

Kevin Prufer

The Twentieth Century

Kiss its cheek, then smooth its sad, gray hair.
Bring it secret cigarettes. How could they hurt
it anymore? A smoke to stanch the fear
is mercy in the end. The doctors purse

their lips or look away. They occupy their hands
with clipboards. Leave them to their notes. Smile. It's what
the dying want. Not tears, you fool. Nor bland-
eyed sentiment. Truth, neither. Offer it

a light. Tell that joke about the Jew, the queer,
the drunken nigger. There you go. It smiles
at that, and so should you. Nothing quells our fears
like comedy, nothing sublimates our ills—

and if it finds no comfort from your visit,
put a pillow to its mouth, and, so, be done with it.