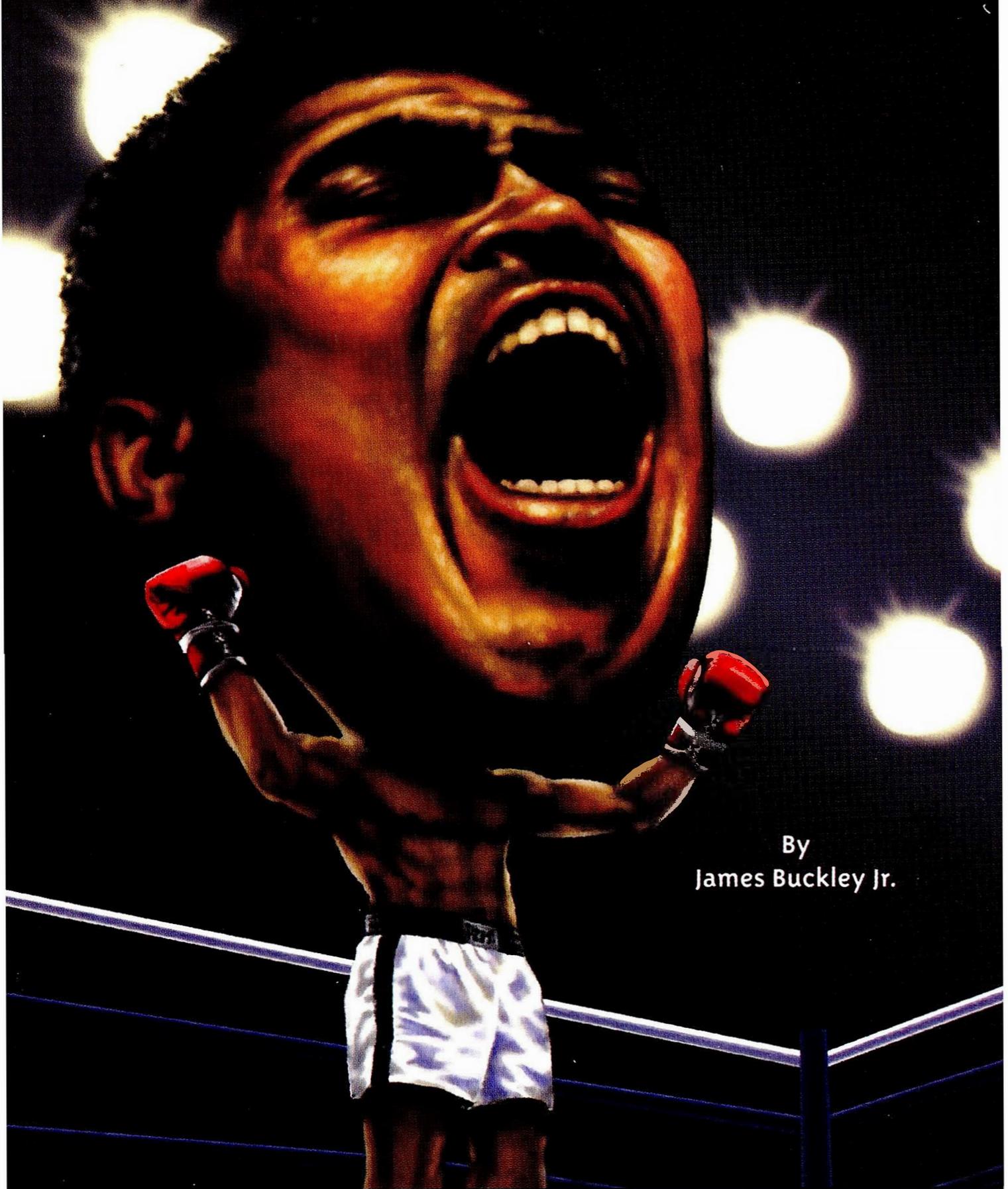


The New York Times Best-Selling Series

Who Is Muhammad Ali?



