

## Chapter 11

# Flower of Destiny



*IT'S TIME!*

Let's give our story's star some space.  
 He's famous through the land, you know his role:  
 "A fire in his eyes, a light in his face,"  
 Eternal Heaven destined him to rule.  
 His birth miraculous, his father killed,  
 He unified the tribes and swept the plains.  
 With hordes displaying bow and arrow skills,  
 He conquered Asia on his horse's reins.  
 Impulsive, cruel—oh wait, my sense is gone...  
 That's from the *Secret History* of Genghis Khan.

10

Wrong epic, sorry. Um...so where were we?  
 Ah, yes—

*IT'S TIME!*

Let's introduce our star.  
 He didn't abdicate like Charles V  
 By citing weariness of gout and war.  
 He never, unlike Caesar, tried to mingle  
 Pleasure with power in his self-expression.  
 Though not a bloody butcher like the Mongol,  
 He still gets blamed for fostering "oppression."  
 You know his face—it's solemn. Never blinks.  
 We see him everywhere, yet he remains a sphinx.

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Mount Rushmore gazes, stone cold and aloof.  
 The dollar's secrets top the pyramids'.  
 A marble pillar stabs the world's roof.  
 The silent quarter raises shouting bids.  
 He guards the Black Hills like a sleepless sentry  
 And towers above our capital like God.  
 He lines our wallets as we spend like gentry  
 And jingles in our pockets as we plod.  
 Icon of power, wealth, and sculptured arts,  
 His meaning's lost when he's forgotten in our hearts.

30

They'd have you think George Washington is "bad."  
 They rip him from the textbooks during strikes.  
 Aren't made-up stories told by some granddad  
 As passé as those twangy tunes he likes?  
 Cast iron values can't endure a forge.  
 Destroy the cellos, murder all the bassists:  
 With Franklin, Jefferson, and Adams, George  
 Completes the string quartet of founding racists.  
 Like deer that, caught in rushing headlights, quail,  
 We're prey to reckless lies—he's no mere dead white male.

40

He felled a cherry tree? He never fibbed?  
 He threw a coin across the Rappahannock?  
 "Whatever." (Kids these days.) "We's gotten ribbed!  
 That Parson Weems invented them talltanic  
 Tales—you aware? The bio's been aggmented."  
*Augmented*—grammar, child. But yes. Old Weems  
 Was *right*: the G-man was unprecedented.  
 Gave up the power twice. Not what he seems.  
 His worshippers have never been occult ones.  
 But chuck the children's fables—I'll relate adult ones.

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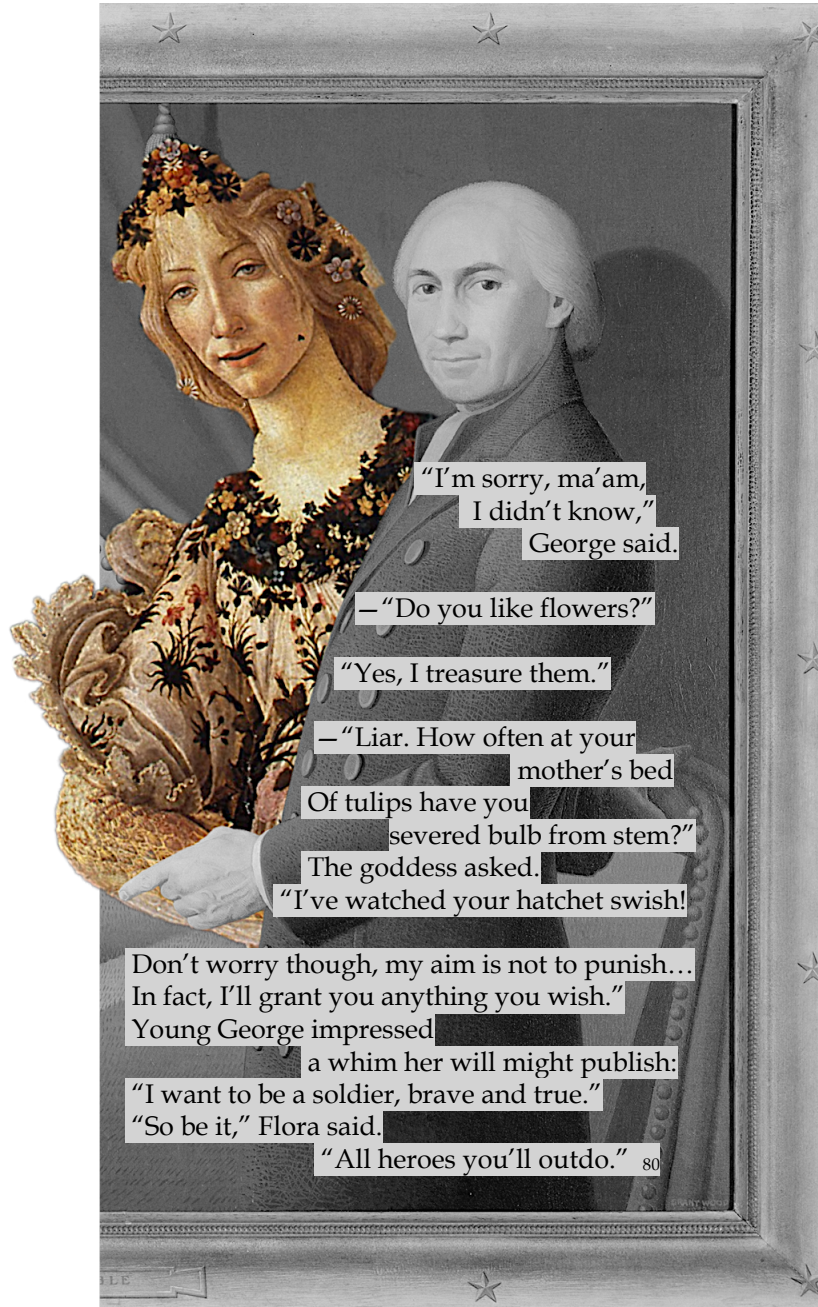
## A LIE RETOLD

