

## I.D.

A man wakes up feeling terrified. He has no idea what has scared him. He opens his eyes and stares at the ceiling. He does not know what is happening to him. He grabs the bedclothes, holding on tight, as if he were in danger of falling off. This is how he feels, like he is falling through space, out of control.

He tries to calm himself. He looks around with frightened eyes. He is in a hotel room. He sees a bag on the floor, a suit hanging up, a radio, a bottle of whiskey, almost full, and one used glass. It is a perfectly normal hotel room—but he has never seen it before. He has no recollection of checking in, hanging up his suit, drinking a whiskey or going to bed.

Panic overwhelms him again as he realises he cannot remember *anything at all*.

He opens his mouth and yells: “Who am I?”

He looks in the mirror and sees a fit man in his thirties, tall and dark-haired, with regular features.

Inside the pocket of the blue business suit is a tailor’s label with his name on it: Dr Mark Spencer Michaelson.

The hotel stationery tells him he is in Washington, DC. A plane ticket and a typed itinerary in his case tell him he is due to fly from Andrews Air Force Base to Huntsville, Alabama, in a couple of hours.

He gets dressed and checks out. In the cab on the way to Andrews he looks at the newspaper and discovers the date. It is 1 August 1957.

At Huntsville, a chauffeur in army uniform is waiting for him. “Office or home, Dr Michaelson?” He decides to go home.

He lives in a large house. A uniformed maid opens the door. In the living-

room is a beautiful woman who must be his wife. He says: "The strangest thing has happened. I've lost my memory. I don't even know your name."

She tells him she is Jackie. She calls him Spence.

He finds her wary. Something is wrong. Maybe his loss of memory has spooked her. But when he showers she asks him to make love to her. After initial awkwardness, it is good. When it is all over, she cries, but will not say why.

Spence realises he has a bad marriage. But it will take him longer to figure out why.

We flash back to their courtship. Both Tess and Spence come from upscale families: Spence from New York bankers, Tess from the Southern aristocracy. They met at Princeton where Spence studied law and Tess art history. They dated, split up during the war when Spence joined the military, then met again and married after the war.

Spence is now a civilian scientist working for the US army. He is part of the Army Ballistic Missile Agency (ABMA), based at Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, directed by legendary German rocket scientist Wernher von Braun.

It is International Geophysical Year (July 1957 to December 1958) and both the US and the USSR have announced that they will put satellites into space. The Redstone missile has several successful launches to its credit. Unfortunately, for political reasons the Secretary of Defense has chosen the relatively untried Vanguard missile, developed by the Naval Research Laboratory, as the vehicle for the American satellite.

So strong is the feeling in the army that a (real-life) officer at Redstone, Col. John C. Nickerson, Jr, has recently been court-martialled for releasing to the press secret documents about missiles including a memorandum trashing the Defense Secretary's decision. Nickerson pleaded guilty but said in

mitigation that he was acting from patriotic motives. He received a light sentence.

Spence sees the base doctor and tells him what has happened. The doc is way out of his depth. He arranges for Spence to see a neurophysiologist specialising in memory, Dr Teresa ("Tess") Wiley.

Tess reminds Spence that they are old friends. In the war they were both assigned to the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the precursor of the CIA. Run by the legendary William "Wild Bill" Donovan, OSS was staffed by a mixture of communists and other left wingers, republican businessmen, and well-dressed young men and women from America's best families. It was famous (and much resented) for its lavish budget and its independence from the normal military chain of command.

As well as Tess, Spence's circle of friends included a brilliant left-wing Jewish intellectual, Bernie Simons, and Anthony Corel, the son of a mobster.

Tess had an affair with Anthony, but broke up with him because he wanted her to marry him and leave the OSS and have babies. Then she slept with Spence and became pregnant. In desperation, she turned to Anthony, who arranged her abortion and paid for it. Consequently, both Tess and Spence feel indebted to Anthony.

Spence meets a woman who kisses him lasciviously and obviously expects him to sleep with her. He realises she must be his mistress. No wonder his marriage is troubled.

He avoids sleeping with the mistress and reflects on his situation. His loss of memory enables him to look objectively at what he is doing. He does not want to live a life of deceit and he is puzzled about how he got himself into this place.

*Spence immediately suspicious of Tess. He investigates and learns about her work on mind control.*

He begins to suspect that Tess does not want him to regain his memory. When he tells her that things are coming back to him, he sees fear in her eyes. He discovers that in the war the two of them worked on (real-life) OSS experiments on mind control. They tested drugs, including LSD, on prisoners-of-war to see whether they could be induced to betray secrets. He now wonders if Tess, working maybe with the CIA, has deliberately caused his amnesia, for some purpose he cannot guess at.

On Friday 4 October, America and the world are shocked to learn that the Russians have successfully launched a satellite, Sputnik. It orbits the earth emitting a beeping signal which is broadcast on every news show. Many people believe, wrongly, that this gives the Russians the ability to rain down nuclear bombs on America.

By coincidence, the Defense Secretary, Neil McElroy, is visiting Huntsville that day. Spence is present during a (real-life) conversation in which von Braun tells McElroy that the Navy's missile will never make it. "We can put up a satellite in sixty days," von Braun says. McElroy rebuffs him.

Spence goes to his mountain cabin. When he opens the freezer he finds a dead body. He is shocked and troubled. He thinks he killed the man. But why? And who is he?

On 3 November 1957, the Russians successfully launch another satellite, Sputnik 2, containing a dog. On 6 December the navy launches the Vanguard, which burns up on the launch pad, deepening the sense of disgrace felt by many Americans. At last the Defense Secretary turns to von Braun, and on 31 January 1958 the Redstone missile, now named Jupiter, successfully launches America's satellite.

CIA work on "mind control" is continuing

Spence assumes Tess's motives are malign, but the truth is that she is protecting him. She knows that if he regains his memory the CIA will assassinate him.