

Cyrus and Ali Shams

In "Cyrus and Ali Shams," the narrative unfolds in Indiana, USA, focusing on the complex relationship between Cyrus and his father, Ali. As a child, Cyrus is troubled by insomnia, which replaces his brother Ali's childhood sleep terrors. While Ali finds solace in sleep, Cyrus experiences a tumultuous mental cycle, replaying daily interactions and worrying about his uncertain status as an Iranian immigrant. He often fears deportation and grapples with the burden of his father's precarious visa situation, pushing him to mask his identity out of concern for safety.

Ali works diligently at a local chicken farm, where he earns additional income by arriving early, providing for the two of them. Their relationship is marked by small joys—like the infamous Big Mouth Billy Bass that brings laughter amidst their challenges. Every Nowruz, they connect with Ali's brother-in-law Arash, who carries the weight of traumatic experiences from the Iran-Iraq War. He played a unique role, providing comfort to dying soldiers by appearing as an angel, but his wartime trauma has left him isolated in his own struggles with PTSD.

Ali's coping mechanism involves gin, contrasting with Cyrus's sleepless nights, where he finds ways to keep his mind occupied through imaginative dialogues with characters he admires. These mental exercises help him drift into sleep, offering a temporary escape. When Cyrus leaves for college, he initially avoids drinking but soon succumbs, using alcohol to bridge the gaps of loneliness and grief following his father's sudden death during Cyrus's sophomore year.

Posthumously, Ali's presence haunts Cyrus, who discovers that his father's purpose revolved around providing for him. The memorial at the chicken farm is a painful reminder of his solitude. As Cyrus spirals deeper into substance use, his relationships blur, but alcohol remains a steady, comforting presence in his life—a "faithful soulmate." After years of dependency, Cyrus's struggle with insomnia resurfaces, forcing him to revisit creative outlets from his past to regain some semblance of peace and reconnect with lost memories, including those of his parents. In the midst of darkness, this journey becomes a pivotal exploration of identity, trauma, and the quest for belonging .