Young George chopped down his father's cherry tree,  
Not knowing that a woman lived inside.  
While playing with his hatchet, too carefree  
Out in the garden plot, he swung in wide  
And chipped a piece of bark from off the trunk.  
Some sap began to pour out in a flood;  
The wounded tree fell over with a 'plunk.'  
A nymph arose. She flowed with flowered buds  
Of blonde, a mistress of lush primavera,  
Her alabaster face unblemished by mascara.

George dropped his hatchet on the ground  
and stared.

Green tendrils crept upon her glowing gown.  
She sighed, exhaling roses, and declared:  
"I'm Flora (Chloris formerly), the crown  
Goddess of spring – and you've destroyed my home.  
This cherry tree had some delicious yields."  
She brushed her golden hair with a bark comb.  
"One like it grew in the Elysian Fields.  
What should I do with you, young vernal vandal?  
I've turned men into flowers for a lesser scandal."

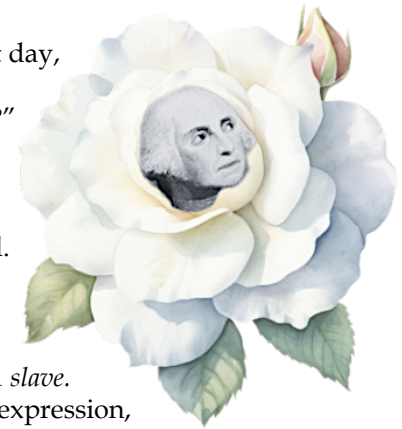




She waved her comb as if it were a wand,  
Then brushed her hair some more, and added, "But...  
The softer side of life, as well, will bond  
You to my nature, ease your martial strut:  
If any time this plot should cease to grow  
At Mount Vernon, you'll turn into a rose."  
George cried, "You promised not to punish, though!"  
Her (shrugging): "'Brave and true'—choice words. Your pose  
Will match them, never slouching in the truth."  
With that, she fertilized the wind and left the youth.

90

"Do you know," asked  
his father the next day,  
"Who felled my cherry tree  
out in the yard?"  
George said unwavering,  
"Why yes...I may,"  
While thinking of  
an answer long and hard.  
*The cook.*  
*The maid.*  
*The gardener.*  
*A slave.*



Recovering his charming, sweet expression,  
He looked his father in the eye with brave  
Deceit to speak a name and silence questions—  
But to his thoughts his lips would not comply.  
"Oh, it's no use," George said. "I cannot tell a lie."

