters as Restroom Guy goes behind bar. He is the Bar Tender and turns alertly toward the newcomer.

Bar Tender: Can I do you for?

Pool Player One stops mid-shot to stand upright and stare.

Cathal (bewildered): Well, er, I uh, were looking for directions to a motel and maybe get something to eat.

Pool Player Two: Yer not from round here, are yuh?

Cathal (affably): Good guess.

Pool Player One: Australia?

Cathal walks toward Player One with outstretched hand, they shake: Cathal.

Pool Player One: Richard. Dick. (Quizzically) Kawl?

Cathal: Ca-hal. Spelt C-A-T-H-A-L. Ireland. Laois. (Approaches Pool Player Two, shakes) Cathal.

Pool Player Two: I cain't say that. How 'bout I call you Charley?

Cathal: That's good. Right by me. Charley it is.

Bar Tender: Charley want a drink?

Cathal: Sign said eat. Got a menu?

Bar Tender (produces sheet of paper): Burgers and hot dogs. Take yer pick.

Cathal (approaches, pulls back a barstool, sits): Sounds great! (Peruses menu for a few seconds) Cheeseburger it is, then. And a pint of Guinness, if you please.

Bar Tender: Sorry sonny. Nothing foreign and nothing on tap, only bottled beer here.

Bar Tender sweeps an arm past a varied row of domestic beer on display. Cathal picks one. Cheeseburger, bottle of beer is served. No glass for the beer. Pool game resumes, guys at other end of bar talking, but in more subdued tones. Bar Tender remains nearby.

Cathal (between bites): There a hotel or bed 'n' breakfast nearby I might try?

Bar Tender: Sorry sonny. None of that sort of place around here. Best we can offer is a night at the twenty-eight spot.

Cathal: Twenty-eight spot?

Bar Tender: Motel. That's the nightly rate, twenty-eight dollars. The Spot is what it's called on account of it's the one spot on the road you can stop between here and Crescent Junction. Locals call it the No Tell Motel. You want I can call Mayleen see if they have a room for you.

Cathal: Yah. I'd like that if you would. Thanks.

Pool Player Two: Hey Charley. You shoot pool?

Cathal (walks over to the table): Bookets. Pockets big as bookets.

Pool Player Two: I'm tired of beatin' Huck over there, how about you and me shoot a game?

They have time for one quick game in which Cathal first must hear the rules.

Pool Player Two: We play bar rules. Call shots, not pockets. No fouls except if you drop the cue ball and then you shoot from the kitchen, behind the head string. Call all shots unless it's obvious. Eight ball has to go clean, not off another ball. If I sink a ball on the break, I keep it.

Cathal: No ball in hand?

Pool Player Two: Naw, no fouls. Drop the cue, shoot from behind the line. Got it?

Cathal: Got it.

All watch as Player Two breaks. As the game progresses, all are impressed as Cathal demonstrates Irish proficiency on the table. He wins.

A huge man in Levis, cowboy boots, brown leather coat with leather arm fringe a foot long, wearing a black Stetson on his head and a wide black handlebar moustache occupies the doorway for several seconds until the game is done.

Moses: You the feller needs a place to stay the night?

Cathal: Yah, at's me.

Moses: Grab yer things yer coming with me.

INT. NIGHT -- Motel guest registration. Woman behind the counter. A child of eight or nine stands beside her. Woman slides Cathal's credit card.

Mayleen: Checkout's eleven ayem unless you're staying more than one night. How many nights?

Cathal: Oh, I dunno. Two maybe. Depends on how interesting it is around here.

Mayleen: If that's your criteria, you'll be gone afore then.

INT. MORNING -- Coffee shop next door to motel. Moses slides into seat opposite Cathal who is eating breakfast.

Moses: Morning Charley. How ya be?

Cathal: Morning Moses. Just fine.

Moses: Sleep well I assume.

Cathal: Yep. I was tired.

Moses: Care to take a trip into the hills with me?

