



Author's Note

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"In wartime, truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies." — Winston Churchill

"The historian will tell you what happened. The novelist will tell you what it felt like." —E. L. Doctorow

I first met Kate Summersby in her 1976 memoir, *Past Forgetting*, which I read in the 1980s. The book challenged my view of Eisenhower, the president of my childhood and young adult years. The bald, bland, inarticulate, golf-playing president actually had a *lover*? At the time, the fact that the Supreme Commander turned out to be impotent (not just once but twice in the book) seemed to me a marvelous example of dramatic irony. I even wondered whether Kay was at last getting even with him, snarkily, for dumping her at the end of the war. After all, Ike couldn't very well rise up out of his grave and say, "It is not true! I *did* have sex with that woman!"

Then, just a few years ago, I encountered Kay again. This time, she was played by Lee Remick in the DVD edition of the TV miniseries *Ike: The War Years*, which was widely advertised as "based on" *Past Forgetting*. The film bothered me. For one thing, the book's highly charged sex scenes had been deleted from the script, and the film's star-crossed lovers acted like two well-mannered adolescents conscious that Mom was looking on saying, "Now, kids, behave."

The lack of sexual tension was bad enough, but the real problem was the portrayal of Kay. Lee Remick's Kay was a charmingly kittenish version of Mary Tyler Moore, and her lines could have come straight from that comic-relief heroine of sixteen years of American sitcoms. (This may have been John

Eisenhower's idea; he is quoted years later as saying that Kay had been "the Mary Tyler Moore of headquarters, perky and cute.")

But a pert, sassy, comic-relief Kay doesn't carry enough emotional weight to make us believe that Robert Duvall's heroic General Ike could have fallen for her. Even more disturbingly, Remick's Kay of the film (and of Shavelson's later spinoff book) doesn't give Ike the chance to break it off. She takes care of that herself, telling him that he owes her nothing, that she won't hold him to promises made in the heat of battle. He is the war hero, free to go into his future unfettered. "I'm a big girl, Ike," she says, yielding the field. "I know when I'm out of my class."

But wait! This isn't the Kay of *Past Forgetting*, who was inexplicably and humiliatingly dumped by the man she had loved, who went back to his wife and the Pentagon with only a brutal letter to axe their affair. Of course, an adaptation is an adaptation and Hollywood is Hollywood. (Lee Remick herself once said she wouldn't make another Hollywood movie until Hollywood started making movies for grownups.) Still, it seemed to me that something had happened during the production of this film that made it necessary to massively rewrite the love affair and completely recast the main character to create a story that revised and trivialized and sanitized the love affair. I began to read, to ask questions, to dig into the Summersby story, which is also the story of the war in North Africa and Europe. Then I became fascinated by the way Kay's story has been told—and altered—in two memoirs, in film, in Eisenhower biographies, and more recently, in posts on the Internet.

The more I learned, the more I wanted to know, not just about Kay Summersby but about the man she had fallen in love with—Dwight Eisenhower—and the General's wife, Mamie. Who were Ike and Mamie before they became President and Mrs. Middle America? I began to sense that the golf-playing President and the Mamie-pink First Lady with the weird bangs were two very real people who had had a very hard time of it during a very hard war, and that their marriage had been seriously jeopardized by Ike's falling deeply in love with another woman.

This novel represents my effort to learn about those real people and their real wartime love affair. Writing historical fiction, I am always mindful that I am working along a continuum that places documented fact on one end and pure invention on the other, with many points between. As I wrote this book, I was dealing with things that really happened and things that might *also* have happened and occasionally with what happened instead.

For example, Ike and all of the characters in his wartime command are historical people. Their interactions and the settings in which they worked and fought are described as they appear in Kay's two memoirs, in Harry Butcher's minutely detailed war diary, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, and in the references listed in the bibliography. I have fictionalized Ike's role in the Darlan affair (exactly what part he played is not known) and throughout have created an Eisenhower consistent with the picture developed in Fred I. Greenstein's masterful study of Ike's duplicities and behind-the-scenes maneuvers, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, a book that gives us a very clear look at a man who played his cards close to the chest. "Ike is Don Corleone, the godfather," says Daun van Ee, an editor of the Eisenhower papers, speaking about Eisenhower's behind-the-scenes destruction of the political influence of Senator Joe McCarthy. "He knows how to take somebody out without leaving any fingerprints." [\[1\]](#)

I have portrayed Ike's 1936 dalliance with Marian Huff (his golf and bridge partner in Manila, of whom Mamie was very jealous) as a precursor to his affair with Kay. The key events of the developing romance with Kay—Ike's gift of Telek, Ike's gift of a uniform, Ike's taking her with him to North Africa, to Egypt, and to Europe after the Normandy invasion—are documented in one or both of Kay's memoirs and in Butcher's diary. Also true: King George's chilly snub, Winston Churchill's interest, and the desert picnic with FDR.