100

His father hugged him in a tight embrace.  
"My son! For once you've fused that silver tongue  
With honesty—it melts your deed's disgrace.  
Truth is a lovely feature in the young!"  
George tried responding, muffled: "Icantbreathe."  
To sentimental moods he was averse—  
Feelings at least were something he could sheathe.  
The rest was open to the dryad's curse.  
Regardless of its usefulness or not,  
He'd practice from now on what most had only taught.

110

## GOODBYE, LOVE

Exploding orchard,  
cherries—  
Trunk hunching with young  
Worm beats the harvest

blossoms  
Relieve the gloom of meadows  
from slaving bees  
Pale dogwood  
Sprung

two molting doves be lost  
plumes?  
Through shaded branches  
In dreams of old  
Could

with dewdrops—  
Cool before high noon  
Beds of roses sway  
In the breeze, flush

of morning  
A fading visage  
The gold  
Rises, smiling on Old Blush—

Sprawls large among the flowers—  
Yoked to a high post



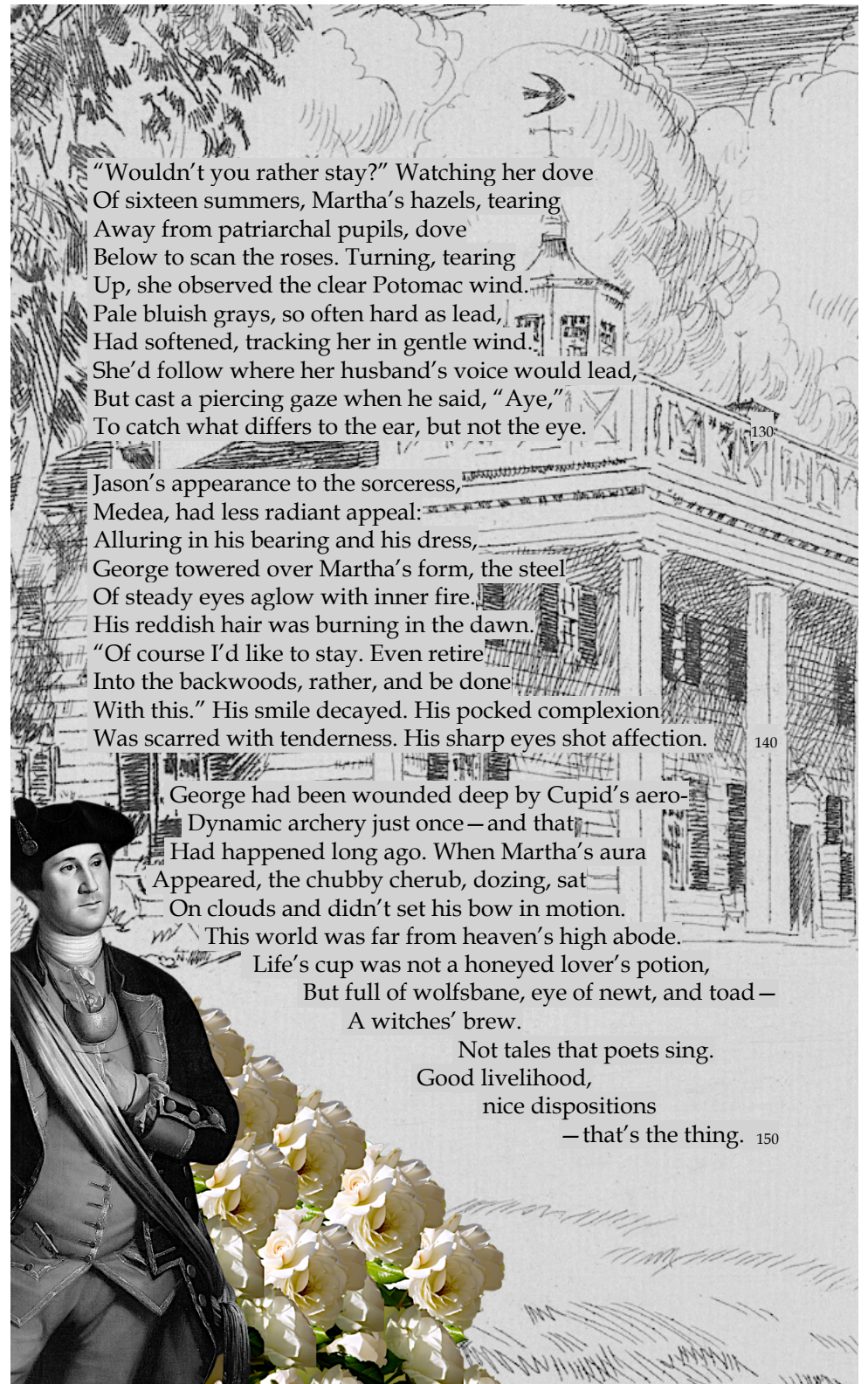
120

"Wouldn't you rather stay?" Watching her dove  
Of sixteen summers, Martha's hazels, tearing  
Away from patriarchal pupils, dove  
Below to scan the roses. Turning, tearing  
Up, she observed the clear Potomac wind.  
Pale bluish grays, so often hard as lead,  
Had softened, tracking her in gentle wind.  
She'd follow where her husband's voice would lead,  
But cast a piercing gaze when he said, "Aye,"  
To catch what differs to the ear, but not the eye.

Jason's appearance to the sorceress,  
Medea, had less radiant appeal:  
Alluring in his bearing and his dress,  
George towered over Martha's form, the steel  
Of steady eyes aglow with inner fire.  
His reddish hair was burning in the dawn.  
"Of course I'd like to stay. Even retire  
Into the backwoods, rather, and be done  
With this." His smile decayed. His pocked complexion  
Was scarred with tenderness. His sharp eyes shot affection.

