The Sinks of Gandy

It's a long way from here to that remote place
Of scald and freeze, southeast of Wheeling
And Morgantown, Clarksburg, Phillippi, Elkins
To Bemis, but West of Cherry Grove and Judy Gap.

You study the map and think it is a place to go
Without your wife, deep in the Cheat Mountains,
By definition a depression on the land surface.
You go and exchange the roundness in your face

For sharpness. You find it is not a garden
Of double-breasted pink roses or passion slowly
Spent. You find a tracked rut, goats scuttle
Over rocks, there is pain in your knees and hips.

A man stands by a sweating horse and utters
His name; they have killed him, he says. Another
Sits alone and cracks his knuckles; a third
Stares at his feet; a fourth tells you when

The coldness comes you will wrap yourself in skins
And wait for some witless stranger to pass by—
To amuse you. A fifth curses his memory, remembers
Shambling along between armed guards. For a moment

Steam curls from water in the Sinks; you pray
That what you don't understand is still far off.
You wipe your forehead with a handkerchief and leave
To tend the world you still know still in your life....

Daniel James Sundahl