

Bitter Exercise · Steven Cramer

Sit up, lie down, sit up, lie down, run
around and around the block

until a little of myself is left
at each corner. The dogs

know it and try to help,
nipping at my feet to speed me up, snarling

my path into wider, aching circles.
The best pain's private

though: shades drawn, the radio blaring,
a blanket for a mat and furniture

my only audience.
At times we long to be small and frail,

for someone to feel we are worth
more hurt. So we let

the ribs show, the cheekbones
pushing out from beneath the skin

like ridges on a stone to tempt sculptors.
I knew a woman, once, who loved

to touch my sharp, protruding hip-bone points—
the tips of the *innominate*, she said,

meaning: *nameless*.
She writes sometimes and never fails

to mention some man's gaunt face, a linear
fragility she's drawn to.

Do we exercise for strength, or is it the pain
that's addictive, those repetitions

of loss we'll never catch up with?
It doesn't get any easier.