George had been wounded deep by Cupid's aero-  
Dynamic archery just once—and that  
Had happened long ago. When Martha's aura  
Appeared, the chubby cherub, dozing, sat  
On clouds and didn't set his bow in motion.  
This world was far from heaven's high abode.  
Life's cup was not a honeyed lover's potion,  
But full of wolfsbane, eye of newt, and toad—  
A witches' brew.

Not tales that poets sing.  
Good livelihood,  
nice dispositions  
—that's the thing. 150





## A RUBBLE-RABBLE

Devoted Billy Lee, a stalking fox,  
 Observed his master's swaying ponytail.  
 The ribbon coming loose, he stopped to fix  
 It, leaning sideways on the narrow trail  
 As Washington, colossal, sat astraddle.  
 On reaching Cambridge to  
 assume command,  
 This marble column  
 shifted in the saddle:  
 A scattered camp?  
 What's this unruly band?  
 His horse backed up —  
 latrines submerged the ground.  
 Lee read his master's  
 roaming eyes,  
 spinning them  
 round. 190

"The *backwoods*?" Martha grimaced as she smoothed  
 A wrinkle on his azure riding cloak.

"What nonsense." Small and dainty fingers soothed  
 Huge hands made coarse from thorns and oxen yokes,  
 Seeding a charm within. — "What's this, my beauty?"

Palms, blooming sunward, glowed — a golden locket?  
 — "To warm you with your mistress." (Madame Duty's  
 Mattress is cold.) He slipped it in his pocket.

"Don't make me plant you under this rosebush."  
 — "Have faith in providence."

The matron muted: "Shush." 160

His lips drew close to hers... then Billy Lee,  
 His valet, rode in view, pulling the reins

Of a white stallion close behind. As she

Puckered, he paused, then kissed the summer plains

That spanned her head — dry grasses, brown and blowing.

From the piazza, Jacky — Martha's last  
 Dear child — approached. She sighed. "Alright, get going."

Washington climbed his horse and trotted past.

"Virginian!" (Turning.) "Don't forget to write."

