Of Metaphors and Similes

This short story was a writing exercise undertaken for amusement, and to see if a story could be made from a list of the "worst high school creative writing metaphors." Most of them are however similes rather than, like y'know, metaphors.

Hefty Bag

Dedicated to Garrison Keillor's *Guy Noir*
By Sue Campbell

I was closing up my office on a Friday night after a week that had been deader than the roaches in the old roach motel that had been under my desk for the past six months. I was looking forward to a brew at my local pub, like Santa looks forward to New Year's Eve, when she walked into my office like a centipede with 98 missing legs.

One look at her and my thoughts tumbled in my head, making and breaking alliances like underpants in a dryer without Cling Free. She was one tall drink of water with gams that started just below her eyeballs and went on till morning. Her face was a perfect oval, like a circle that had its two other sides gently compressed by a Thigh Master.

"Are you the private detective?" she stammered and looked up at me through thick black lashes.

"Sam. Sam Santorini, P.I. at your service. Ma'am." I replied. "What can I do for you?"

"Oh, Mr. Sant..."

"Sam, just ... Sam's fine. Miss . . . er?"

"Angela Mellons McBride" Her voice had that tense, grating quality, like a first generation thermal fax machine that needed a band tightened.

"Tell me your story Miss Mellons...

"Angela Mellons-*McBride*," she interrupted, "Angie. Call me Angie, Sam."

“Tell me your story Angie.” I said, and leaned back in my circa 1948 oak swivel desk chair. The springs protested with a squeak like a rat in a trash can full of leftover lasagna.

Angie perched on the corner of my desk and crossed her long, shapely legs. She was growing on me like she was a colony of E. coli and I was room temperature Canadian-beef. She tearfully began telling me her tale, and her vocabulary was as bad as, like, whatever.

“I thought our love would last forever,” she began. “My love and I were star-crossed lovers long separated by cruel fate. When we found each other we raced across a grassy field toward each other like two freight trains, one having left Cleveland at 6:36 p.m. traveling at 55 mph, and the other from Topeka at 4:19 p.m. at a speed of 35 mph.”

A tear slid down her cheek, like sweat on a longneck bottle of Budweiser. I offered her my handkerchief.

“My lover had been a boxer.” She went on, “He was a young fighter, and he had a hungry look like the kind you get from not eating for a while. Unfortunately, for his boxing career, he was lame as a duck. Not the metaphorical lame duck, either, but a real duck that was actually lame—maybe from stepping on a land mine or something.”

She took a deep breath, and dabbed at the corners of her big brown eyes with my hanky.

“I was a dancer—no, not a ballerina. I could never rise gracefully en pointe and extend my slender leg out behind me, like a dog at a fire hydrant. No. I was a Pole dancer.”

That got my attention. I was falling for her like my heart was a mob informant and she was the East River.

“So you met your lover at the club where you were dancing?” I asked. “I imagine that happens a lot for a woman in your profession.”

“Oh, no!” She laughed. She had a deep throaty, genuine laugh, like that sound a dog makes just before he throws up. “I danced folk dances at the Polish American Club. My grandpappy who’s from the old country got me that job.”

Well, so she's not as easy as the *TV Guide* crossword puzzle, I thought. I was surprised. Clearly, the water is deeper than it looks, like when you step in a mud puddle and sink in up your ankle, I was surprised. She went on with her story.

"Things were going fine, we married and settled into suburban life. We lived in a typical suburban neighborhood with white picket fences like Nancy Kerrigan's teeth. We had two children. And grandpappy moved in with us. It was perfect. It was an American tradition, like fathers chasing kids around with power tools."

"So, Miss Mellons . . . Angie, tell me why you came to me. What's wrong?"

"It's my husband John. He's gone. Disappeared last week, like when you blow out the birthday candles and the smoke dissipates in the air leaving a sort of sulfur smell? Like that but without the cake, or the candles." She paused and gave me a look with her brown eyes glistening like a Hershey bar left on the dashboard.

"Please Sam, please find my husband."

