Editor's Note: The author writes, "Physicians speak a language that is not understood by many patients. Even the name of an illness may terrify the patient. This poem describes how a patient may interpret the words in a common diagnosis, paroxysmal atrial fibrillation. Such misinterpretation may adversely affect treatment and cause undue anxiety. I am a non-invasive cardiologist on faculty at Penn State University College of Medicine. I have a joint appointment in the Humanities Department and teach first and second year humanities classes."

Paroxysmal atrial fibrillation

Not one word in the name of this crazy pounding that starts boom

just like that in the middle of my chest

in the middle of the night or at 2 p.m. and flies up through my neck to my jaws and has me thinking

I will drop dead

not one word in its name that even a person who went to college would know. They talk about the upper chamber and all I can remember is the porcelain potty Grandma used in the upstairs bedroom

when she was 85 and couldn't make it down the steps, the one mama emptied every morning. They talk about fluttering

and it makes me think of the chicken bodies jumping all over the back yard after papa cut off their heads. And why can't they just say "every now and then"?

They say don't worry, the rat poison (they call it warfarin) will keep the blood from clotting and the diltiazem will stop the heart from going too fast.

But when they call something a name like this it must be bad.

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