For Mamie's characterization, I have stayed close to the details that Susan Eisenhower gave us in her sympathetic biography of her grandmother, *Mrs. Ike: Memories and Reflections on the Life of Mamie Eisenhower*, and in several other First Lady biographies. I have somewhat fictionalized Ike's determinedly reassuring letters to her, but they are based on the real letters published in *Letters to Mamie*, which are indeed stilted, defensive, and thoroughly unconvincing. Where Kay Summersby was concerned, Ike's protestations must have caused Mamie a great many more doubts than they resolved—especially after Mamie realized that he had brought Kay to North Africa.

Also real: Mamie's 1979 interview with Barbara Walters; a copy is available at the Eisenhower Library. Mamie's comment about Ike's "old bald head" is reported by J. B. West, Chief Usher at the White House during the Eisenhowers' tenure there.^[2] Her reaction to *Ike: The War Years* ("Oh, how ugly they've made me look!") was reported in the *Indiana Gazette* after her death.^[3] And her well-known jealousy of Ann Whitman, Eisenhower's Oval Office secretary, is documented in *Confidential Secretary*, Robert Donovan's biography of Whitman, which also reports Mamie's efforts to get Whitman fired during the 1952 campaign. "I tried to keep out of Mrs. Eisenhower's way," Whitman said after she was finally forced to leave Ike. "It was clear that she did not want me around."^[4]

Mamie's friend Ruth Butcher is real, but to serve the fiction, I have invented a number of Greek-chorus friends. They give voice to Washington and Stateside fact and opinion and allow me to get some of the goings-on in the Pentagon on the record. Cookie, Diane, and Pamela are fictional creations, and their discussion in chapter 20 of the arrival of Ike's divorce letter at the Pentagon is fictional. However, Doris Fleeson is real, and her *Evening Star* column about Kay's Washington visit—which I have quoted accurately—was published at the time Kay was there. Fleeson was a highly regarded journalist, and her column could very easily have produced the fictional result I have described in that chapter: Mamie's call to General Marshall, asking him to keep Kay in Germany, and Marshall's order to Eisenhower, directing him to return immediately to the States.

Now to the complicated matter of Eisenhower's "divorce" letter and Marshall's reply. In the fictional conversation in chapter 20, I have invented "Marv's" reported glimpse of Marshall's scolding cable to Ike. But I based this incident on a real event related by Eisenhower biographer Jean Edward Smith. Garrett Mattingly, a Pulitzer Prize-winning Columbia University history professor, served as a junior naval officer in the Washington censor's office during the war and was assigned to read outgoing cables. In the early 1950s, well before Truman placed the letters into the public record, Mattingly told Columbia colleagues that he had seen Marshall's cable to Eisenhower in Germany.^[5]

In addition to Mattingly's corroboration of Truman's claim, there are other confirmations. Dr. John R. Steelman, a close Truman aide, said in a 1996 interview that he actually *accompanied* Marshall to the Oval Office to discuss Eisenhower's divorce letter with the president. (Truman's calendar contains two meetings between Marshall and Truman where this issue might have been discussed: May 16 and May 28, 1945. Steelman is not shown to be present, but since he was frequently in the Oval Office, he would not necessarily have been listed.^[6]) At the meeting, Truman instructed Marshall to burn the correspondence. Steelman recalls, however, that Marshall told him that "he was going to put it in the files, because he [Marshall] didn't trust Eisenhower as much as Truman did."^[7] That is, there was some doubt in Marshall's mind as to whether Ike would end his relationship with Kay. He obviously wanted the correspondence in case Ike defied him and went on with the divorce.