I started on the case that night. The beer would have to wait. I had a suspicion about what happened to John, but I needed proof. Proof, which just might make Angela Mellons-McBride mine. Yeah. The dame had got to me. I was in love—deeply in love. When she spoke, I thought I heard bells, as if she were a garbage truck backing up. I had it bad, bad I tell ya.

I started with the family, interviewing her grandfather first. Even in his last years, Grandpappy had a mind like a steel trap, only one that had be left out so long it had rusted shut. But he was an old man with a story to tell, and I wasn't going to stop him. I knew I couldn't, so I didn't even try.

He spoke with the wisdom that can only come from experience, like a guy who went blind because he looked at a solar eclipse without one of those boxes with a pinhole in it and now goes around the country speaking at high schools about the dangers of looking at a solar eclipse without one of those boxes with a pinhole in it.

I wouldn't get nothing else outta him. His mind was on the kielbasa and not much else. Still I wondered what had happened to Grandmama.

The kids, John, Jr. and Mary were next. It was as if John and Mary had never met. They were like two hummingbirds who had also never met. The typical story, John

played the piano and tatted lace (like Grandpappy), and Mary was a softball star, and hung out at the local garage learning to fix old cars with gummy carburetors. Nothin' new. The kids didn't know what had happened to their dad; didn't even know he was missing, and they didn't resemble the picture of John McBride.

"That left Angela. What wasn't she telling me?"

Time to do some real snoopy… snooping. At night, because you just can't snoop properly during the day.

I'd have to kill some time. So I got myself a Grande Latte Mochiatto with an extra shot, and a bag full of Little Debbie powdered sugar, mini donut treats. Then I staked out the house from a discrete distance right across the street. The plan was simple, like my brother-in-law Jack. But unlike Jack, this plan might just work.

I had a feeling that John, wasn't really missing, but Angela wanted him to be.

It was still dark when I woke up. Powdered sugar dusted my belly like flour and eleven herbs and spices on a chicken leg about to hit the fryer when, shots rang out like shots are wont to do. I didn't see anything, and the streets were wet and deserted.

Suddenly, I heard a shout! From the attic came an unearthly howl. The whole scene had an eerie, surreal quality like when you're on vacation in another city and Jeopardy comes on at 7:00 instead of 7:30.

I thought I saw shadows on the shades upstairs. There were thumps and grunts coming from the window. It sounded like a fight, but a one sided one. Like the midget batboy struggling with the bag of balls on the steps of a dugout. The light went out, and I waited for the next move.

A car came sliding out of the garage, lights off, backing out of the driveway and silently rolling down the street like a garbage barge looking for a place to dump its unwanted cargo. I started my lime green, battered, 1972 Subaru wagon and tailed it about a block behind. He was headed for Jersey.

Halfway across the bridge it started to rain. Claps of thunder, and flashes of lightning, punctuated the spaces between the street lamps like misplaced semi-colons. Rain turned to hail as the car pulled into the yard of an abandoned warehouse on the river. I parked just out of sight and watched as a manly figure struggled with a big black bundle in the trunk. He made it over to a conveniently

waiting dinghy tied up at the old dock. The big black bag was slung into the boat with a thud, like when the Foley artist fakes a punch and you totally know he just smacked a smoked ham in the studio during post-production.

The hailstorm picked up its pace as I stepped out of the car. The hailstones leaped from the pavement, just like maggots when you fry them in hot grease. They stung like rock salt in your ass when your cousin's dad shoots at you for looking in at her in the bathroom window. Still, I had to get closer.

The little boat gently drifted across the water exactly the way a bowling ball wouldn't. Roughly, in the middle, I saw the figure push the bag over the side. For a second, it floated. Then with a gurgle and belch like my friend Sid when he washes down a dozen hot wings with a Colt 45, it slipped under the murky waters. I imagined the body in its shroud seesawing down, down into the depths, and settling next to the rusted out hulks of cars, full of former mob informants.

I stood in the open on the wooden dock as the figure rowed up, back to me, face hidden. Appropriately clad in a dark trench coat, a man alighted from the boat and stood before me. He was tall. He was as tall as a six-foot-three-inch tree. John? My God! I thought, but where was Angie?

But before I could confront him. The glint of a stainless steel revolver whipped out of his pocket. He raised the gun and fired. He was a lousy shot, this lame duck, ex-boxer.