By
James Buckley Jr.

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By James Buckley Jr.
Illustrated by Stephen Marchesi

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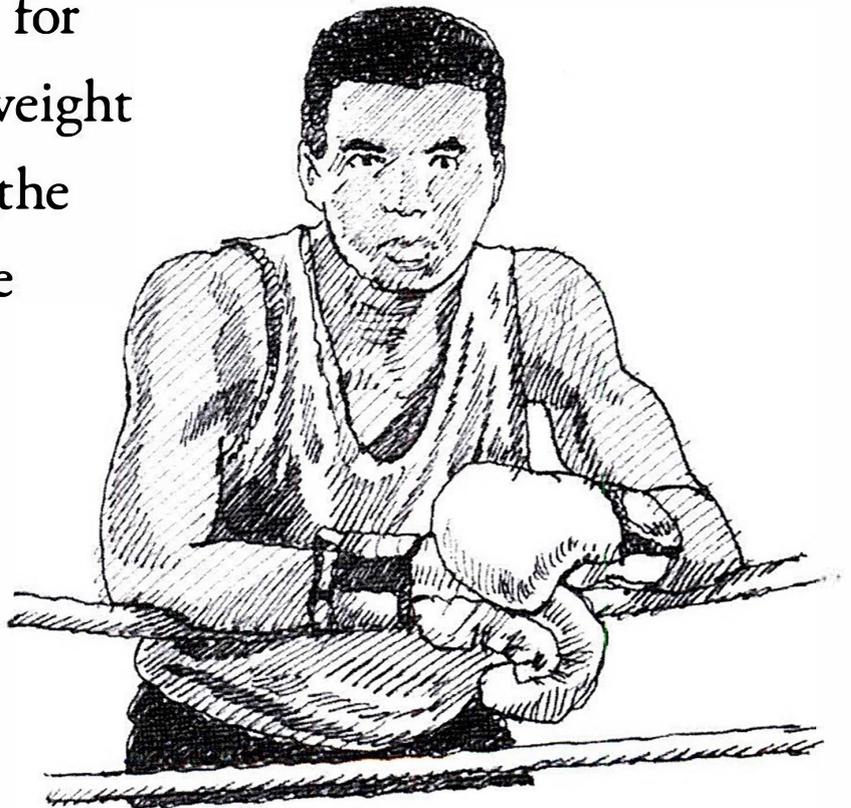
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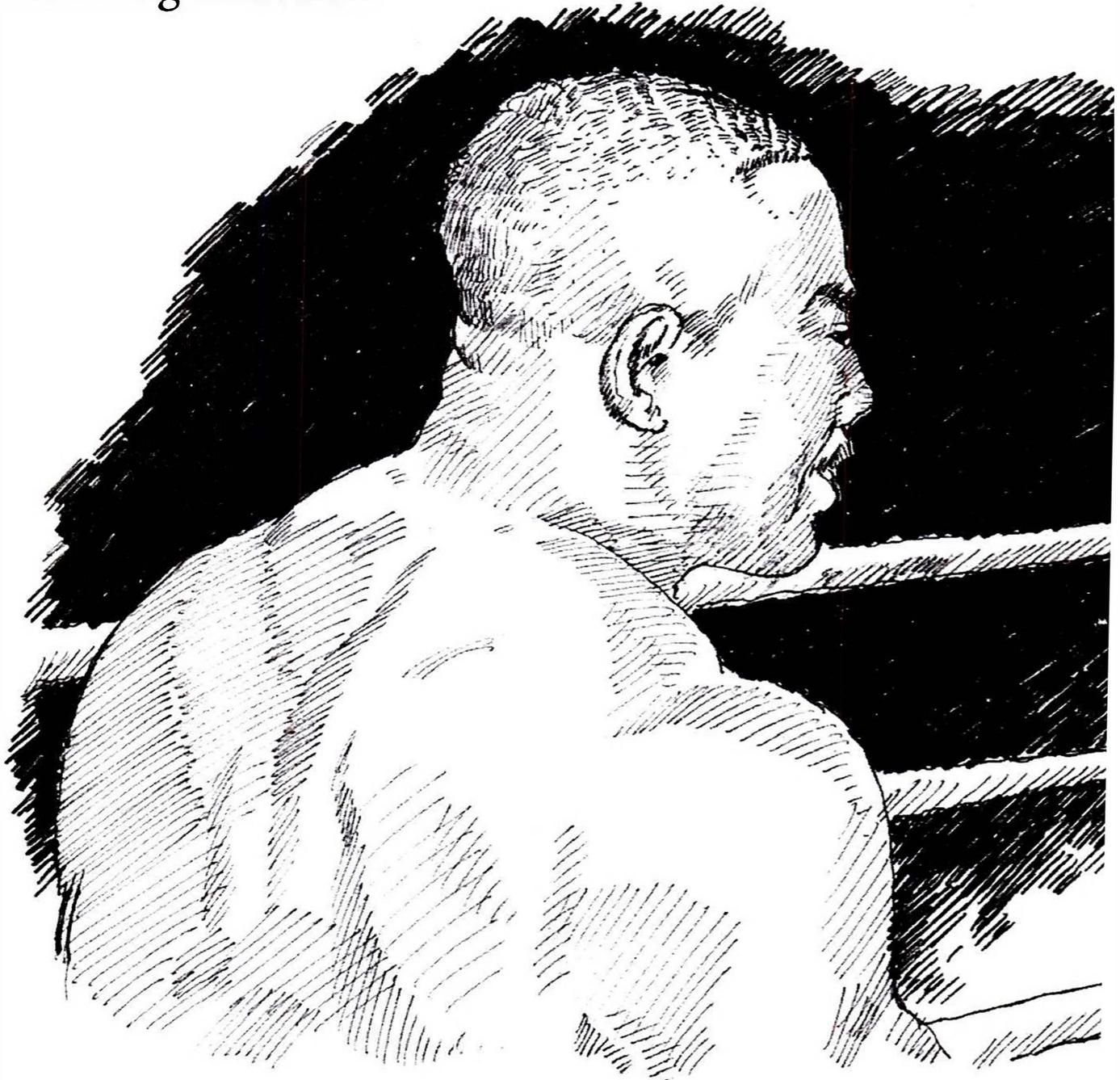
Who Is Muhammad Ali?

