Ancillary staff

A difficult kind of listening

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ANCILLARY STAFF

Teflon coated nickel wire
fed through a tungsten guide
spot welded from one gold plate pin to the next
by the numbers.

12 pin flat packs soldered on the other side,
each joint and weld
inspected under a microscope,
redone over and over,
till no flaw is found.

Then it flies without fault
on 3 satellites
and the shuttle.

A decade later,
watching over the surgeon's shoulder
for unseen disaster,
I write the instruction sequence
to carry pictures
wherever someone watches and warns.

The weight of life and limb no lighter
15 years and 10,000 cases later,
I watch no more,
but others do.

A DIFFICULT KIND OF LISTENING

Whispers of the organ of Corti
echo through the brain's core
while the surgeon cuts, pulls, burns
the clinging plasm
with 10,000 strokes.

My part: to listen, understand,
say when the bruised, beaten
very small locus of life
can bear no more.

Too often he persists
as if I were Cassandra,
cursed with vision,
dire but disdained,
and our patient emerges
deaf, devastated, or dead.

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References are included to establish the relationship of the work to a neurologic profession.

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