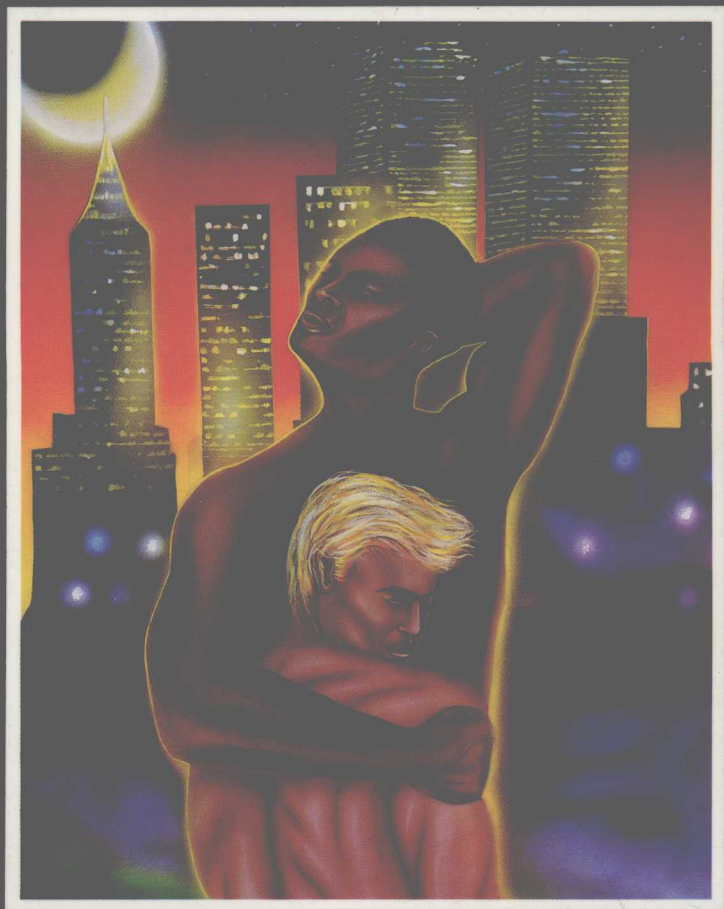


# FRAGMENTS *That Remain*



**STEVEN CORBIN**

# **FRAGMENTS** *That Remain*

a novel by  
**STEVEN CORBIN**

**Boston: Alyson Publications, Inc.**

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*for*  
*CARLOS PENICHET*  
*1946 — 1990*

# *Acknowledgments*

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Special thanks to my Band of Angels, who have been sent to love and nourish me unconditionally and who, in one way or another, contributed to my struggle and survival:

Victoria Brownworth, Guy Corbin, Warren Corbin, Cara DeVito, Larry Ewing, Ross Farley, Bill Flanagan, Winifred "Fred" Hervey, Tonja Jefferson, Dorothy Love, Patrick McCollum, Terry McMillan, Donald O'Hare, Jr., Martin T. O'Hare, Yvonne Corbin-O'Hare, Bill Parks, Douglas Sadownick, Mark Simmons, Sheila Simms, Mitch Walker, and Bobby Watson.

# *Contents*

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Sunrise :	9
Skylar :	14
Althea :	20
Kendall :	28
Howard :	37
Evan :	43
Christmas Eve, 1962 :	52
Interview :	63
Stormy Weather :	73
Us and Them :	80
Soaps and Commercials :	88
Separate Ways :	97
Rude Awakening :	109
Summer Nights :	120
Beginnings and Endings :	130
IMRU :	139
Roommates and Other Nightmares :	151
Neon Shadows on the Blue Meringue :	161
First Impressions :	168
I Have a Dream :	177
Althea: The Mother :	184
Withdrawal Pains :	195
Thespian :	205
When Cover Gets Blown :	214
Cul-de-Sac :	221
Before the Fall :	232

Evan: The Lover : 237  
West of the Hudson : 243  
Friday Night, 1969 : 251  
Kendall: The Brother : 259  
Where's My Forty Acres and My Mule? : 267  
One Night, I Awoke : 274  
Howard: The Father : 282  
New Beginnings : 289  
Epitaphs and Other Lies : 299  
Skylar: The Son : 307  
Second Wind : 314

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# Sunrise

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SKYLAR IS TOSSING AND TURNING when he first smells smoke.