In 1973, after *Plain Speaking* was published, General Harry Vaughan, Truman's military aide, told an AP reporter that at Truman's order, he had retrieved the documents from the file "to keep them out of the hands of Eisenhower's political opponents" (in the 1952 run-up to the GOP nomination) and gave them to the president.^[8] Jean Edward Smith surmises that Truman destroyed them and finds evidence that Eisenhower knew what he had done and was grateful.^[9] Stanley Weintraub sums it up wryly: "Documents, if any, have disappeared. That itself was not unique in the self-protective bureaucracy."^[10]

In any event, copies may have been made, for both the Taft primary campaign staff and the Democratic campaign staff threatened to use them in the 1952 election. ^[11] I haven't been able to find any evidence that the Taft campaign actually had the letters. But years later, syndicated columnist Jack Anderson wrote that the late Senator Olin Johnston (D-SC) told him that the Democrats had compiled a dossier on the Eisenhower-Summersby affair. Johnston claimed to have personally seen Marshall's correspondence "admonishing Ike to forget Miss Summersby." ^[12] Columnist Drew Pearson also refers to Eisenhower's divorce plans in his diary entry for December 4, 1952, when he notes a conversation with John Bennett, a Pearson staffer who reported that he had talked with Eisenhower in Paris in late 1951. Ike had wanted to know "what the effect on the public would be" if word got out about his affair with Kay. Eisenhower "seemed chiefly worried because apparently Mamie didn't know he contemplated a divorce," according to Bennett, and feared that General George Patton's letters to his wife might contain references to the affair. ^[13]

Some biographers have attempted to explain Truman's startling announcement in *Plain Speaking* by saying that the former president confused the divorce correspondence with another exchange of letters between Eisenhower and Marshall regarding Mamie. On June 4, 1945, nearly a month after V-E Day, Eisenhower wrote Marshall asking permission to bring Mamie to Europe. The wartime separation, he said, was causing serious personal problems for him and his wife. Four days later, Marshall sent a sympathetic refusal, saying that the request couldn't be approved when other similar requests were denied. Jean Edward Smith remarks that, in fact, this incident actually offers "tangential corroboration" of the divorce correspondence. He concludes that Eisenhower was using this letter to signal to Marshall that he had given up his plan to divorce his wife. ^[14] Stanley Weintraub, too, finds the letter "suspicious on its surface," especially since Mamie would have to travel by sea (she refused to fly), as well as give up her apartment and store her belongings, only a few months before Ike was due to return to the United States. ^[15]

My conclusion: at the time of V-E Day, Ike did intend to divorce Mamie and marry Kay. Marshall—a strong father figure, as well as Ike's boss—persuaded him otherwise. Ike signaled his altered intention with his June 4 request to bring his wife to Germany. Ike hadn't told Kay of his intention to marry her, so he didn't have to retract an offer or a promise.

But he hadn't necessarily agreed to give her up, either—he had only agreed not to marry her. I believe that, as late as November 1945, he intended to bring Kay to the States with the rest of his staff. In fact, it may have been his decision to send her to Washington in October 1945 to pursue her citizenship that set the subsequent events in motion.

With regard to Ike's impotence, as it is portrayed in the two "failure" scenes in *Past Forgetting*: as a writer of fiction, I have a wider latitude than a historian or a biographer. I feel that both Ike and Kay deserve to wrest at least a little passionate pleasure out of those dark days, so I have given them that, at times and places where I think it might have been possible. In offering this fictional satisfaction to my fictional lovers, I have trusted to my own romantic imagination and to the testimony of Sigrid Hedin, the first ghostwriter on *Past Forgetting*, who told a reporter that Kay told her the affair was consummated and that she (Sigrid) had the manuscript to prove it. (I can't help but wonder who might have bought Hedin's manuscript, how much was paid for it, and what happened to it. That's a story in itself.) I'm guessing that Hedin was removed from the project for the same reason Shavelson was removed as director of the film. Each of them had a different story to tell, and they were paid not to tell it.

