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ALISON HAWTHORNE DEMING

# SCIENCE

Then it was the future, though what's arrived  
isn't what we had in mind, all chrome and  
cybernetics, when we set up exhibits  
in the cafeteria for the judges  
to review what we'd made of our hypotheses.

The class skeptic (he later refused to sign  
anyone's yearbook, calling it a sentimental  
degradation of language) chloroformed mice,  
weighing the bodies before and after  
to catch the weight of the soul,

wanting to prove the invisible  
real as a bagful of nails. A girl  
who knew it all made cookies from euglena,  
a one-celled compromise between animal and plant,  
she had cultured in a flask.

We're smart enough, she concluded,  
to survive our mistakes, showing photos of farmland,  
poisoned, gouged, eroded. No one believed  
he really had built it when a kid no one knew  
showed up with an atom smasher, confirming that

the tiniest particles could be changed  
into something even harder to break.  
And one whose mother had cancer (hard to admit now,  
it was me) distilled the tar of cigarettes  
to paint it on the backs of shaven mice.

She wanted to know what it took,  
a little vial of sure malignancy,  
to prove a daily intake smaller  
than a single aspirin could finish  
something as large as a life. I thought of this

because, today, the dusky seaside sparrow  
became extinct. It may never be as famous  
as the pterodactyl or the dodo,  
but the last one died today, a resident  
of Walt Disney World where now its tissue samples

lie frozen, in case someday we learn to clone  
one from a few cells. Like those instant dinosaurs  
that come in a gelatin capsule—just add water  
and they inflate. One other thing this  
brings to mind. The euglena girl won first prize

both for science and, I think, in retrospect, for hope.

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