

Tom Russell, The Banks Of The Musselshell

I stare out every evening at the distant Northern Star
It leads us ever northwards and tells us that we are
Lost below the Yellowstone in a land unknown to me
Ten thousand miles from loved ones and my home across the sea

We travel through an empty land, the benches are all strewn
With bison bones that shine ghost white with the rising of the moon
The grey wolf howls and answer as i try to sing on guard
Indentured to these Texans, in a land so wild and hard

When I hired on to Bill Ducharm in the heat of the Texas sun
I was unawares of his darker side or his swiftness with a gun
But I had made a solemn promise to ride with him through hell
And to deliver the herd to the ends of the earth or the mouth of the Musselshell

I turned just about 17 when we hit the first cowtown
I drank my first strong liquor there - and the women spun me 'round
But of all the barroom angels and their soft forbidden charms
I was stuck on Blue-eyed Annie - who belonged to Bill Ducharm

And the boy became a man that night in Annie's arms
But Annie cried and begged me... "Beware of Bill Ducharm";

We left that Texas cowtown and pointed the herd North
But the first night when the moon was down, I rode back to Old Fort Worth
They were closin' down the barroom and rollin' up the floor
My heart was in my throat - as I knocked on Annie's door

And the boy became a man that night in Annie's arms
But Annie cried and begged me... "Beware of Bill Ducharm";

Bill Ducharm had one bad eye - his face was a devil's red
The result of a bygone prairie fire where he'd crawled back from the dead
And every night in dreams as I rolled in Annie's arms
Only to wake to face old Satan - in the guise of Bill Ducharm
And each night 'cross the campfire - I'd face that one bad eye
Did he know that I'd betrayed him? Had my hour come to die?
One promise he did make good - yes, we followed him through hell
Driven by this one-eyed Lucifer towards the banks of the Musselshell

And as we near the Yellowstone, the snow begins to fall
And soon this wretched enterprise shall be ending for us all
It's then I'll need fast horses to fly to Annie's arms
And stay one jump ahead of the guns of Bill Ducharm