

A young woman stood by the window drying her hands on her apron. "I have to go and make supper now."

Saunders Jackson loved this girl and wanted to take her with him to California, but there was one big problem. The year was 1848 and this was Missouri. Slavery still existed in the United States. Saunders was a free black man, but the girl was a slave who worked as a house servant for a white family.

"Wait—I want to tell you something," Saunders said. "I am going to California tomorrow. We will not see each other for a while, but when I have enough money I will return here and buy your freedom, then we can go back to California together."

"Oh, Saunders," the girl said, "that is impossible. Do you know how much money my master would want for my freedom?"

"Yes, I asked your master and he wants seventeen hundred dollars."

"That is more money than you could make in many years."

Saunders nodded. "I know it's a lot of money, but I have heard that a man can get rich in the West."

As the young man left, the girl brushed a shiny tear off her cheek. "Goodbye, Saunders Jackson," she whispered. She did not believe that she would ever see him again. He had a good dream, but dreams do not always come true.

Saunders walked to the edge of town where a group of men heading west had gathered. Their leader was John Charles Fremont, and when he saw Saunders, he smiled. Fremont had worked with Saunders before and knew he was a good worker.

"Mr. Fremont," Saunders said, "I want to go west with your expedition."

Fremont looked hard at Saunders and asked, "Are you sure? We will be crossing the Rocky Mountains."

"I want to go," Saunders said, "and I can do anything any other man can do."

And so Saunders joined the expedition, and the men traveled west. There were people in the East who wanted to build a railroad to the West, and Fremont had promised to find the best route.

After a dangerous journey Saunders arrived in California in 1849—a good time to come, because gold was discovered in the California mountains that year. Saunders hurried to the gold fields. He staked a claim and worked hard from dawn to nightfall.

"Look at that fella work," the other miners said. "He must be working for something really important."

Saunders overheard them, straightened up, and said, "I *am* working for something really important."

"What's important enough to break a man's back for?" asked a miner.

"Freedom," Saunders Jackson said. "There is no price too high for freedom."

There were days Saunders became so weary that he almost fell asleep on his feet, but he worked on.

Back in Missouri, the young black woman worked hard cooking and cleaning, but she did not smile very much.

"Why do you look so unhappy all the time?" the lady of the house asked her.

"Oh, it's nothing," the young woman said.

"It's that worthless Saunders Jackson you're

thinking about, isn't it?" the woman asked. "You'll never see him again."

"He went to California to buy my freedom . . .," she stopped talking. She heard a horse coming very fast and turned to look. "Saunders!" she cried with joy.

Saunders jumped off his horse, ran to the owner of the young woman, and gave him seventeen hundred dollars. The man stared at

Saunders in shock. He had not really believed Saunders was serious when he had said he would buy the girl's freedom.

Saunders and the young woman packed and were heading for California the next week with a bright world ahead of them. It was true, what Saunders had said to the miner—there is no price too high for freedom.

CHECK YOUR READING

1. **The story takes place**
 - A during the Civil War
 - B before the Civil War
 - C after the Civil War
2. **Saunders Jackson was going to**
 - A California
 - B Canada
 - C Africa
3. **The young woman couldn't go with Saunders Jackson because**
 - A the trip would be too difficult
 - B Indians were on the warpath
 - C she was a slave
4. **A slave could obtain freedom by**
 - A working hard
 - B purchasing it
 - C stealing ownership papers
5. **The price of the young woman's freedom was**
 - A \$1700
 - B ten more years of work
 - C twenty head of cattle
6. **Saunders joined John Fremont's expedition, which was setting out to**
 - A find gold
 - B find the best route for a railroad
 - C fight Indians
7. **1849 was a lucky year because**
 - A crops were good
 - B gold was discovered in California
 - C no wars were being fought
8. **Saunders worked from dawn till dark because he**
 - A wanted to be rich
 - B liked to work hard
 - C wanted to buy his girl's freedom
9. **It is probable that the girl didn't smile very much because she**
 - A didn't think Saunders would come back
 - B was mistreated by her owners
 - C didn't get enough to eat
10. **When Saunders paid for the girl's freedom, her owner was**
 - A sorry to lose a good slave
 - B happy to have so much money
 - C shocked that Saunders could do so