I ran to my lime green, 1972 Subaru wagon and prayed she'd start up, as on rainy nights the car was as slow to warm up as forty-year-old librarian, but thankfully, not tonight. Her engine roared to life like a circus lion being poked by the lion tamer's chair in the second show. The gravel flew up behind me peppering my would-be assailant as I peeled out of the parking lot.

Wait a second! I slammed on the brakes and screeched to a halt, my tires making a sound like nails on a chalkboard as they skidded on wet pavement. I didn't want to lose him. I drove slowly down the empty industrial street to a high-rise parking garage, making sure my tail was still behind me. He was.

On the top level I pulled into the spot next to the outside corner overlooking the city lights, which shone as bright in the rain like the braces on Ugly Betty's teeth. I got out of my car and waited. The man in the trench coat emerged from a silver-gray 2003 Taurus. Prada heels clicking against the smooth concrete floor as he walked

toward me. It was only then I realized he wasn't wearing any pants under the long black coat.

There was something familiar about that walk.

"Angie?" I squeaked.

"John." Came the throaty reply, and then he laughed. He had a deep, throaty genuine laugh, like the sound a dog makes before it throws up. "So you figured it out huh Sam?"

I couldn't answer. I was hurting. It hurt like the way your tongue hurts after you accidentally staple it to the wall.

John / Angie shrugged out of the wet trench coat, still clutching the silvery 25-caliber handgun with white knuckled firmness. Like your driver instructor's hand holding the door handle while he stomps the imaginary brake on his side of the car.

She was a long, long tall drink of water all right. Her hair glistened in the rain like nose hair after a sneeze.

"So what's the story, Angie . . . er, John."

The sad story came tumbling out like when you open the door on one of those big dryers at the Launderette, while it's running, only to discover it wasn't your dryer and granny panties come tumbling out all over the dirty linoleum.

The revelation that his marriage of 30 years had disintegrated because of his wife's infidelity came as a rude shock, like a surcharge at a formerly surcharge-free ATM. She'd been sleeping with the accordion player at the Polish American club for years.

"Why'd you come to me John?"

"Don't you get it?" He countered, bitterly.

I was beginning to. The dress he wore fit him like it was made for his tall slender frame, like paint clinging to the side of a freight car after a tagger had his say. The effect was . . . disconcerting. The mascara on his big brown eyes was running down his cheek. His nylons had a run from his shapely ankle up to his nethers, where I uncomfortably averted my gaze.

“Yeah. So you know now.” He said again. “That’s too bad, Sam. Because I was hoping we could be ‘special’ friends afterward. After I got her out of the way. See her clothes fit me, and she was diddling the polka prince, so what did I have left to lose?”

He sighed heavily and went on, “I needed you to confirm my death. Insurance, it pays to Angie, see?”

I did see. And I saw him raise the little gun out in front of him with two hands like Angie Dickenson as Sgt. Pepper in Police Woman. God that was a sexy move, but I couldn’t get distracted now.

I dropped to the pavement, fishing my own revolver out of the pocket of my relaxed-fit, khaki Levi’s Dockers as I rolled. I crouched alongside the car dodging bullets like Neo and Trinity in slo-mo impressing myself even as I ducked.

Angie / John fired off a couple more rounds as he / she ran toward me. This guy was really a lousy shot. I wondered how he’d been able to shoot his wife in the close range of the attic room. I scooted backward around the car and he circled around by the rail. His tight skirt edged up showing me the patch of hairy skin where the garter belt held his hose against those long shapely … arggh!

I fired once, twice. Angie stood there, a surprised look crossed her face like when a chicken crosses a road only doesn’t make it. She raised her gun, and this time she wouldn’t miss, but I fired once more.

John / Angie toppled over the rail. Turning end over end he fell through the air, like your luggage at the airport when it falls out of the luggage cart and onto the tarmac and sits there while your flight takes off for a two-week trip leaving you with out clean underwear.

McBride fell 12 stories, hitting the pavement like a Hefty bag filled with vegetable soup.

And that’s how I ended up here. I’ll have another longneck Bud please.