

THE BALLAD OF ACCOUNTANT JO

By Aditi Brennan Kapil

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A Balladeer with an instrument turns to the audience.

Balladeer

**Well, here now friends, if you turn to me, I'll tell you a story fine-
About a young accountant who did turn to a life of crime
He was such a nice and quiet sort, or so the neighbors said...
But when asked to describe him further, they just stood there, scratched their heads**

**Who was accountant Jo? Who was the man behind the legend?
And what drove him to this life of crime, and to that bloody end?**

(Chorus)

**Accountant Jooooooooo, he was a shmooooooooe, but how he wiiiiished, he could be
mooooooooore**

**Accountant Jooooooooo, he was a shmooooooooe, and how he waaanteed, to be
whooooooooole!**

**Now Jo was good with numbers, and with laws, dictates, and rules!
And not cause he was Asian or something, it began way back in pre-school-**

Young Jo sits cross-legged on the floor with actual or imaginary kids. Voice of girl to his right-

Girl Voice

My name is Amanda, and I'm half Austrian and half Swiss.

Boy Voice

Hi, I'm Stuart, I'm an African-American!

Jo

My name is Jo. I am half Filipino, half Irish, half Zimbabwean, half Venezuelan, half Inuit, half—

Laughter

Balladeer

**Well the kids they were a'laughin', even the teacher couldn't stifle it!
Poor Jo turned red... and yellow and pink and brown and black and white...
Young Jo cried in his chubby fists, but the reason for their antics-
was not his many colors, but his poor grasp of mathematics!**

Jo

“If I can master fractions”-

Balladeer

-mused young Jo upon his bed-

Jo

“Then surely I’ll fit in, and I’ll have lots of friends,”

Balladeer

- he said!

(Chorus)

Ooooh, Accountant Joooooooo, he was a shmoeeeeeee, but how he wiiiiished, he could be moooooore

Accountant Joooooooo, he was a shmooooooooeeeee, and how he waaanteed, to be whoooooole!

So Jo applied himself, he learned his theorems and pis!

And then one day he found himself-

Jo at a desk droning

Jo

This brings us to the Ethnicity and Race Identification form. Ethnicity and race information is requested under the authority of 42 U.S.C. Section 2000e-16 and in compliance with the Office of Management and Budget’s 1997 Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity. Providing this information is voluntary and has no impact on your employment status, but in the instance of missing information, your employing agency will attempt to identify your race and ethnicity by visual observation. The Racial Categories are American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latino, White. You may check as many boxes as apply. But you may not check all of them. I found that out the hard way. Would you like to check a box?

Black Man voice

Black

Jo

Black... and White...?

Black Man Voice

No, just black.

Jo

Really?

Black Man Voice

What's your problem man?

Jo

I... Uh...

BEAT

Balladeer

**-And that was that. Jo was done. Employment forms went flying!
His boss came in and shook his head**

Nerdy Boss Voice

Now, son, you're out of line!

Balladeer

**As Jo rose up, to his feet, in his head was a terrible roar-
Of water breaching giant dams, with Jo in the downpour!
He felt the swelling of a voice, words thrilled within his lungs
Generations drummed inside his head with history and songs!**

All stop to listen

Jo

I AM...—

I AM...--! -!

Balladeer

(spoken) And- nothing. Nothing came out.

Jo

WHO AM IIIIIIII---?

Balladeer

-Wailed Accountant Jo, with fist upon sweater vest!

And he knew the answer, lay not with fractions, so he went out and joined a gang.

(spoken) That's right. Didn't see that coming, did you ladies and gentlemen? Didn't even rhyme. That's how I catch you by surprise, see, can't have you figuring it all out before I get there...

(Chorus)

Ooooh, Accountant Jooooooo, he was a shmoeeeeeee, but how he wiiiished, he could be moooooore

Accountant Jooooooo, he was a shmoooooeeeeee, and how he waaanteed, to be whoooooole!

Well, accountant Jo, he tried several gangs, and he actually joined 3 or 4.

(aside) Which was hell on his schedule-

Babble of various voices

You should cut your hair

Why are your pants so tight?