To go a little further: I believe the impotence was a fabrication, either by Barbara Wyden (the second ghostwriter) or the Simon and Schuster editor—and more likely the latter. The publisher was caught in a bind. On the one hand, given the whispers and insinuations that had grown up around Ike and Kay over the years, readers were expecting a story with at least a modest dose of steamy sex. An entirely chaste memoir would have felt both disappointing and evasive—and wouldn't have done much to settle

the did-they-or-didn't-they question. Further, it might have been difficult to explain to an editorial board why an editor paid today's equivalent of a quarter of a million dollars for such an unsatisfactory manuscript. On the other hand, there was the pressure from the Eisenhowers and their friends—the same kind of pressure that John Eisenhower brought to bear on ABC Television that resulted in the removal of all but a whiff of romance from *Ike: The War Years*

Faced with this dilemma, Simon and Schuster might have considered canceling the project: the author was, after all, out of the picture. But the publisher had already invested a substantial sum in the advance. What's more, the subsidiary magazine, paperback, film, and foreign rights had already been sold, and at very nice prices indeed. *Past Forgetting* was too ripe a plum not to pick. So somebody came up with a solution that even Bill Clinton might have envied: Ike did *not* have sex with that woman because he couldn't.

In my novel, the lawyer Kay consulted is a fiction, but both the ghostwriter and the editor are real people. Barbara Wyden continued to work as a ghostwriter into the 1990s. (I was fortunate to locate and obtain copies of her notes on this project, but they tell us nothing about who might have made changes to the book.) The editor's visit to the dying Kay Summersby actually happened. Michael Korda, who was an editor at Simon and Schuster at the time, lays claim to that visit in his 2007 biography of Eisenhower, remarking that he "had the pleasure of talking briefly to Kay Summersby Morgan shortly before her death, and published her posthumous memoir." ^[16] In the same chapter, he relates the anecdote about his stepmother knocking down his father with Lady Mountbatten's car, which his fictional counterpart shares with Kay. I have, however, invented that conversation and fictionalized the editor/publisher's role in the production of Summersby's memoir. I have no idea who is responsible for any deviations from the "truth" of the affair, or what those might be.

Regarding my depiction of the circumstances around the writing of Kay's first memoir, *Eisenhower Was My Boss*: Colonel McAndrews is fictional, and the nondisclosure document is pure invention. But Kay's mother would later claim to a reporter that her daughter had "General Eisenhower's approval before agreeing to write the book." ^[17] And after Kay's death a friend hinted that Kay had signed "some papers" that kept her from telling the whole truth about the affair. ^[18] It is logical to assume that she signed such an agreement, especially since some of Eisenhower's staffers were disturbed by the publication of Harry Butcher's gossipy memoir, which mixed military report and personal commentary in a way that required Ike to write apologetic letters to Churchill and Charles de Gaulle. The question of the affair aside, there would have been other very real concerns about what military secrets she might reveal. Kay, a British citizen, had been privy to some of Eisenhower's most sensitive wartime discussions and correspondence. Her book was potentially a bombshell, and Ike's staff at the Pentagon would have wanted to get out in front of the situation.

Telek and Telegraph Cottage are real, of course, and there's no reason to doubt Kay's explanation of Telek's odd name. Kay's connection with the cottage is real, as is its code name—Da-de-da, Morse for the letter K—that Butcher reports in his diary. ^[19]

I decided to include Kay's postwar biography as a nonfiction epilogue to the novel because her life after her three years with Eisenhower is virtually unknown, and because I thought it might answer some of the questions that the novel inevitably raises. Perhaps it can help us understand something more about why and how Kay first told one kind of truth, then another—and what happened to the "truth" after she was no longer around to defend it. The effort to erase her from the General's life and cleanse the General of any hint of an illicit relationship with her is a part of the postwar creation of Ike the heroic figure, crafted by those who wanted to assist and ensure his ascension to the presidency.

The mature, postwar Dwight Eisenhower was fully his own man. But he was also a commodity that many people wanted to exploit and a symbol that some needed to protect. Kay Summersby was never

a threat to the General; she cared too much for him to want to do him harm. But her intentions aside, she remained both a real and an imagined threat to him—even after both he and she were gone.

Geraldine Brooks wrote, "The thing that most attracts me to historical fiction is taking the factual record as far as it is known, using that as scaffolding, and then letting imagination build the structure that fills in those things we can never find out for sure." There is a great deal we will never know for sure about Kay, Ike, Mamie, and the triangular relationship that existed during the darkest days of the worst war the world has ever seen. But fiction is that path that brings us to the inner life, into the heart that is hidden and ultimately unknowable behind the closed curtain of actions and events. If this fictional work leads you to want to explore the real lives of these real people further—at least as far, that is, as the histories and biographies will allow—that is my reward.

