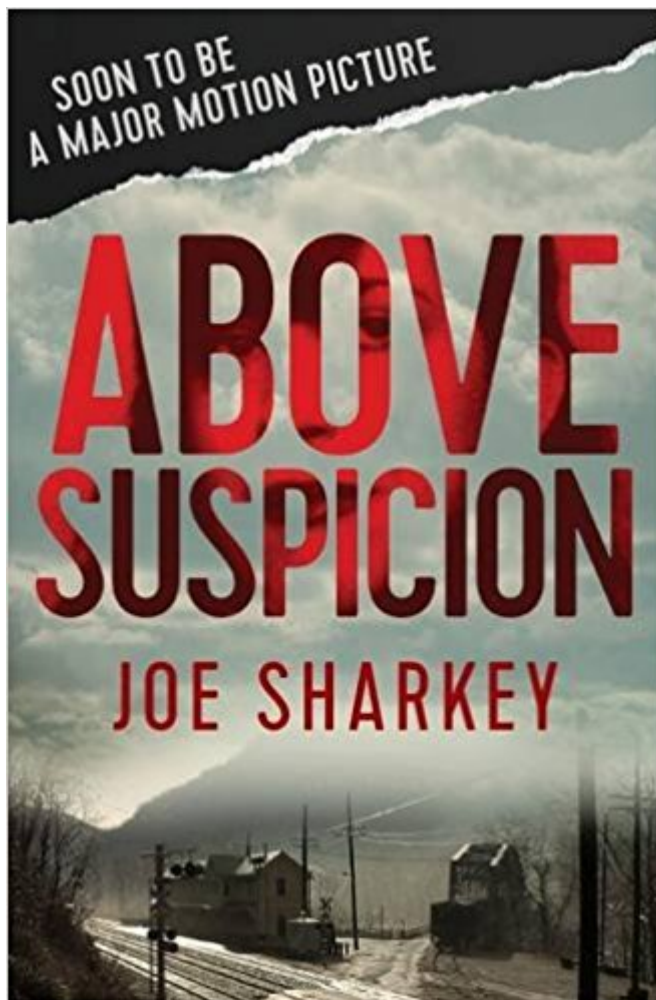




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# Above Suspicion



## Synopsis

Soon to be a major motion picture starring Emilia Clarke and Jack Huston: The  
“uncommonly trenchant account of the only known FBI agent to confess to murder”  
(Kirkus Reviews). When rookie FBI agent Mark Putnam received his first assignment in 1987, it was  
the culmination of a lifelong dream, if not the most desirable location. Pikeville, Kentucky, is high in  
Appalachian coal country, an outpost rife with lawlessness dating back to the Hatfields and McCoys.  
As a rising star in the bureau, however, Putnam soon was cultivating paid informants  
and busting drug rings and bank robbers. But when one informant fell in love with him, passion and  
duty would collide with tragic results. A coal miner’s daughter, Susan Smith was a  
young, attractive, struggling single mother. She was also a drug user sometimes described as a con  
artist, thief, and professional liar. Ultimately, Putnam gave in to Smith’s relentless pursuit.  
But when he ended the affair, she waged a campaign of vengeance that threatened to destroy him.  
When at last she confronted him with a shocking announcement, a violent scuffle ensued, and  
Putnam, in a burst of uncontrolled rage, fatally strangled her. Though he had everything  
necessary to get away with murder—a spotless reputation, a victim with multiple enemies,  
and the protection of the bureau’s impenetrable shield—his conscience  
wouldn’t allow it. Tormented by a year of guilt and deception, Putnam finally led authorities  
to Smith’s remains. This is the story of what happened before, during, and after his  
startling confession—an account that “should take its place on the dark shelf of the  
best American true crime” (Newsday). Revised and updated, this book also includes  
photos and a new epilogue by the author.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This tragic story by Wall Street Journal reporter Sharkey details the rise and fall of Mark Putnam, an apparent straight arrow for whom working as an FBI agent was the realization of a dream. As a rookie in 1987, he was sent to a branch office in Pikeville, a coal-mining town in eastern Kentucky. There he cultivated one Susan Smith as an informant; she fell in love with him, perhaps because he was the first man to treat her with respect. An emotionally unstable drug user given to lying, she spread the news that she was having an affair with the married Putnam before this was fact. Later, after he had been transferred to Florida, he returned to Pikeville to tie up the loose ends of another case, and Smith confronted him with news that she was pregnant with his child. She threatened a scandal. After a wild battle with her in his car, Putnam killed her and threw her body off a cliff. A year later, as the law closed in, he confessed. He plea-bargained for a manslaughter conviction and a 16-year sentence, which he is serving. This grim story is expertly told. Photos not seen by PW. BOMC alternate. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Rookie FBI agent Mark Putnam was pleased with his assignment to an office in the hill country of Kentucky as it would allow him the freedom and independence to make a name for himself and get ahead. He began cultivating informants and pursuing bank robbers and chop shop operators. One of his informants, Susan Smith, an attractive drug user with connections among the rural underworld, was one of the most useful and one of the most troublesome. Becoming emotionally (and financially) dependent on Putnam, she began to inject herself into his personal life, finally taking advantage of Putnam's troubled marriage and seducing him. This tangle of motives and loyalties ultimately led to a confrontation wherein Smith threatened to reveal that she was pregnant. Allegedly, she also attacked Putnam physically, and he responded in the heat of the moment by strangling her. Sharkey makes both this scenario and Putnam's subsequent actions to cover up the crime psychologically believable. By implication, Sharkey condemns the FBI for encouraging the use of paid informants, but the force of his story lies in the sharp characterizations, the human drama, and the tragic inevitability of its conclusion. For all popular true crime collections.- Ben Harrison, East Orange P.L., N.J.Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Very interesting read about a real tragedy. I like the author's style, lots of detail but he doesn't take a side.

