

ERIK CAMPBELL

*The Subtle Again*

You expect something miraculous, something  
synesthetic to happen. But at first nothing happens.

Until you begin to notice your hands are empty,  
the missing gesture of hand to mouth; you find

only your wife has reason to touch your lips. You throw  
away your favorite ashtray (inexplicably washing it

before putting it in the bin) and begin searching  
for new ways to measure time; so many small moments

suddenly need filling. Your wife sees in your decision  
a moral victory, smells your hair at night for proof

of your resolve and, in bed, articulates your burgeoning  
perfection: "You won't be a smoker anymore. Only

a man of will." You surmise you will begin to smell  
the subtle again, and debate learning the names of flowers.

You wonder if, in a year's time, you'll become  
one of those characters in Victorian novels that always

annoyed you. The type of man that keeps his hands  
behind his back, drinks tea instead of coffee, and knows

the price of things. The sort of sad character that can look  
at a flower, call it a rhododendron, and be perfectly correct.