As always, I owe a great deal to the scholars whose work has helped me—a very great many, when it comes to Eisenhower and World War II. For my understanding of Eisenhower's personality and style, I am especially indebted to Fred I. Greenstein and his seminal work, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader*, and to Jean Edward Smith, the only biographer who pays careful attention to the events surrounding Eisenhower's intention to divorce his wife and marry Kay Summersby. I was glad to find a recent biography of Kay Summersby by Kieron Wood, *Ike's Irish Lover: The Echo of a Sigh*. Wood filled in many of the details of Kay's Irish heritage and prewar experience and clarified some of the murky details of her postwar life. For Mamie Eisenhower, Susan Eisenhower's *Mrs. Ike* has been most helpful. You will find a list of the other important reference works at the end of this book. I hope you will make use of it as a springboard for your own further reading and study.

I am grateful to Ben Ohmart at BearManor Media for permission to quote the lengthy scene from Melville Shavelson's memoir, *How to Succeed in Hollywood without Really Trying: P.S. You Can't!* The cover image of Eisenhower is courtesy of the Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas. The image of Mamie Eisenhower is courtesy of the United States Library of Congress's Prints and Photographs Division. The image of Kay Summersby is courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

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^[1] [Prologue, Fall 2015, " Eisenhower and McCarthy: How a President Toppled a Reckless Senator](#)," by David A. Nichols, (retrieved June 29, 2016). Nichols portrays an Eisenhower expert in "strategic deception."

^[2] J. B. West and Mary Lynn Kotz, *Upstairs at the White House: My Life with the First Ladies* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973), 130. Among first ladies, Mamie was uniquely known for managing the White House from her bed.

^[3] "Mamie Had Been Identified by Sleek Black Limousine," July 20, 1988, 23.

^[4] Robert J. Donovan, *Confidential Secretary: Ann Whitman's 20 Years with Eisenhower and Rockefeller* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1988), 14, 162.

^[5] Smith, *Eisenhower in War and Peace*, 441.

^[6] President's Appointment Calendar, May 15 and May 28, Truman Papers, Truman Library.

^[7] [Oral history interview](#), Dr. John R. Steelman, with Niel M. Johnson, February 29, 1996. [122.123, 202.205, original hardcopy version of this interview], Truman Library.

^[8] The Associated Press article appeared on the front pages of many American newspapers. One example: "Ike's Divorce Letter Still Exists, Says Former HST Aide," *High Point Enterprise*, High Point, NC, November 27, 1973, 1.

^[9] Smith, *Eisenhower in War and Peace*, 364.365. Copies may have been made from the Pentagon file, since both the Taft and Democratic campaigns claimed to have them.

^[10] Stanley Weintraub, *15 Stars: Eisenhower, MacArthur, Marshall: Three Generals Who Saved the American Century* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 519.

^[11] Smith, *Eisenhower in War and Peace*, 502, 546.

^[12] Jack Anderson, "Rumors Spread in Case Involving Sen. Kennedy," Washington Merry-Go-Round [syndicated column], August 22, 1960.

^[13] Drew Pearson, *Drew Pearson Diaries: 1949-1959* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), 238.

^[14] Smith, *Eisenhower in War and Peace*, 442.

^[15] Weintraub, *15 Stars* 519.

^[16] Korda, *Ike*, 270. The anecdote about his stepmother is on page 269.

^[17] Wood, *Ike's Irish Lover*, loc. 5012. *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 20, 1948, 25.

^[18] "Network Shy on Girl Who Liked Ike," *New York Magazine* May 7, 1979, 69. The friend claims that "*Past Forgetting* is not true"—that is, that the claim of impotence is false—and goes on to say that Ike and Kay "trysted" in her (the friend's) New York apartment after the war.

^[19] Butcher, *My Three Years*, entry for October 14, 1942. "Clark, Beetle, T. J., Major Lee, Mickey, and I had a so-called "surprise" birthday party at Da-de-da." A footnote explains that Da-de-da is the "current code name for Telegraph Cottage" and a quick online check of the Morse code gives it as the letter K. Butcher deleted most of his references to Kay Summersby but allowed this coded hint to stand.