Cassius Clay liked to shock people. He was a boxer who liked to brag about how great he was. He liked to show off to get attention and sometimes spoke in poetic rhymes. And he liked to win.

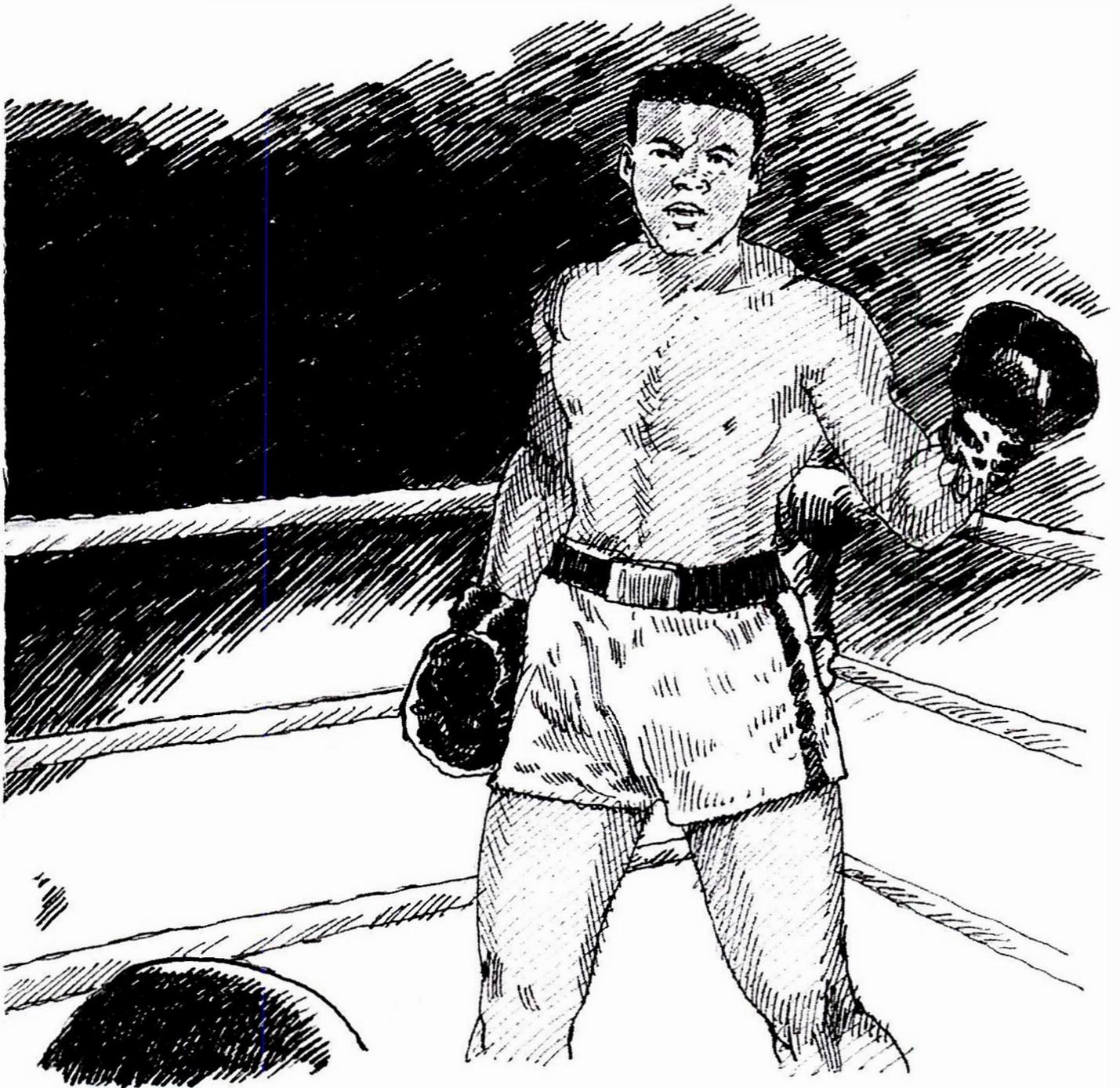
But he was only twenty-two years old. He had never fought for the world heavyweight championship—the most coveted title in boxing. He was considered to be fast, but not quite tough enough.



Sonny Liston was the champion. He had held on to his championship title for nearly two years. He was powerful, experienced, hard-hitting, and fierce. Many other boxers were afraid to get into the ring with him.



On February 25, 1964, a boxing match took place in Miami Beach, Florida, between the “Louisville Lip”—as Clay was known—and the powerful champ, Liston.

