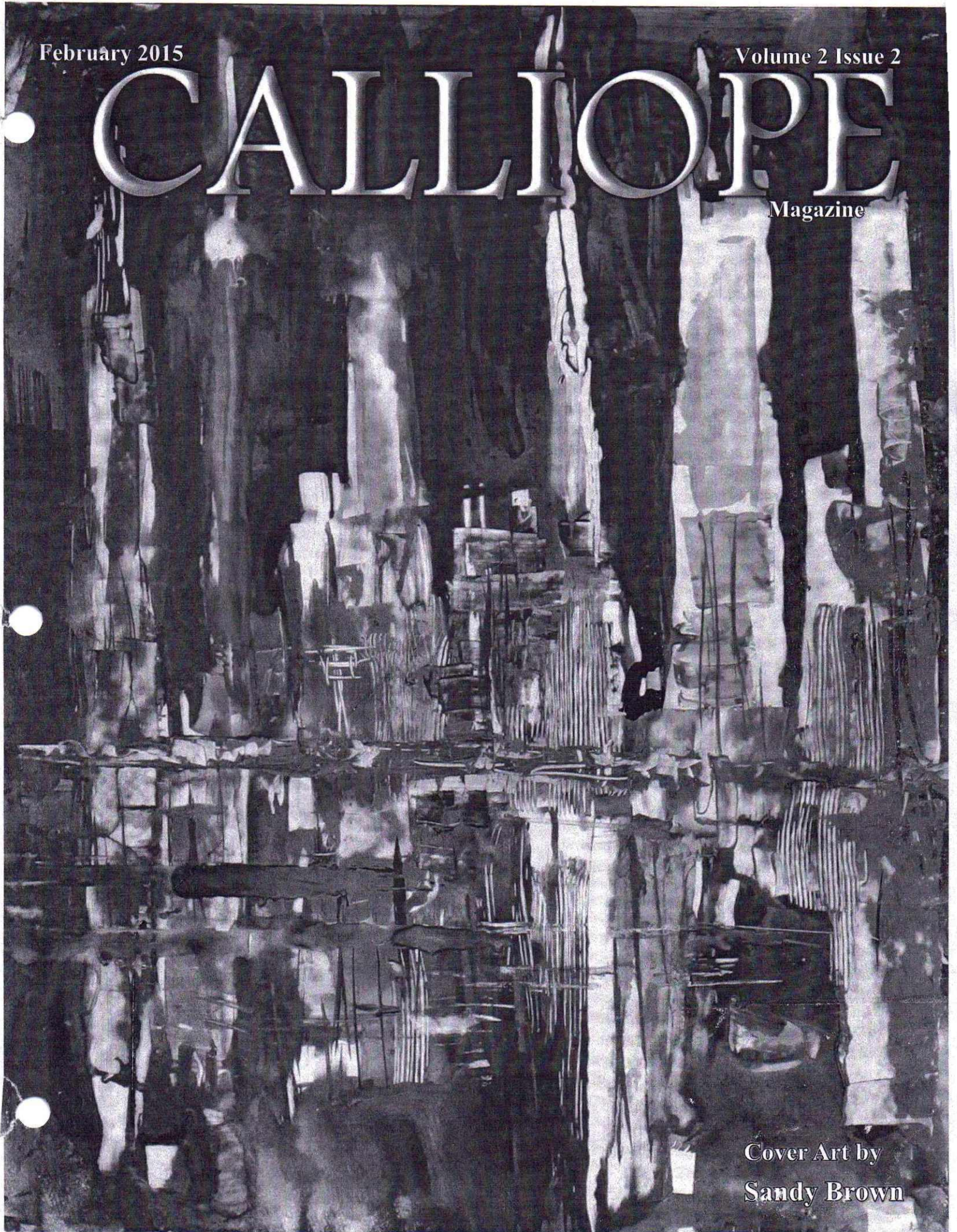


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Sandy Brown

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Sandy Brown

Back Cover Art
Kat Stilwell



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Founding Editor - Robert Olson

Art Editor - Adel Baizhan

Chief Intern - Kat Stilwell

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Parental Discretion

By Kathryn Holzman

“See what you can find out, but, please, be discrete.”

Discretion and valor, he hadn't quite grasped the connection. Discretion required great skill and tact. The principal had asked him to look into the girl's complaint; the whole thing could blow up. The football team had made it to the finals. There was a lot at stake.

Parental discretion was required.

She had been lying in the football field at night. When she had called her parents, she told them that the sky was cloudless and the stars especially bright. Stunned by their grandeur, she described the constellations to them. She had been unable to move.