Cathal: Where you headed?

Moses: Was thinking you might like the Arches.

Cathal: Read about them. Geologic formations.

Moses: Those're the ones. Out near Moab.

Cathal: Sounds biblical.

Moses: It is. You know your Old Testament. Genesis, named after the son of Lot. We don't get many Papists around here. Most think the city's named after somebody local or a Indian.

Cathal: And you want to go there?

Moses: Um, yeh. Arches. We're going to Arches National Park where you can see the Delicate Arch and other mind boggling fingerprints left behind by the hand of god.

Cathal: Yah, but Lot's wife was turned to salt. Did she have a son?

Moses: She didn't. He did. Two sons. Moab and Ammon. He had daughters first. Then when his wife was gone, he got them pregnant. Yep. Moab was a product of incest.

Cathal: And that's where we're headed?

Moses: Um, yeh.

Cathal: Sounds good. Let's go.

EXT. DAY The two are riding inside the cab of Moses' rattle trap truck.

Moses: At's high desert we're passing through. Rainfall less than ten inches a year. We're at the four thousand foot range, surrounding mountains thirteen thousand foot. You get good weather most days this time of year, but it can be cold at night.

Cathal: Beautiful country.

Moses: It can be dangerous. Bob cats, wildcats, rattlers, coral snakes are one of the most venomous vipers in the world. Rocks can fall on you. Gotta carry your own water.

Cathal: Whoa. I didn't even think of that. Water? Food? Can we stop and pick up some?

Moses: No need lad. Filled the cooler behind the seat this morning. Plenty of bottled water and had Mayleen fix us up some sandwiches.

Cathal: Girl checked me in at the motel?

Moses: That's the one. My daughter. Lucy's my grand daughter.

Cathal: Oh. The little girl.

Moses: She's a bright one, let me tell you.

Cathal: Cute kid.

Moses: Growing up in God's country. Which is what you're in and about to see a lot more of.

EXT. DAY -- The dust settles around the truck. Moses digs behind the seat to pull out two plastic water bottles. He hands one to Cathal, pops the top off the other and takes a long drink.

Moses: Hope you're ready for a bit of a hike.

Cathal: Sure thing.

Moses: Keep your water bottle with you. Let's go.

EXT. DAY -- Cathal is obviously worn out from the trek. He is bent over, head lowered, hands on knees panting. Moses is unbowed standing tall smiling at what he sees.

Moses: See why it's called delicate? The 2002 Olympic torch passed through it. Locals named it The Schoolmarm's Bloomers. Course it was formed during the Jurassic, one and a half, two hundred million years ago, and is part of the Colorado Plateau. Might fall down any time.

Cathal: Grand. Brilliant. Admirable. Amazing sight.

Moses: You ain't seen nothin'. Some of the formations have funny names. Domes you get easy. Hoodoos, fins, goblins, you'll get 'em when you see 'em.

Cathal: I understand why you like it out here.

EXT. DAY -- They are stopped along the highway taking sips from water bottles.

Expanse seen on screen: Dead Horse Point

Cathal: Stunning.

Moses: Over there is where the final scene in "Thelma and Louise" was shot. And over there was where cattlemen of the 1800s rounded up wild ponies in a natural corral.

Cathal: Wild horses. Indian ponies?

Moses: Yep. Wild but easily broke. Most of 'em. Not all, but most.

Cathal: Can you still do that?

Moses: What? Round up wild horses? Naw. Nope. That was way long time ago. It's a state park now. They got rid of all the wonders like wild horses. Caters to tourists now. Mountain biking, white water river rafting. Night sky watching is some of the best in the world. C'n see why it's called the Milky Way. Romans named it that, via lactea, cuz it looks like spilled milk in the sky. When Max Moe was still at Astronomy Camp his father brought the family out here.

Cathal: I'm supposed to know this Moe guy?

Moses: Well, no, not yet. But I like to think the origin of his binary star formation theory was right here in Moab.

