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A few hundred people attended this event, and different groups seemed to gather around specific players. Throughout the afternoon, a consistent rotation of people came up to Clay to talk to him and ask him questions. They wanted to take pictures with him and shake hands with him. I stayed right by his side the entire time, but as each minute passed, I could feel myself blending in more and more with the room, with the background. I started to feel like I wasn't even there. No one spoke to me, smiled at me, or even looked at me. While in Clay's shadow, I was invisible, unnoticed, and totally disregarded. I'd never felt this way before; I'd never been ignored. I was used to getting attention and being included in group conversations and activities. Now, however, I felt forgotten and overlooked. I stood quietly, watching as each person, delighted and amazed, came up to these players. The way that they looked at them with such admiration and respect thoroughly surprised me. What about the athletes made people so happy to be in their company? Just because of their athletic skill? Just because they were able to score points and win a game? I didn't understand the fascination. But what happened next topped it all off. A man suddenly surfaced from the crowd, carrying a large object. He was a fan who was undeniably in total awe of being in the presence of Clay. He told Clay that he had followed his college career and was pleased he would now be playing for Springfield's team. The fan then told Clay that he brought a gift for him, and he proceeded to unveil a portrait that he said he'd painted—apparently his own vision and image of Clay. The painting was an abstract collage of what looked like an athlete throwing a basketball toward a hoop and silhouettes of women in the background. As the man presented Clay with the portrait, he kept smiling at his work of art and then looking back at Clay. I assumed he was looking for

some sort of approval or pleased reaction from Clay. He seemed extremely proud of his painting and of what it portrayed—that an athlete would have women all over him. I thought it all was a bit weird, particularly as this man completely ignored me. Did he think it was okay to not only discount me but to give Clay a painting that showed him with a harem of women, right in front of me? I felt very uncomfortable that day, but this one act really made it worse. I could have easily walked out of the room, and I don't think anyone would have noticed, not even Clay. He was so busy talking with everyone, signing autographs, and taking pictures that he was really too busy for me. I understood that it was all part of his job, but the occasion was definitely an eye-opener for me and what I should expect in the future.

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