Parental discretion required. The following scene contains partial nudity.

She was lying in a field at night. By the time her parents arrived that Friday night, she had smoothed her cheerleading skirt back down. Her panties still hung from the goal posts. Her makeup was smeared and her white sneakers had grass stains. The lights, so bright during the night's victorious football game, had been turned out. The sky was cloudless. Her parents agreed, the stars were especially bright. They gazed up at them, the first of the silent witnesses.

Parental discretion required. The following contains language that may not be appropriate for family viewing.

She was lying on the fucking field at night, left behind by the asshole football players who had taken it upon themselves to make her part of the celebration of their victory. There were bruises on her wrists and ankles. The field was dark and deserted. She had smoothed down her cheerleading skirt.

“What the fuck are you going to do about this?” Her father had demanded on the phone. “The principal had promised to get to the bottom of things.”

“Shit,” he had told the guidance counsellor charged with the follow up. “We've got to put a lid on this. Find holes in the girl's story.” The parents had not taken their daughter to the hospital. “Hell, football players and cheerleaders have been screwed around forever. See if you can make this go away.”

Parental discretion required. The following contains sexual content that may not be appropriate for family viewing.

Discretely, he visited the team's locker room after their Monday practice.

“Great game, guys.”

“All the way!” the quarterback responded, thrusting his fist in the air. His team mates snickered.

“I guess you had one hell of a celebration. Going to the Finals. That's big, huh. . .”

Jeff didn't flinch. “I won't lie to you. We shared a few beers.”

“Understood. My lips are sealed. Hell, you gotta go somewhere with a rush like that. Beers, huh. Just you guys?”

“Yeah, just us and, ah yeah, I think a few of the girls were there too.”

“Girls?”

“You know, the cheerleaders. Our biggest fans.” The locker room had gotten quieter.

“Cause I've heard some things.”

She claimed that Jeff, the quarterback had declared “This is fucking unbelievable,” as he emptied his beer can and climbed on top of her. The others had cheered him on. The lights were out.

“Anybody in particular?”

“Not anybody I can think of. Hey, guys, can you think of anybody in particular helping knock a few back last Friday night?” Shuffling and nods. Eyes cast to the ground.

“Trudy?”

“No one who didn't want to be there.” Jeff looked him right in the eyes, without blinking.

Parental discretion required. The following contains violence and may not be appropriate for family viewing.

No guns. No weapons. Minimal signs of struggle.

She'd shared a beer or two. The guys were in a celebratory mood. At first it had been fun. Jeff had held her hand, asked her for a kiss. They were the center of attention. Then things got out of control. Instead of holding her hand, they were holding her down. She told her parents that, when she closed her eyes, she could still feel them on top of her, one after the other, feel them inside her. She complained of a dull ache in her belly.

Her father laid photos of the bruises on her hands and ankles on the guidance counsellors' desk. The bruises were the size of bulky fingers.

“They held her down and took turns.”

His words hung there. The guidance counsellor looked down at his desk. When he answered, it was very quietly, very carefully.

“But you didn't take her to the hospital? If this is what I think you are saying, you should have taken her right to the ER. I understand your concern, but, you gotta understand, I can't pursue this without evidence. Can't you see what a difficult position you are putting me in?”

The silence between them filled with static. Subtle calculations. Immoral deliberations.

“We don't want to put Trudy through that. Her mom and I have discussed this. The kid is pretty shook up.” Her father's was pleading with him now. It had been a long weekend. He had dark circles under eyes.

The counsellor's face softened. The sympathy that he had held so carefully in check was allowed to surface.

“Got you. We can handle this discretely if you'd like.”

No valor here. By noon, her father sat at a wooden conference table with the principal, the coach, the district lawyers and the girl's parents. Agreements were reached; settlements made.

Later, in the principal's office the coach promised to make his boys behave. "This never happened and, believe me, it will never happen again."

Watching police procedurals on TV that night, the guidance counselor studied the rating posted before each scene of the drama, advising parental discretion, listing objectionable content without further guidance on what to do with the information provided.

Outside, the waxing moon caused the stars to burn less brightly. He remembered that a pair of girl's panties still hung from the school's goal posts and made a note to have the ground's crew take it down first thing the next morning.

He turned off the television set and headed to bed.

By Kathryn Holzman



Silvino Gonzalez

 <http://goo.gl/IWw5G>
yourmung@gmail.com
mobile (+57) 312 5869685
silvino gonzález morales
FOTOGRAFÍA & DISEÑO