1. I really didn’t like the story “The Chalk Outline”. It was really long and hard to read. There were several things I disliked including that crazy woman Carolyn. “I know it was Stanley Murdoch.” She’s also mean . “She slapped him.” This was a terrible story.
2. Villain is defined as “one whose harmful actions are important to the plot”. In “The Chalk Outline” by Brian Garfield there is one specific villain – Charles Berlin. Mr. Berlin is responsible for three harmful actions: the dead Fido, the golf ball thrown through Carolyn’s window and the fire. Mr. Berlin knew that the cat was important to Carolyn. “Fido was the closest thing to a child that she had.” He killed it with his car. Charles is also responsible for the golf ball since he is likely to have a newspaper clipping and knew where she had moved. “This funny coincidence, I have a friend who has an apartment to sublet.” He knew someone to rent her an apartment because he wanted her to be away and vulnerable. He also set the fire because his wife was back. “Sorry, but we’ve decided to give it another try.” He wanted Carolyn gone. Charles is a villain.
3. Villains come in all shapes and sizes and the best ones are those a reader wouldn’t suspect. Carolyn Benson is such a woman as the main character in Brian Garfield’s “The Chalk Outline”. Although she begins the story as the victim and protagonist, her mental state leads her to become the antagonist. Before the unfortunate death of Amy Murdoch, Carolyn was a lonely divorcee but the author hints even at this point she was unstable. The narrator gives the readers hints of her instability noting her shower routine which even during the divorce included “hot scalding water followed by icy needle like water”. This habit seems to suggest a need for self-punishment and she resumes this habit after she returns home from the trial. Her need to punish herself becomes coupled with paranoia . She observes Stanley Murdoch standing on his porch “not smoking, not reading, not doing anything” and interprets this action of a man who has just lost his last family member as threatening. Later, when a golf ball comes through her window, her mental state is further questioned as she “burns the newspaper and wishes it were Stanley Murdoch”. She has become so filled with paranoia that she goes on the offensive, claiming not to need even the help of her lawyer and in the end takes initiative to run down Mr. Murdoch. Such actions are clearly indicators that this seemingly innocuous woman has become a murderous villain or unexpected proportions.
4. “Sorry, sorry, sorry”. Brian Garfield’s “The Chalk Outline” has several possible villains but readers should not reject the obvious character Stanley Murdoch. Mr. Murdoch has the motive and the opportunity to be responsible for the unfortunate incidents of the story. When Carolyn first returns home after the trial, she observes Murdoch on his porch “not smoking, not reading, not doing anything” but watching her house. Later when she approaches Murdoch about the golf ball, he says nothing but “clenches and unclenches his fists”. Finally, Murdoch obviously tried to run her down. “Tailfins of an older model station wagon.” Murdoch is the villain.
5. “Evil is relative.” In Brian Garfield’s The Chalk Outline there are no villains, just mere bad luck and coincidence. The first instance of bad luck is the fact that Fido was dead . “Flattened on the spot little Amy Murdoch died.” To attempt to kill or run over a cat at an exact spot is near to impossible. The screeching of tires is also something that can occur occasionally though not menacingly on any suburban street. Carolyn herself observes that “Murdoch usually didn’t drive like that” and it is possible that even though she claimed to have seen his car turn the corner, it would be difficult to get to the window to see it drive away if it was driving at a great speed. Finally, the fire at the apartment was also coincidental. “It had started in the furnace room just below Carolyn’s apartment.” One of the most common places for a fire to start is the furnace room. Although most stories have an antagonist, this one is an exception unless bad luck and coincidence can be considered characters.