

First Page

By Jennifer Stella

Don't die tonight Don't try to die tonight Stop trying to die Tonight I am in charge of you not dying What's another six hours It isn't time to die or keep trying to I will stand at the head of your feet Better at breaking ribs than giving directions I am good at breaking ribs If they want ribs broken they call me On a good day It's been too long since I went running anywhere but here And in rhythm my hair and stethoscope count Staying Alive to remember Now it's day or night Stop trying to die Just wait What's another five hours I will bolt if it goes off I will jump and others will jump and I will run and others will run It will be fast or slow It will be fast or slow to find you trying to die So many lines and tubes and drugs to remember And shout What's another four hours Already did ten admissions wrote notes ordered labs and meds and meal plans Even hallway beds are full Stop trying to die So I can sleep If you keep trying to die you'll wake the whole hospital with overhead announcements No one wants to hear about that What's another three hours

Jennifer Stella is a writer and a doctor, as well as a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer from Cameroon. She completed her MFA in poetry at Brooklyn College while in medical school in San Francisco and subsequent internal medicine residency in New York City. Writing has appeared in *Omniverse*, *Calyx*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *the Dusie Blog*, *Eleven Eleven*, *Der Grief*, *Pharos*, and others. Two chapbooks of her writing have been published: *Your Lapidarium Feels Wrought* (2016, Ugly Duckling Presse) and *Letters We're Allowed* (2019, above/ground press). Stella was recently in the Democratic Republic of Congo with Doctors without Borders as an HIV/TB physician. She currently works in the TB clinic of the Department of Public Health in San Francisco.