With a graceful nod, he rode into the morning light. 170

His splendor sank from view as Sirius,

The Dog Star, hanging low and faint behind

Them, glimmered in the south, mysterious

Above the bright and ripened groves that lined,

The paths to the estate. As a frontier

Woman will stoke small flames and sing a hymn

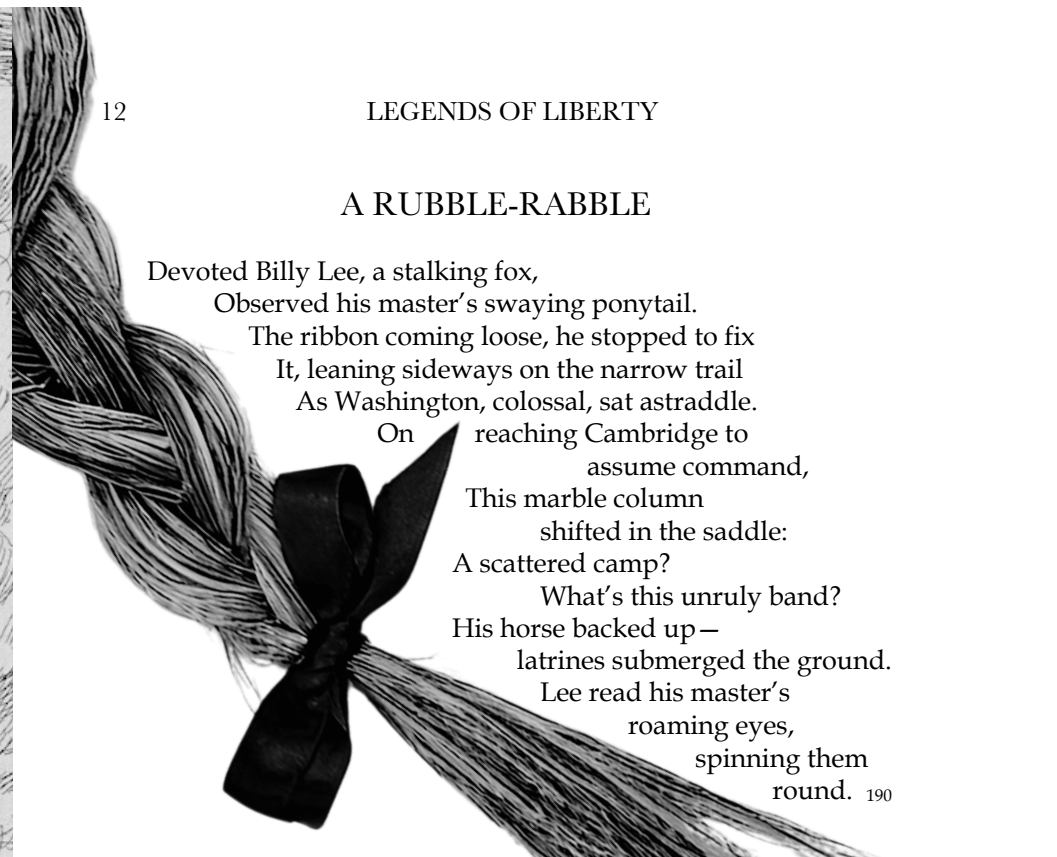
About the Virgin, hoping her austere

Hearth will be favored, nestling warm at home,

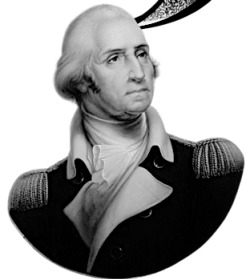
Then feels the fire die without a blessing,

So Martha's thoughts turned dark,

her smile a window dressing. 180







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*Dirty, filthy.*

Lee: "War-weary bums."

*Panties, young moms?*

"Females in the rear –

*Purty, healthy."*

*Whores! And they abut*

*Shanties, wigwams?*

"There's a nice caboose."

*Brick and brush?*

"Low building costs – rock bottom!"

*Board and sailcloth?*

"Hardy bunch of squatters –

Thick and flush," said Lee (of sunburned haunches

Hoarding soupbroth, hunching over pots).

– "Asses!"

Lee: *Is master...cursing?*

"Blaggards,"

Swore Washington (low, posh).

"This army's class is backwards!" 200

One bumpkin, bumping someone's bum ("Gee— hey!")  
 Spilled rum. "Ah, bummer." So, to make them pay,  
 This rifleman that hailed from VA  
 Snatched up some flip that anglers from MA  
 Had brewed and took a sip. "That's my jar, guy!"  
 An heirloom beer mug, dating from B.C.,  
 Upturned its BAC on an RI  
 Cobbler, whose shoes hit coopers from DE,  
 Who threw their kegs of grog. States of initial  
 Drunken fellowship are often superficial.

210

A thousand brawlers soon were joining in.  
 Washington gritted teeth and clenched his jaw.  
 Cheek muscles rippled under icy skin  
 As patience, wearing thin, began to thaw.  
 Just like a deer, he sprang from off his steed  
 And rushed into the thickest of the fighting,  
 Seizing two brawny farmers where they stood –  
 An iron grip upon their throats. (No biting.)

Shaking, he held them both apart:

"ENOUGH!"