Here, try this on *(clothing chucked at him, he puts it on)*

You got a black girlfriend?

Why do you talk white?

Catch! *(he gets bonked in the head by a basketball)*

Is this your first country club membership?

I still don't get the hair *(Jo messes with his hair)*

What are you?

Jo

Uh, I'm half-Filipino, half-

Voices

Half and Half!

Neither cream nor milk, can't whip it, can't drink it
Only good for diluting coffee

(laughter)

Dance!

A medley of different styles of music ensues and Jo tries to dance to all of them, simultaneously and/or consecutively.

Balladeer

-the social commitments alone, meant he had to quit his job.

Ooooh, Accountant Jooooooo, he was a shmoeeeeeee, but how he wiiiiished, he could be moooooore

Accountant Jooooooo, he was a shmooooooooeeeee, and how he waaanteed, to be whoooooole!

Jo collapses in exhaustion

Then came that fateful day, when he overheard three words...

Silence while we listen

V/O

Psst psst psst psst MIXED RACE GANG pst pst pst

Balladeer

And Jo played possum as he strained to hear more-

V/O

(hiss)...pst pst THE APPLES pst pst...

Beat. Jo is still waiting.

V/O

(stage whisper) The Apples meet once a month at the old warehouse on Broadway!

Jo

(stage whisper) Ok thanks! ... The Apples?

V/O

(stage whisper) Get the fuck out of here, Jo!

Balladeer

**From that moment on, his fate was sealed, accountant Jo was dead
If only he'd stuck with 1099s, he might have lived, and died in bed...
But a-**

*Jo's solo interrupts the Balladeer who waits patiently.
To the music of 'Tonight' from West Side Story, sung with great commitment.*

Jo

The Apples? The Apples. This feels right... somehow... It feels right.

**Could it be? Yes it could!
Something's coming, something good!
Maybe toniiiiight!
I'll be with people who understand me
See what I see
I'll be alriiiight
Toniiiiight**

**Toniiiiight's the begiiiiiiing! I'll fit into this mixed race I liiive in!
Tonight... tonight...**

(spoken with hope and reverence) The Apples...!

Jo runs offstage. Balladeer resumes

Balladeer

(ominous) **But a man who seeks identity, must always pay a price,
Knowledge and Naming and Apple Eating gets you kicked out of paradise**
(aside) Genesis 3

Jo trips onstage in a blindfold, and is hit by a spotlight. The Apples address him in booming voices from the direction of the audience.

Fuji

THREE STEPS FORWARD

Jo

What? Oh, right, sure!

Macoun

A SCOSH TO THE LEFT

Jo

Like here...?

*GD rips off Jo's blindfold and a Jo is blinded by a bright spotlight.
Jo screams for a bit. Then calms down.*

Jo

Ha! Ha! You scared me, a little bit there, that's, wow that's bright

Gala/Balladeer

WELCOME, JO

(aside) Yup, this is how I met him. I was known as Gala- a tasty hybrid of Kidd's Orange Red and Golden Delicious.

Jo

Um, could we kill the blinding light? My eyes are starting to water...

GD

YOU'RE AN APPLE NOW!

Jo

Oh. Yeah. Apples, that's pretty good, though I was thinking, I mean there are other fruits that are... intimidating too... I mean if that's what we're going for... or even members of the non-produce family... not that I'm criticizing the name per se... I just wonder...

Fuji

YOU'RE ONE OF US NOW

Jo

Oh, cool. Does that mean I get to see what you look like?

GD

I'M GOLDEN DELICIOUS, AND THAT'S ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

Jo

Oh. Well, nice to meet you... and more power to ya'... Golden Delicious

Fuji

FUJI.

Jo

Ok. That's a funny coincidence... cuz you know those are both...

Macoun

MCINTOSH AND JERSEY BLACK MAKE MACOUN!

Jo

Apples. Those are apples. You already knew that.

Gala

I'M GALA

Jo

I'm not familiar with that one

Gala

THEN YOUR DIET IS SADLY LACKING. MAMA WAS A PIRATE AND DADDY
WAS YELLOW-BELLIED THROUGH AND THROUGH

Jo

Ok! Alright! I get it, so I need an apple-name-

Macoun

FIRST YOU'VE GOT TO DO THE CRIME

beat

Jo

Crime?