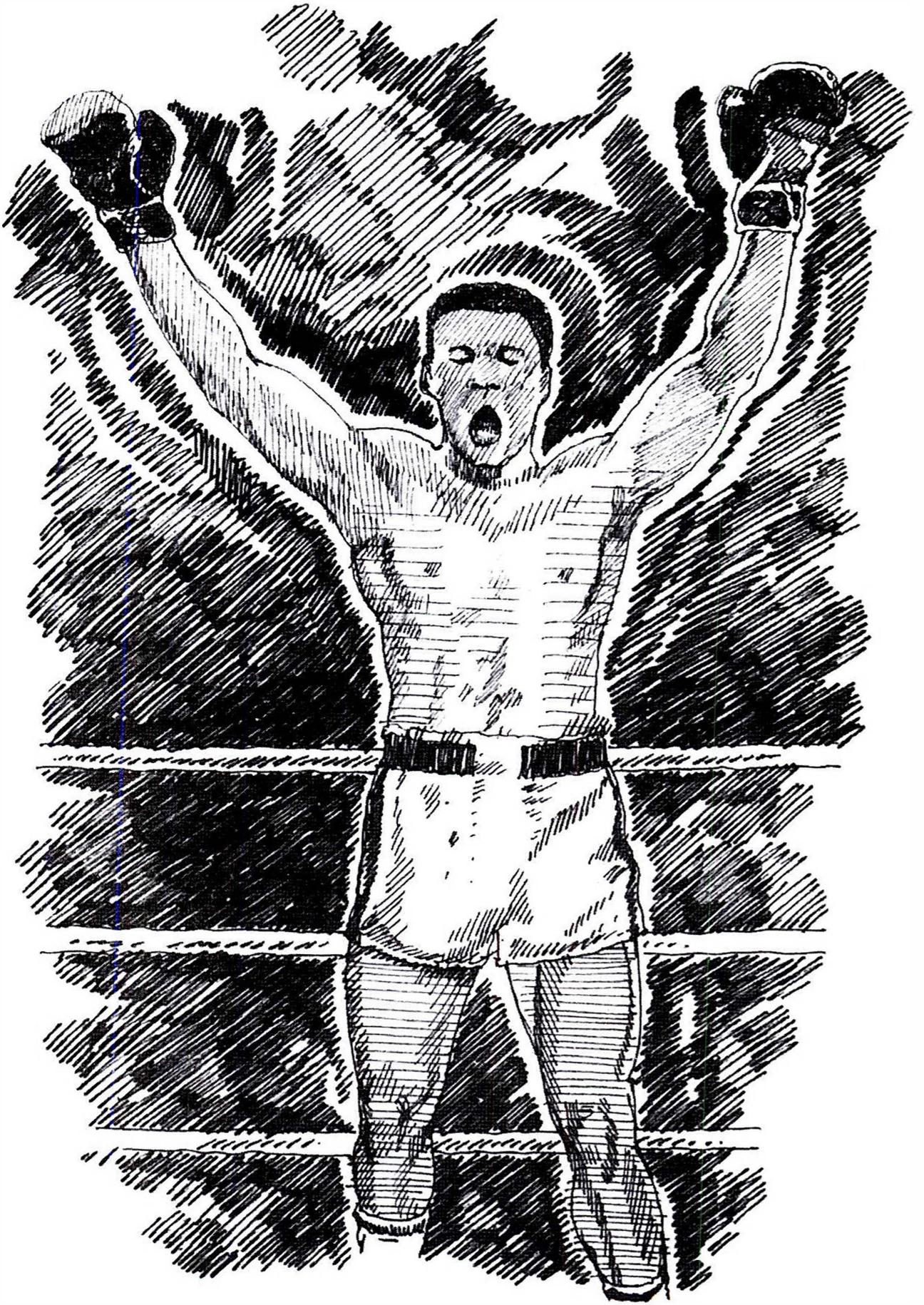


Once the fight began, Liston tried to overpower Clay. But Cassius moved quickly and danced away from the big man's punches. As the rounds went by, thirty-two-year-old Sonny Liston grew tired. His legs felt heavy. Clay, meanwhile, continued to move with grace and speed, darting in to hit Liston again and again.

After six rounds, Liston was worn out. He could not come out to meet Clay for the seventh round. The fight was over! Cassius Clay had won!

Clay erupted from his own corner and leaped onto the ropes around the ring. "I shook up the world!" he shouted as people filled the ring to celebrate. "I shook up the world!" By defeating Sonny Liston, Clay became the heavyweight boxing champion of the world.

