The Subtle Again

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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.