GD

CRIME. ARE YOU IN OR ARE YOU OUT?

Gala

ARE YOU IN OR ARE YOU OUT?

Fuji

ARE YOU IN OR ARE YOU OUT?

Macoun

ARE YOU IN OR ARE YOU OUT?

Balladeer

**What could he do, what could he say, poor Jo was torn in twain!
But no man can fight his nature, and so Jo cried-**

Jo

I'm in! I'm in! I want to be in!

Balladeer

**His voice was strong, his eyes they shone, with pride and joy and glee!
That dam that cracked, now fully burst and the flood knocked down an apple tree
And the apples fell, as apples will, and bobbed toward their doom
And as poor Jo, he bobbed along, he felt free at last and-**

Radio Jock V/O interrupts the song, all listen

Radio Jock v/o

And in other news of the STUPID, one of the dumbest crimes I've ever heard of!! A bunch of freaks stormed a packed fundraiser this afternoon, and tried to make off with the cash donations. According to a spokesman for the 'Minority Representation Advocacy Group,' they carried no weapons, they wore absolutely no disguise, and didn't even make it to the exit before police arrested them. Some of the money is still missing, but with 140-some witnesses, I'm thinking not for long! And to top off the weirdness factor- every single pitcher of half and half was on the floor. That's it, just the half and half! Nothing else. People like this make my day! They really do! They make my job easy!

Balladeer

**Well now, Jo and his new friends were hardly naturals at crime
They forgot a step or two, and they were likely to do time
As they stood in that police line up, not a one that wasn't wishing
That they'd stayed in their safe jobs and lives, instead of going on this damn stupid
mission
Identity is fine and good, but home and safe is better-**

*Lights up on Jo and 4 others in a police line-up. They are wearing numbers 1 through 5.
Jo (4) is sweating and muttering.*

Jo

Stupid! Stupid! Oh my god, I'm through the looking glass and the cops are on the other side! I'm an accountant!

Fuji

Shut up man, you'll get us all in trouble

Jo

Get us in trouble?? We're in a police line-up! We're in trouble!

Balladeer

And just when things just couldn't get worse, Jo got pulled in for questioning.

Jo is pulled from the line up and seated across from detective

Detective

You know why you're here, Jo?

Jo

No.

Detective

Come on. This isn't you. You're an accountant. No record, no nothing. What are you doing here?

Jo

That's right, it wasn't me, I didn't do anything! I'm innocent! I mean what did I really do, right? Nothing! You don't have anything!

Detective

We have 143 eye-witnesses

Jo

Yeah well... the eye is easily deceived, you know? You ever get one of those emails with the optical illusion? You stare at this one picture for like a minute and then it turns from red to green, and it's all in the eye, right? Or the ones where you never even see the hidden image, but the dummy in the next cube sees it right away because that's how his brain is wired, he can't do a small business return without screwing up the 1040, but he can see the pink moose in the green squares!

Detective

Attempted robbery is a crime. But it's a minor crime, Jo. I resent having to spend any portion of my busy day interviewing someone as unimportant as you. You know who I'd rather be interviewing?

Jo

I... uh... no

Detective

Whoever put you up to this stupid ass stunt. That was irresponsible, and frankly, cruel.

That's who I'd like to arrest. Whoever took an upstanding citizen like you and persuaded him to run around yelling profanities and stealing money from a charity.

Jo

That's not exactly what...

Detective

Who are they, Jo?

Jo

Who are who?

Detective

Who are the others?

Jo

I don't know...

Detective

I can't help you if you don't talk to me!

Jo

No, I really don't know! I mean, don't you know? You know more than I do, didn't you arrest everyone? I never even saw a face! And then today it was all just crazy and I couldn't tell who was who, I just followed directions...

Detective

That's right, you just followed directions! Who gave those directions?

Jo

They... the... the Apples

Detective

Jo

Jo

The Apples! The Apples! They said where to show up, what to say, and I just did it! It's like my gang initiation...