Cathal: Yer allowed overnight camping?

Moses: Some places, yah. You have to register in advance, but yah. (Pause, sip) You flew here from Ireland, yes?

Cathal: Had to fly. Takes too long by boat. Unless I get a job, I'm on a short term visa.

Moses: What do you do?

Cathal: Biologist. My last job was in stem cell research. I'll be looking for something in that field on the West Coast, probably San Francisco.

Moses: That can be a touchy subject to some folks hereabouts.

Cathal: What? San Francisco or stem cells?

Moses: Both. But mainly interfering with human souls. Stem cells are from aborted fetuses.

Cathal: Naw. They come from a variety of sources. Blood, bone marrow, adipose tissue. Pluripotent stem cells can come from human embryos, but that was given up long ago as too controversial.

Moses: Well, my observation is not to prohibit science. It's what kept a lot of us alive in Vietnam.

Cathal: You were there?

Moses: Did two tours along the DMZ as a medic.

Cathal: And stem cell research is not a problem for you?

Moses: Why hell no. Way I figure it, when God told President Bush He didn't want him doing stem cell research, San Francisco said, "God must want us to."

Cathal: Yep. Well, my pa'ticular area of research is yeast cells.

Moses: Knew there was sompin I liked about you. I'm familiar with yeast cuz I make beer. We have something in common: flocculation.

Cathal: Yeh. Same animals, but different purpose. We're studying longevity and the cell cycle of yeast makes us ask a very interesting question. A yeast cell produces twenty sister cells and each of those are set to produce twenty more. They shut down at twenty. We want to know why twenty and if we can figure that out p'rhaps we can reset the cell to start over. But I like the idear of beer making.

Moses: Y'ever brew beer?

Cathal: Nope. But it's the national drink of Ireland, ya might say. So I drinks a mite. What style are you making?

Moses: State law won't allow a bar or supermarket to sell anything over three point two. Three two. That's what we call piss. I like a big beer so I make IPAs which come in at seven to eight percent. Right now I have an oatmeal stout in the secondary. Next step is getting it into bottles.

Cathal: Mmmmmmm. My favorite dark ale is an oatmeal stout. Aside from this pa'ticular view, it's one of my favorite things.

Moses: Well, let's drink later and drive now. I want to show you Canyonlands and the islands in the sky while it's still good light. You'll really appreciate the Island in the Sky.

EXT. DAY -- They are driving and Moses begins to hum. He sings almost as if to himself, but we hear.

Moses: Mamma didn't have no money, but she had me. (Pause. Turns head toward Cathal with a big smile) Me and my brothers three.

Cathal: What's that ye say?

Moses: Song I wrote. Perfecting the lyrics. (Sings)

Mamma didn't have no money,

 But she had me and my brothers three.

Mamma didn't have no time,

 But she had my three brothers and me.

EXT. DAY -- They drive past a filling station.

Cathal: Say, you want some gas money?

Moses: Naw. Filled the tank afore we left. Don't worry about it. Just enjoy the ride.

EXT. DAY -- The vehicle comes to a stop in a parking lot rest area.

Moses: Canyonland National Park. Mesa Arch is located here. We'll take a short hike and see country you'll never see the likes of anywhere else.

EXT. DAY -- They are standing beneath the stone window frame of Mesa Arch. Below is Utah's canyon country. The view is breath taking.

Moses: You managed that pretty well. Better'n last time. You feeling good?

Cathal: Oi am. (Pause) So you got tree brothers?

Moses: Three? You are referring to the lyrics in muh song? Naw, I only got two, but three sounds better don't you agree? "She had me and my brothers three" works a whole lot better than "my brothers two."

Cathal: But she was a single mum, right? Raised you all alone did she?

Moses: Naw, naw. Dad was a college professor at Nevada State. Taught economics, the Dismal Science. Raised us all in good middle class conditions. Them's just lyrics the way I wrote 'em.

Cathal: But you all got along and pulled together as a family, then?

