

Limitless
By Neya Krishnan

When I was five,
I always asked my mom to describe the most intellectually
challenging jobs in the world;
from thin lines in the palm of her hand
she drew rocket scientists,
neurosurgeons, and astronauts.

I told her not to fear,
that I would become all of them.

I would then urge her to describe the most
physically demanding jobs;
she told me about people who
run into warzones and swim in flames:
soldiers and firefighters.

After those conversations and many more,
I used to wonder how I was to go about completing
five different careers in parallel-
not to mention the eight others I was aiming for:
president, author, lawyer, journalist, dancer,
musician, elephant care-taker,
person-who-makes-babies-giggle-24/7 (*that's a job right?*)

You see when I was younger,
I didn't know the word "limits".

But I always won at tag during recess and then
the boys stopped playing with me,
and I found that my confidence during
group discussions about literacy texts in a fifth-grade
classroom was perceived as arrogance,
and eventually, I learned my
whole 'feminist agenda' was off-putting.
I came across as an agent witch with
unending cries for equality.
I must be a man-hater then.

So I shrank. I shrank, I shrank, I shrank-
I broke a mirror to slim my reflection's waist.
I shrank until I no longer took up space,
Until I came to the conclusion that I couldn't be
a rocket scientist because I was not nearly intelligent enough
and that I should never take a compliment without saying
"that's not true" first and that my body was not mine,

because it belonged to men's lingering eyes
so I should always cover it up.

But at some point, I became so small from all my shrinking,
that I was hidden under a black veil of my own creation,
nearly invisible. And I was left with two choices-
disappear altogether or learn
learn to rebuild the parts of myself
that the world asked me to disintegrate.

I learned from women like Jennifer Doudna and Emmanuelle Charpentier,
pioneers in CRISPR technology, and the first women to independently
win the Nobel Prize in Chemistry.

I learned from Greta Thunberg, a sixteen-year-old girl
with Aspergers who single-handedly changed the way we
think about climate change.

I learned from Marie Curie and Malala and
Little Miss Flint, women of our past and present and future,
women who won't stop flooding spaces,
who won't stop making their voices, their ideas,
their contributions heard.

They teach me to never make myself small,
not when I could be a neurosurgeon or
an astronaut or a soldier or a firefighter or
a rocket scientist.

Not when I have power to make the world go thin,
not when I am limitless