Detective

And who are these apples?

Jo

I don't know!

Detective

You know!

Jo

I don't! I- Golden Delicious, Fuji, Macoun--- and Gala! Gala!

Detective

You got Tourettes?

Jo

No! That's all I know! That's all I know! I can't believe I'm here, I can't believe this is happening to me, I just wanted to be me and be with people who... But this is not me! This is not me! I'm not a criminal!

Detective

No. You're just the sap, right?

Jo

Right, yes, that's me, I'm a sap. I'm a loser!
Last week my girlfriend's mom said she considered me white, and I said, 'but I'm not!' and she said, well, I think you are, and I'm thinking 'what the hell?' What the hell does that mean? You're just as good as white? You're really pale? You can pass? You don't talk street? What? And who cares, because I don't consider myself white, and others don't, but what does that mean? I couldn't even tell her, I couldn't even pinpoint how I'm not white aside from the fact that my dad isn't, and my mom... and then I'm starting to sound like a defensive asshole, and it's not like I can burst into 'I'm Black and I'm

Proud' so what am I? I just want to know! I want a song, or like a chant. A fucking bumpersticker. And I thought they had the answer. But the other gangs never had me doing crime, only the damn Apples, and that's not right, that's not what I was looking for, that's not who I am! Goddamnitalltohell!
So arrest me! Arrest me for being stupid. I'm the stupid apple.

Which is ironic if you're familiar with apple mythology.

Silence

Detective

I can't arrest you

Jo

Why not?

Detective picks up a folder of witness accounts and reads

Detective

I don't know officer, it might be number 5, but I can't quite say, there were so many of them, and they just didn't stick out somehow, I know the one I saw had tan skin, a lovely tan, maybe a little darker than number 3. Mostly they had dark hair, but a couple of them didn't. Mine didn't really look that dangerous, I guess that's why I didn't react for a while. It was just all the yelling, threw us off. Number 1 looks a little like the one who snatched the hat from Jilly, but I thought he was Asian, but maybe not- I can't swear to it- and they were all speaking American, I didn't catch a foreign accent though at first of course I thought they were all terrorists...
And so on... and so on...

Jo

You can't hold me on that.

Detective

I can't hold you on that. But it's not right, Jo. You're a law-abiding citizen. You need to tell me everything you know before you leave here today.

Jo

I already have. I don't know anything.

Detective

Jo? Jo.

Ok. Alright. I can't hold you.

Jo

Ok. Well I'm leaving then.

Detective

Fine.

Jo gets up and leaves. He heads out of the station. Meanwhile we hear Radio jock V/O

Radio Jock V/O

An update on the dumbest crime of the century folks, all the suspects have been released because 143 stone cold sober eye-witnesses failed to positively identify a single one of them! Seriously, this day gets better and better! I can't! I can't decide who gets the prize, the dumb gangsters or their idiot victims! Wow! I just gotta say-WOW!

GD appears at Jo's shoulder

GD

How does it feel to be invisible?

Jo

Unbelievable

Macoun

You're one of us now

Fuji

Welcome to the gang. We'll see you next month.

Jo

Wait, that's it?

GD

What did you expect?

Jo

Something! A fucking party! We just evaded the law, that's like the movies, man! We went in and wreaked havoc, no disguise, no nothing, and no one could identify us! We're like superheroes or villains or whatever! So come on, spill! What's the plan? What are we going to do with our powers, huh? Something big, right?

Gala

I don't know...

Jo

Rob banks? Right wrongs? Come on man, we're invisible! That's gotta mean something!

Macoun

We can talk about it next time, I'm running late.

They start to leave

Jo

Next time? Wait! Guys!
Don't you want to like hang out or something?

Fuji

Listen, we used to try to hang out. But the fact is we've got nothing in common except for this. Next month, ok?

Jo

But we're Apples, man!

Macoun

Yeah, but come on, that doesn't mean we hang out. All different varieties in one tree? That's just botanically unsound, man. It's been fun, kids! I have to go be black.

GD

Later

They all depart and leave Jo alone on stage. A moment. Then softly...