Soon after, Cassius Clay shocked his family and the world again when he changed his religion from Christianity to Islam, and his name to Muhammad Ali.



As the years went by, Ali would be a champion time and again. He would go on to surprise people, both in and out of the ring. Through it all, he would show the same unique style and courage he had shown in 1964. After his big win against Sonny Liston, he yelled out to the crowd, "I am the greatest!"

In the years that followed, he proved it.

Chapter 1

Life in Louisville

He became world famous with the name Muhammad Ali, but he was born Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr. on January 17, 1942, in Louisville, Kentucky.

“We called him ‘GG’ when he was born,” said his mother, Odessa Clay. “He used to say ‘gee, gee, gee, gee.’” She said that Cassius was running and talking before most other babies. And he



was strong. He accidentally hit his mother in the mouth once, loosening one of her teeth.

In 1944, Cassius's brother, Rudolph, was born. Cassius looked out for his baby brother, and he would sometimes even try to stop his mom from spanking Rudolph, who was also known as Rudy.



Their mother raised them as Christian, attending a Baptist church. “Every Sunday, she dressed me up, took me and my brother to church, and taught us the way she thought was right,” Cassius said later in his life.

When the boys were a bit older, their father, also named Cassius, would bring them along on his job painting signs. When they weren't working with their dad or at school, the boys played together. They loved playing marbles and touch football. Cassius was a very fast runner. He would sometimes race the school bus, running alongside as his friends cheered him on.

