Bitter Exercise

Steven Cramer

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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.