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My new mistress proved to be all she appeared when I first met her at the door, -- a woman of **the kindest heart and finest feelings**. She had never had a slave under her control previously to myself, and prior to her marriage she had been dependent upon her own industry for a living. She was by trade a weaver; and by constant application to her business, she had been in a good degree **preserved from the blighting and dehumanizing effects of slavery**. I was utterly **astonished at her goodness**. I scarcely knew how to behave towards her. She was **entirely unlike any other white woman** I had ever seen. I could not approach her as I was accustomed to approach other white ladies. My early instruction was all out of place. **The crouching servility, usually so acceptable a quality in a slave, did not answer when manifested toward her**. Her favor was not gained by it; **she seemed to be disturbed by it. She did not deem it impudent or unmannerly for a slave to look her in the face**. The meanest slave was put fully at ease in her presence, and none left without feeling better for having seen her. **Her face was made of heavenly smiles, and her voice of tranquil music**.

But, alas! This kind heart had but a short time to remain such. The **fatal** poison of irresponsible power was already in her hands, and soon commenced its **infernal** work. That cheerful eye, under the influence of slavery, soon became **red** with rage; that voice, made all of sweet accord, changed to one of **harsh** and **horrid discord**; and that **angelic** face gave place to that of a **demon**.

Characterization

Diction

In chapter six of his autobiography, "The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass," Frederick Douglass utilizes diction and characterization to underscore the dehumanizing effects of slavery on the master. When Douglass first meets his new mistress, Mrs. Auld, he describes her as having "the kindest heart and finest feelings" and as being "preserved from the blighting and dehumanizing effects of slavery." Through this characterization of Mrs. Auld, Douglass is able to articulate the overall innocence she possesses before she is influenced by the power of being a slave owner. "But alas, this kind heart had but a short time to remain such." Overtime, "the fatal poison of irresponsible power...commenced its infernal work." Douglass uses the demonic connotations of the word "infernal" to preface the transition of Mrs. Auld's "angelic face" to "that of a demon." When Mr. Auld discovers his wife teaching Douglass to read, he insinuates this transition by telling Mrs. Auld that "learning would *spoil* the best [slave] in the world." By diminishing the slaves' intellectual power, Mrs. Auld reaffirms her own superiority, which corrupts her "heavenly" qualities. In this way, Douglass articulates the dehumanizing effects of slavery on the master, utilizing diction and characterization to illustrate the change in Mrs. Auld's demeanor as a result of owning slaves.

Questions:

1. Mr. Auld sparks the change in Mrs. Auld's demeanor. How does this reflect gender roles in society during this time?
2. Douglass is "gladdened by the invaluable instruction" that he gained from his master, because it enlightens him of the true situation he is in, being a slave. By gaining this knowledge, he acquires the intellectual pain of reality. Which is worse--physical or intellectual pain?
3. Douglass talks about understanding "the pathway from slavery to freedom." What gave him this understanding, and what is the pathway?