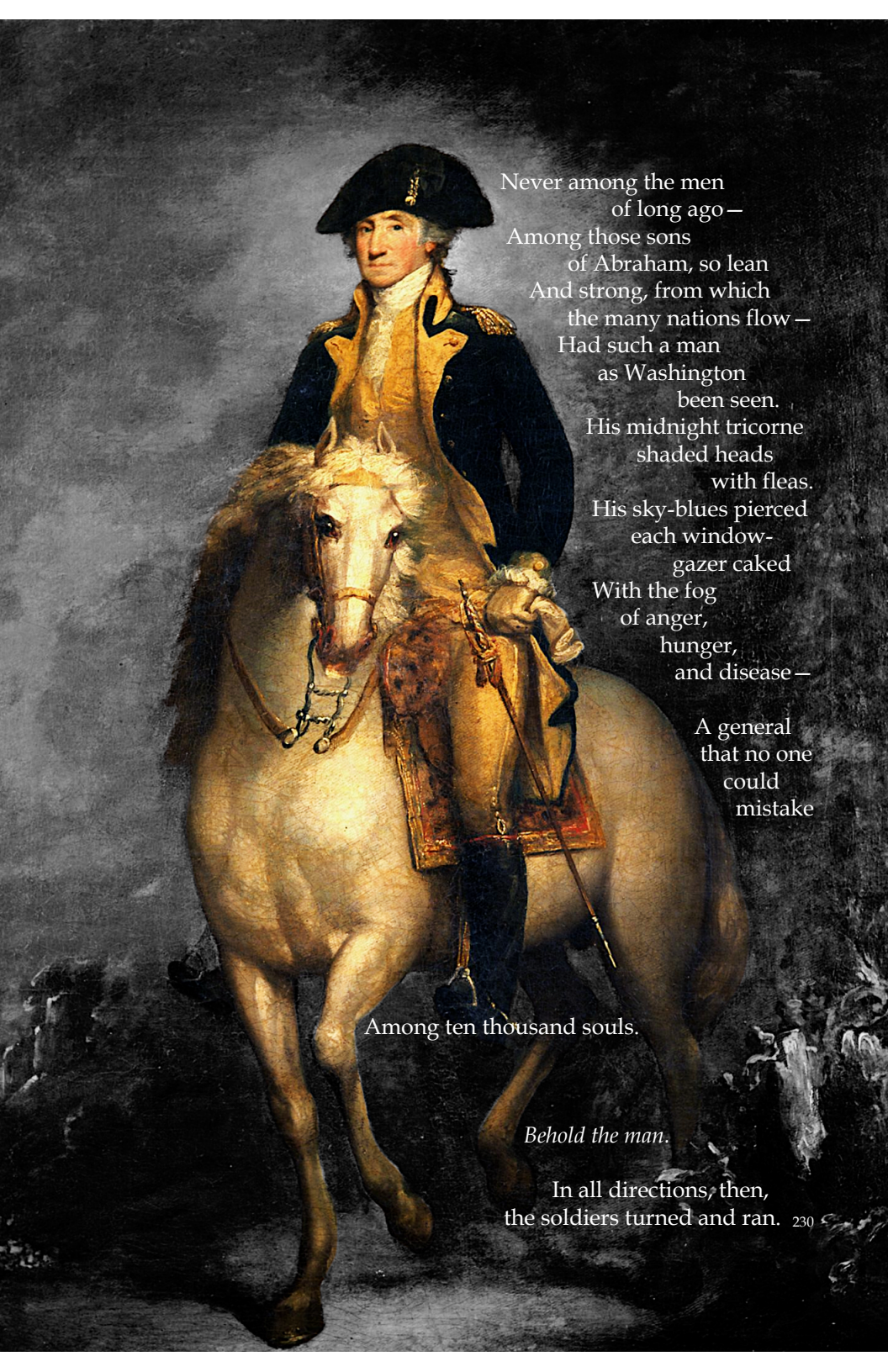
The fists all froze, mid-face –

raw, muddy,

mad, and rough. 220







Never among the men  
of long ago —  
Among those sons  
of Abraham, so lean  
And strong, from which  
the many nations flow —  
Had such a man  
as Washington  
been seen.  
His midnight tricorne  
shaded heads  
with fleas.  
His sky-blues pierced  
each window-  
gazer caked  
With the fog  
of anger,  
hunger,  
and disease —

A general  
that no one  
could  
mistake

Among ten thousand souls.

*Behold the man.*

In all directions, then,  
the soldiers turned and ran. 230