Moses: Well, not really. I got a brother, Cayro the youngest He was okay growing up, but as time went by he became more and more angry with me personally. It was as if he has a big festering wound on his rectum he wouldn't allow to heal. And the only thing I can think that caused this horrible wound in the first place was his position in the order of birth. I was first, he was third and the older he got the worse this tore at him until we cain't have a conversation without him get madder 'n hell and hangin' up on me when I call.

Cathal: Yah, I got a sister like that.

EXT. DAY -- They have returned to the truck. Moses is in the driver's seat as Cathal climbs in and notices the bathroom towel covering something on the floorboard between them. He lifts and towel inquisitively.

Moses: At's a Benelli Super Black Eagle II twelve-gauge

Cathal: Expensive?

Moses: Under two grand.

Cathal: And, like, anybody in America can own one?

Moses: That's as it should be.

Cathal: Children? Can they have guns too?

Moses (starts engine): Got my first twenty-two single shot lever action for my tenth birthday. Fore that I hadda borrow my older brother's thirty-thirty any time I wanted to go shoot cans. Afri-Cans. Puerto Ri-Cans. They's some Ameri-Cans I'd put on a fence post.

Cathal: Whyizzit covered with the bath towel?

Moses: Highway patrol doesn't like to see a scattergun in the front seat first thing they pull you over for something stupid.

Cathal: Like what?

Moses: Like doing a hunnert and ten in a eighty mile zone.

Cathal: Somehow I find that comforting.

Moses: What? That this old tub'll do a century?

Cathal: No. That there are police out here.

EXT. DAY -- They are driving. They parallel the train tracks and pass the Amtrak station where Cathal was dropped off.

Moses: They's three thousand square miles of public land -- Red Rock Country -- surrounding Moab.

Cathal: Where we headed now?

Moses: Afore I take you back to The Spot, I want to show you why we won the Second World War.

Cathal: They made airplanes out here?

Moses: Not perzactly. We made the bomb.

Cathal: The atom bomb?

EXT. DAY -- Evening approaches. They are standing beside the white legs of the water tower outside the fence surrounding the Green River uranium disposal cell.

Moses: Our nuclear claim to fame. It's a outdoor uranium decay center a mile from town. As a kid used to play in the tailings. They made a mound of the stuff from other mines around here and fenced it off. Glows at night. Can you feel the heat coming off it? You might say we helped win World War Two by ruining our countryside.

Cathal: Yah. In Ireland it's known as The Emergency.

Moses: You don't call it World War Two? Your boys were in it.

Cathal: We were strictly neutral. Although Germany did bomb Dublin at one point. And me granddad used to tell how for two years all he did was dig holes in fields to put in telephone poles so planes couldn't land in them.

Moses: Sometimes I can't tell whether you're joking or not.

Cathal: No, it's true. The Emergency because the government created emergency powers to censor the press and imprison people and control the economy.

Moses (after mulling this over): Ever seen a geyser? Crystal Geyser is ten miles out of town. Take you to Crystal Geyser if you like.

Cathal: Let's go.

EXT NIGHT -- Outside. The Spot. Ground floor rooms. Truck idling as Moses is saying goodnight.

Moses: So Charley, I told Mayleen you'd be here another night or two. No problem. Stay as long as you like, she said. Not like we're full up.

Cathal: Thanks. I will stay another night.

Moses: Well, good. Get up bright and early, get some breakfast in your belly and I'll pick you up at eight in the morning and we'll go for a little ride west.

EXT. DAY -- They are driving.

Moses: Thought I'd show you a real live ghost town. Take you out to Frisco about fifteen miles west of Milford which is 300 miles from Moab. Four hours by car, we can make it in two.

EXT. DAY -- They are parked near a couple of permanently planted time-worn trailers. In the near distance are man-made rock mounds.

Cathal: Frisco?

