

Ian C Smith

Three

Nursing a hard-saved sum of money
he leaves his cold rented room behind
sits in a racetrack train with his plans
a boy who decodes sports pages.

Before the first event, sidling close
he eavesdrops on bookies & punters
sorts out their staccato vernacular
studying the language of gambling.

Heart hammering, words memorized
he bets each way in each race, a mimic
ignorant of fools' gambling practices
a novice with a reading habit.

Three of his bets begin with *Lady*
three ridden by the same jockey.
He wins enough to cover his day out
lunch, fare, admission, cigarettes.

In this lonely phase before books
he rides in triumph to that bare room
bankroll intact, literature's lucky number
surging around & into memory's track.