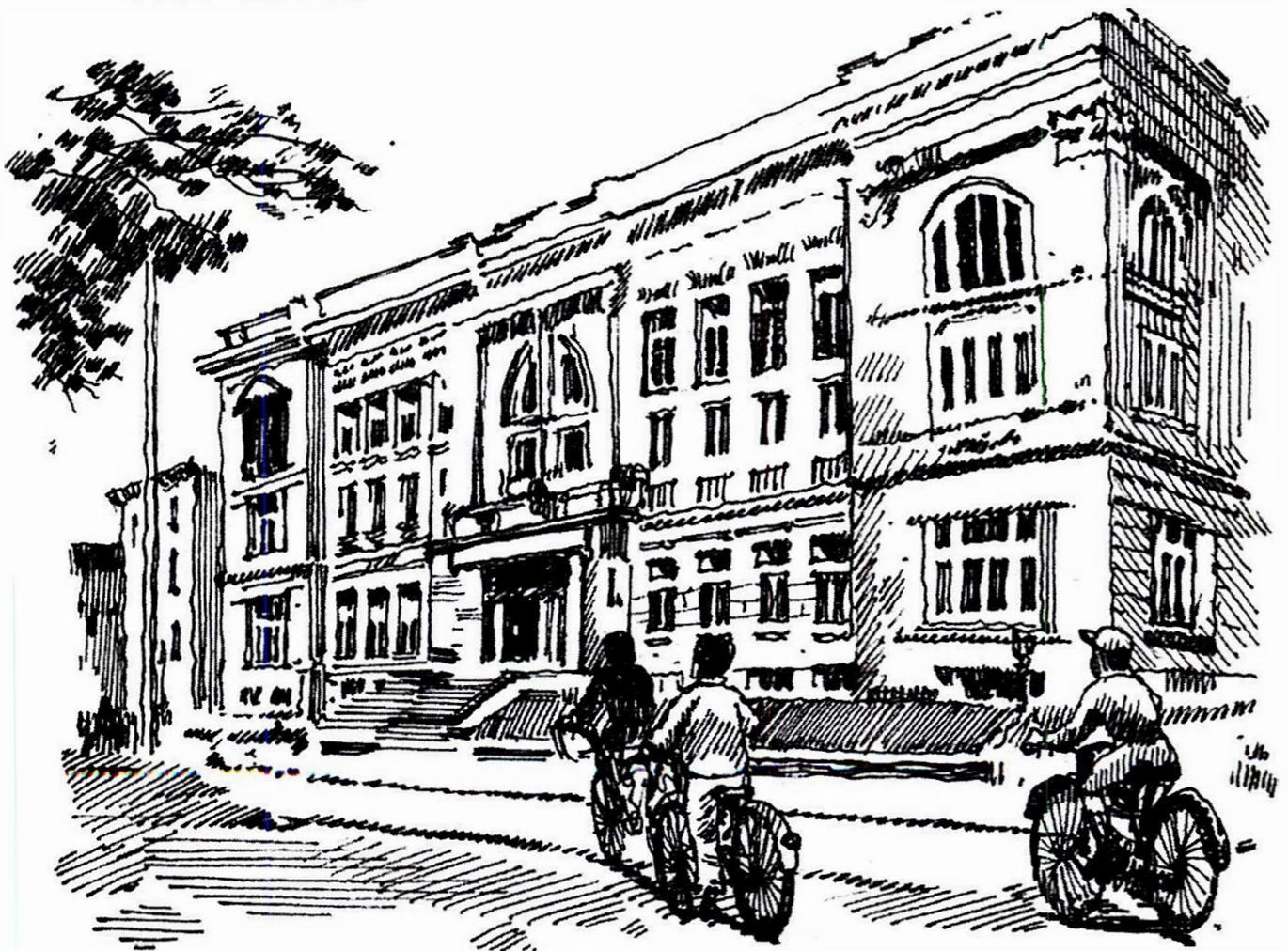




Together the two boys were full of energy. Friends called them the “Wrecking Crew,” since something always seemed to break when they were around. Cassius was very outgoing, happy to laugh and talk with anyone. “By the time he was four, he had all the confidence in the world,” his mother remembered. The brothers could find plenty to do in their own neighborhood, but they knew not to go to certain parts of Louisville. In America in the 1940s and 1950s, especially in the South,

black and white people often did not mix. Many white people felt that blacks should be separate from whites. Southern states like Kentucky even had laws that said black people could not swim in public pools or go to school with white children. Cassius grew up in a divided America, and it was something he never forgot.

In 1954, when Cassius was twelve years old, he and his friends rode their bikes to Louisville's Columbia Auditorium to see the Louisville Home Show.



THE FIRST CASSIUS M. CLAY

THE FIRST CASSIUS MARCELLUS CLAY WAS A WHITE MAN BORN IN 1810 IN KENTUCKY. THOUGH HIS FATHER OWNED SLAVES, YOUNG CLAY WAS AGAINST SLAVERY. WHEN HE GREW UP, HE SPOKE



OUT AGAINST IT. HE PUBLISHED AN ANTI-SLAVERY NEWSPAPER CALLED THE *TRUE AMERICAN*.

HIS VIEWS WERE VERY UNPOPULAR IN THE SOUTH. HE WAS ATTACKED BY MOBS AND HIS FAMILY SUFFERED.

CLAY WORKED TO GET ABRAHAM LINCOLN ELECTED PRESIDENT IN 1860, AND DURING THE CIVIL WAR, HE LED A GROUP OF VOLUNTEER SOLDIERS WHO FOUGHT TO DEFEND WASHINGTON, DC. DURING AND AFTER THE WAR, HE SERVED AS AMERICA'S MINISTER TO RUSSIA. AFTER RETURNING TO THE UNITED STATES, HE WORKED FOR THE REPUBLICAN PARTY FOR MANY YEARS BEFORE HE DIED IN 1903.