Moses: Named for the San Francisco Mountains nearby. Silver strike ten years after the Civil War was worth millions. The place was mineral rich with zinc, copper, gold and became one of the wildest cities in the west. Murder was common, whore houses and

saloons outnumbered houses. One fella described it as Dodge City, Tombstone, Sodom and Gomorrah all rolled into one.

Cathal: What happened to make it a ghost town?

Moses: There was 6,000 people living there by 1885 when the richest ore was buried by a cave-in and it was downhill after that. By 1920 everyone was gone. Frisco's kilns were placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982. Kinda ironic. Current population ten. Maybe twenty permanent residents.

Cathal: You think that's them coming toward us?

EXT. DAY -- Several armed men are approaching the truck. Cathal notices the towel between the seats has been removed revealing the entire shotgun.

Moses: Morning gents.

Leader (holds rifle at port arms): Morning.

Moses: Visiting local landmarks.

Leader: Checkin' to see if you was Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms in disguise.

Moses: You thought I was bringing in supplies?

Leader (laughs): Yep. That's a good one.

Moses: Mind if we mosey around a bit?

Leader: Not a problem. Just want to steer clear of the open pit over there and keep a eye peeled for rattlers.

Moses: Good advice.

EXT. DAY -- They investigate the kilns, read the placards, wander the grounds and return to the truck. As they drive away:

Moses: I failed in front of children.

Cathal: Sometimes I can't tell whether you're joking or not.

Moses: Use your eyes as a tool if not a weapon.

EXT. DAY -- They are driving.

Moses (makes a whistling woo-woo-woo sound in E-flat): My imitation of the ferruginous pygmy owl. Don't usually find 'em this far north. Breeding grounds are south-central Arizona.

Cathal: Yah, we have the loon. Makes an eerie sound at night which is the stuff of poetry and legend.

Moses: Then there's the rufous-capped warbler.

Cathal: Named after some guy named Rufus?

Moses: Red. Means he wears a red cap on his head. They're never up here. Arizona, south Texas. Tellin' ya lad. This means something: birds where you never seen them.

Cathal: Where we headed?

Moses: To where Butch and Sundance used to hide out.

Cathal: Never heard of them either.

Moses: Well, get ready to learn. The Green River is a main tributary of the Colorado. So's the Dirty Devil River. We're going for another hike in the hills up the canyons that feed the Dirty Devil.

EXT. DAY -- They have climbed another hill and gone down into a gulley.

Moses: The Hole in the Wall Gang hid out here in Robber's Roost. This is where they lived between train and bank robberies. The hide out was never found by lawmen.

Cathal: What happened to them? They didn't die of old age.

Moses: Well, one of 'em did. Elzy Lay was Butch Cassidy's best friend, the only one who got out of a life of crime alive. Died in Los Angeles 1934 just shy of his sixty-fifth birthday.

Cathal: How come you know all this?

Moses: History of the country is important. Knew a man thought he didn't need to know anything except how to plow a field. He said he could do the job with one hand tied

behind his back. By saying that, he shot himself in the foot. In wresting the gun away from his mouth where he was trying to put his shoe, he shot himself in the other foot. Then, in an attempt to holster the gun, he shot himself in the hand. And the other hand is tied behind his back. I said, Not only do you not have a leg to stand on, you don't have a hand to do the work with, allegorically speaking that is.

EXT. DAY -- Cathal is standing on the Amtrak station boarding platform with his pack at his feet.

Cathal: Moses, you were a great guide and I thank you and Mayleen and Lucy for all the hospitality. I saw a whole world I'd never have without you.

EXT. DAY -- Train approaches, comes to a stop. Doors open. Conductor from opening scene stands waiting.

Moses: Been fun showing you around. But a word of advice: Keep away from the World Bank. Run by the Rothschilds. One day the whole federal government is going to collapse. Figuring out when that day is is the difficult part.

END

Moses: A guy named Stephan Roberts said, "I contend that we are both atheists. I just believe in one fewer god than you do. When you understand why you dismiss all the other possible gods, you will understand why I dismiss yours."