



A Long Way From St Petersburg: The Tom Conway Story

C E Parkinson

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Tom's Conway's life story began in imperial St Petersburg, Russia at the beginning of the 20th century. He went to England in 1915 where he was formally educated. Reference has been made to the incident with the pistol that led to his expulsion from the prodigious Bedales School. After this episode his parents sent him to the less impressive Brighton College. We then follow his emigration to Rhodesia where he became a miner, bus driver and cattle rancher. He returned to England six years later, broke, very eager to work but still suffering from the effects of a near fatal case of malaria. We look briefly at the ten years that follow in 1930's England during the Depression where he had various occupations before becoming a stage actor and radio broadcaster. Finally we trail him to Hollywood just before the outbreak of WWII and see his success in getting a contract with Metro Goldwyn Mayer where he worked for two years before taking over the 'Falcon' role from his brother at RKO which he will always be famous for. He became disillusioned with the poor films he was making and very frustrated at being typecast. The story then focuses on his decision to take the free-lancing route and the decline in his film career. After taking an eighteen-month career break, Tom returned to acting once more and he found success in television in the early 1950's as Inspector Mark Saber. His story concludes with his illnesses, battle with alcohol and frequent hospital visits before he is discovered destitute near the end of his life. Once again, after a long stint in hospital, teetotal for nearly a year and surviving on a federal pension, Tom is ready to start again at the age of 62. He has a multitude of ideas going round in his head but sadly, he becomes gravely ill again before his dreams come to fruition.

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