He blinks repeatedly to focus in the darkness. Sniffs the acrid air, noticing clouds of smoke wafting through the cracks of the closed door. The red numbers of the digital clock on his nightstand glow 1:18 a.m.

"Oh my God!" he shouts, tumbling out of bed, groping through darkness and shadows. "Shit!" he whispers, wringing his hand after touching the doorknob, unaware of its intense heat. He runs into the bathroom, clicks on the light, grabs a towel, and thrusts it under the cold-water faucet, inadvertently knocking medicine bottles, toothbrushes, and dental floss out of his way. His body tingles from the rush of heat enveloping the room. He is terrified of opening the door. But far more terrified of leaving it closed.

Loud, crackling flames, the intimidating height of the doorway, leap out and lick at him like spookhouse pranks. He covers his nose and mouth with the damp towel. Through flickering waves of fire and thickening smoke, he sees his invalid father rolled on his side, his back facing Skylar, the wheelchair at the foot of the bed. He lies immobile, lifeless. Skylar can't tell if he's dead, or unconscious.

"Daddy!" Skylar yells, the roar of the flames drowning him out. He must outwit the blaze to rescue his paraplegic father. He stiffens at the inevitability of having to enter the room.

When he spots an opening, he half lunges forward. But pulls back when the dancing flames merge. His forehead drips sweat from heat and anxiety, his black face turning blacker from the dingy clouds. He coughs and chokes violently, his chest inflating, lungs exploding. He paces quickly, on the verge of panic, his mind desperate for a strategy to penetrate the blazing room. His father remains immobile.



He stops pacing. Dizzy from the inhalation of thick fumes, he stands frozen, helpless, incapable of movement. His feet feel one with the floorboards, his alertness waning. Ready to jump through the raging flames devouring the door frame, his rubbery body begins a graceful sway, both arms blocking his face, when the director yells, "Cut!"



A loud buzzer sounds. A bullhorn amplifying the director's voice commands cast and crew to break for ten. Silence segues to chatter and laughter. Skylar remains on his mark, the angle of his head submissive. The impatient actor portraying his father leaps out of bed, hissing through clenched teeth. The cinematographer, assistant director, and script girl sigh. The director softly touches Skylar's shoulder. He winces. Pandemonium subsides as everyone empties the set, milling outside the building. It is quiet again and Skylar is alone with the director.

"Is there a problem?" the director asks, his gaze fixed on the cigarette being crushed beneath his toe.

"No," Skylar replies, unable to face him.

"This is the ninth take and you can't walk through the flames." Glancing over his shoulder, he lights another cigarette, which bobs in his mouth as he speaks. "I assure you, the costume is guaranteed fireproof."

"I know."

"And it's not too late for the stuntman to complete the take—"

"No," Skylar replies, more abruptly than he meant to. But he will not be deterred on this. "I insist on doing it ... myself."

"Are you afraid of fire?" He faces Skylar for the first time.

"What does that mean?"

"Just a question. Relax." He pulls deeply on the cigarette, then speaks, the smoke escaping his lips in short bursts. "I've got a schedule, a budget to adhere to—"

"I know, I know." Skylar still avoids eye contact. "Just give me time. I know I can do it." He doesn't care to discuss it any further. "I'll be in my trailer. See you in ten?" He walks away.

The sun blinds him when he steps outside the soundstage. All eyes gang up on him as he heads toward his trailer. No one speaks. They just look, exchange embarrassed glances with each other, and continue their conversations, their eyes trailing the principal actor.