Balladeer

Ooooh, Accountant Jooooooooo, he was a shmoeeeeeee, but how he wiiiiished, he could be moooooore

Accountant Jooooooooo, he was a shmooooooooeeeee, and how he waaanteed, to be whoooooole!

Well this might be the end of the tale, and for most of us it was.

We went home to our kids and jobs and taxes, went on with life and loss

But Jo he wasn't finished, no Jo he wasn't done

Cuz Invisible Jo, went on a spree of crime, if ever there was one!

Gas stations and convenience stores across the great divide!

The police they thought it was a dozen men-

Sounds of bullets, chasing, and witness voices

Witness Voices

He was Latino

Definitely black!

Just a white boy

Like Japanese or something, like in the war movies

Damn Mexicans

Al Qaeda terrorist

It was a woman

Balladeer

Accountant Jo...

Bullets flying, crazy chase antics, spotlight stops on Fuji

Fuji

Nononono, I've got nothing to do with that freak! That's all from back when I was confused, before I was real, you know? And I was never in agreement with that name, Apples! What the hell? Yeah, you gotta make choices in this life, decide who you wanna be- none of this hybrid shit. I stand with my people now, and I stand proud. There's a reason why we never accomplished anything, what's mixed race anyway? You don't

stand for nothing, you don't accomplish nothing, and no one will stand for you, and you got no power. No one votes mixed.

Balladeer

Accountant Jo...

Bullets flying, crazy chase antics, spotlights stops on Golden Delicious

GD

Have you ever had burritos, but they're like wrapped in seaweed? I know it sounds vile, but that's total comfort food for me, my mom used to make them when I was growing up- she was fusion way before fusion was trendy! I do a breakfast burrito version of that on Sundays for my kids...

-

Yeah, I went by Golden Delicious back then but... well, we don't talk about it much. The Apples, we kind of stopped meeting after that whole thing- it wasn't the same. Besides, we got busy... life, you know?

All

Accountant Jo...

Bullets flying, crazy chase antics, spotlight stops on Macoun

Macoun

I don't know what you're talking about.
I've never heard of that.
I can't say.
I have no comment.
Just leave me alone, ok.

Bullets flying, crazy chase antics

Balladeer

**The manhunt spread, far and wide- but then one fateful day-
they caught him up, that damn fool Jo, and he knew this was the end**

All stops

Detective

Step out into the open with your arms in the air!

Balladeer

And finally! - - Finally! - - Invisible Jo was seen.

Jo slowly walks into a light

Detective

Jo...?

Jo

Yes

Detective

Where are the rest of you?

Jo

Right here.

I'm 1/8 Filipino, 1/8 Irish, 1/8 Zimbabwean, 1/8 Venezuelan, 1/8 Inuit, 1/8 Afghani, 1/8 Greek, 1/8 American. I am not Other. I am I! I am Jo.

He pulls a Gun, and is gunned down.

Detective

Damnit. Goddammit. He was good. He was an accountant.

Balladeer

**And here ends the sad sad tale of accountant Jo, well, well,
On the upside, no
Filipino-Irish-Zimbabwean-Venezuelan-Inuit-Afghani-Greek-American will ever be
taken for granted again!**

**Yes accountant Jo, he left a legacy of fear confusion and strife
But most importantly he taught me the value of a life**

Huh? Who me? Well I actually went back to school and became an accountant. See Jo was kind of my hero, to a lot of us actually. I like it, I like numbers, fractions, counting things up, tallying... Stand and be ACCOUNTED!

And as for that search for identity, well, I have my music... and I go around singing songs and telling stories... and I guess that works for me.

You know there are Jo-sightings every once in a while? I've never seen him myself, but I wouldn't be surprised. In that final moment he fell back and into the river, you saw his head bobbing down stream, but they never found the body. He's still out there.

I think he approves of my telling his story. I think it makes him smile. I think he's watching right now... he could be sitting right behind you... or right next to you... or hell, he could be you. Have you looked in the mirror lately?

All in harmony

Accountant Jooooooooo, he was a shmooooooooeeee, and how he waaanteed, to be whoooooole!

Balladeer

Thank you. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

LIGHTS OUT

THE END