

GARY IRVING

Lonesome Lands 2013
photographic print, 36 x 40 in



URSULA K. LE GUIN

The Jackson Brothers

for Betsy Buck

I was heading to my friend Homer James's place in a lonesome part of Wyoming when my horse started favoring his left hind foot. I couldn't find what was wrong, but it wasn't getting any better, and seeing a track off the road and a roof at the end of it I took the track. Towns and ranches being few and far between, I figured we better take what offered, if it got offered. I led old Rusty, gimping along like he could barely stand to put that foot down. We got near the ranch and the dogs came out and made a noise. We got to it and a man came out to see what the noise was.

He was short and fairly stout, not young not old, bright blue eyes. He said well howdy, and I said howdy. Then he clammed up. He didn't look unfriendly. He just didn't know what to say next. Standing there at Rusty's head, I said, "He went lame kind of sudden. Like he picked something in his hoof. But I can't find it." The man didn't say anything so I went on, explaining what didn't need much explaining. "Figured I better give him a rest."

The man nodded, but still looked like he didn't know what to say, so I asked, "Okay if I water him," nodding to the little barn, "and have a look at him?"

"I guess," the homesteader said. He looked distressed. He turned half round and called out, "Will? Joe?" but not real loud.

Somebody hollered back, and presently a man came from around back of the house, and almost at the same time another man appeared from the chicken runs and sheds behind the barn. As they came up to where we were, it was like a reflection in two mirrors coming together. They were twins. Aside from one of them wore a blue shirt under his coveralls and the other one a red long john top, they were dead ringers. And then darn if still another man didn't come out of the house.

They were all short and strong-built, not big but sturdy, with snub noses and blue eyes. Brothers for sure. The last one was really short, maybe five foot, with a kind of scared look that made me think maybe not quite all there. He didn't come all the way out but hung back in the doorway, staring at me.

The twins said well howdy, and one of them said, "We're the Jacksons. Will," indicating himself, "Joe," his twin, "Bob," the one I'd met, the eldest of them, and "Jack," the shorty. "Can we be of help to you?"