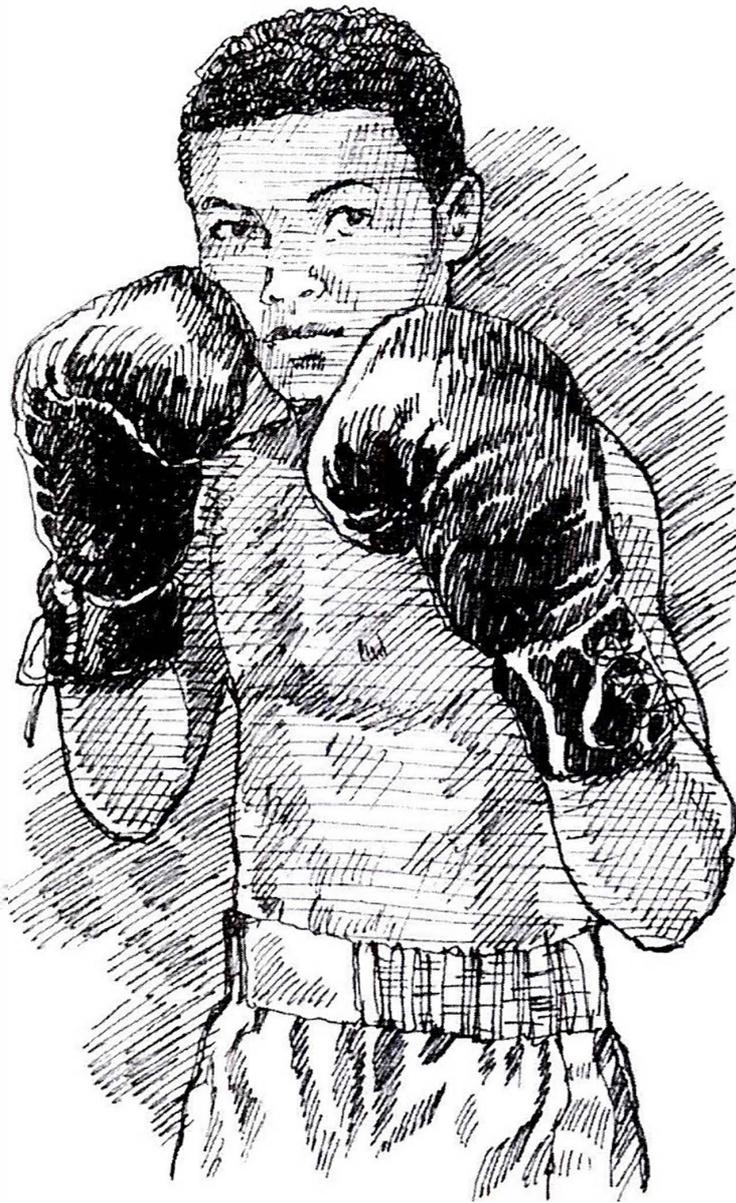
CLAY'S ANTI-SLAVERY VIEWS INSPIRED A BLACK FAMILY TO NAME THEIR SON AFTER HIM IN 1912. IN 1942, THAT MAN, CASSIUS CLAY SR., NAMED HIS SON CASSIUS CLAY JR.

In addition to furniture and appliance displays, the boys also found such delights as free popcorn. After they had wandered around the show for several hours, Cassius found that his bike, a beloved red-and-white Schwinn, had been stolen.

He was very upset. Someone said that a policeman was in the building, so Cassius went to report the theft. Cassius was crying. He said that he would like to hit whoever stole his bike.



Joe Martin, the policeman, was actually teaching a boxing class in the basement gym of the auditorium. He invited Cassius to try boxing in order to channel his anger with some degree of control. Cassius soon discovered that not only did he enjoy boxing, he was really good at it.



Not long after he began to train with Joe Martin, Cassius was featured on a local TV show called *Tomorrow's Champions*.

Cassius, who was still only twelve years old, took to the ring against a youngster named

Official Site

www.ali.com

Muhammad Ali and his family have an official website. It has a long biography, photos from his life, and news on his travels.

Who Is Muhammad Ali?

- A young boy named Cassius Clay
- A teenager who learned to float like a butterfly and sting like a bee
- The “greatest” heavyweight boxing champion of all time
- All of the above!

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