Everything about this story is wrong. How could it have happened? I found myself feeling sorry for every one of the major players, except one. The writing is flawless. The author has done an excellent job of bringing the facts to life. It's one of the very best true crime books that I've ever read. You really couldn't make this up and have a believable story. Truth is better than fiction. Very tragic for all concerned.

I am a true crime junkie and this is one of the most engrossing and well researched books I've ever read. A fantastic read!

I was wondering as I read this story if it was going to have a sad ending, and it did in more ways than one. I wonder how I am going to feel after seeing the movie. Life sometimes can be a tragedy.

One of the very best true crime stories I have ever read. I truly couldn't put it down. I have read dozens of true crime books

ABOVE SUSPICION by Joe Sharkey is one of the best true crime reads--ever. Admittedly, the first 20 percent of the book includes a lot of character background and geographical information, which could erroneously lead a reader to think "ho hum." Yet it's interesting data, and the reader learns a lot about the people involved, the history of the area and insight into the age old feud between the Hatfields and McCoys. Once the storyline fully kicks in at this point of the book, it quickly becomes a read difficult to put down. Initially only having general knowledge of the book, I was surprised to find that the storyline is one I never could have anticipated. Nor could I have conceived of experiencing the degree of empathy I have for everyone involved in this tale. For the first time in my life, I found myself greatly moved with compassion for the perpetrator of the crime, FBI Special Agent Mark Putnam. If the FBI ever wanted to set an agent up to fail, the scenario Putnam is placed into is a prototype. With only 16 weeks of basic training, he is given what is considered to be a "hardship assignment" in the wilds of Eastern Kentucky, better known as "hillbilly country." Navigating the socioeconomic, political, and demographical climate of the area is stressful and demanding. Although Putnam is an idealistic, gung ho, capable rookie, he is without benefit of adequate

supervision and support. Add to the mix a strange, unorthodox agent in the two person office who's been moved there as a form of addressing performance issues. Couple that with having a wife and young child who are also isolated and struggling. Then stir in a young, female paid informant who develops a crush on Putnam, and it's a recipe for disaster. What a devastating tale for everyone involved. Once again, Sharkey has picked a unique topic in the true crime genre and done a superb job.

This was a very good book. I did not expect much from it when I purchased it. But as I kept reading I found it hard to put down. Although the results in the end were sad He showed it was the right thing to do. The author did a great job in telling the story. You could tell it was well researched as to the facts given by all involved.

This is surely a story worth telling, but it is a bit uneven. The good parts are more than 5 stars, and the slow tedious parts are 3 stars. I now know more about Kentucky folks and landscapes than necessary. I found the FBI informant department to be fascinating, and how poor people knew how to use it and profit is a factor in this crime. Now I would like to see the movie.

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