



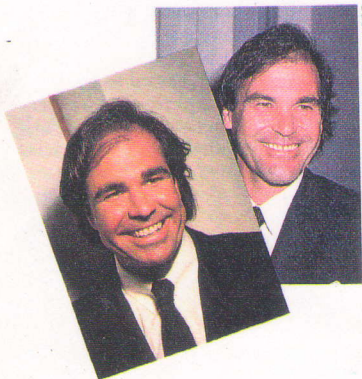
C O D A

Whose Face Is It, Anyway?

Worse things can happen than being a dead ringer for Oliver Stone, but when your own mother can't tell the difference, it's time to light out for El Salvador.

BY
Tom O'Neill

TOM O'NEILL (LEFT) AND LOOK-ALIKE DIRECTOR OLIVER STONE (RIGHT)



SCOTT DOWNIE/CELEBRITY PHOTO

MY VACATION HAS BEEN RUINED BY OLIVER STONE. I know this just hours after arriving in Los Angeles. As I stand at the urinal in the men's room of China Club, I feel hot breath hit the back of my neck. I glance over my shoulder and see a mustachioed face careening in.

"OLIVER! I JUST GOT CAST IN YOUR MOVIE!" Perhaps it's karma—retribution for hopping coasts under the alias of a buddy who sold me his frequent-flyer ticket. Upon landing, I replaced fake IDs with real ones, but I learn too soon that I checked my identity back at JFK.

"WHAT'S A MATTER. DON'T YA REMEMBER ME?"

In all fairness to L.A., the first time I was mistaken for Oliver Stone was in New York City, where I live. The year was '86, the director's star was soaring with *Platoon*, and a woman passed me a note in a restaurant asking for a copy of my script *The Hand*. Only problem was, I hadn't written a script called *The Hand*.

As Stone's career ebbed and mostly flowed, so did the encounters—no matter that the guy has a good twelve years on me. But nothing had prepared me for the onslaught that occurred on his home turf—except maybe Mom's call in December saying she nearly had a heart attack when she thought she saw me on *Entertainment Tonight* with Tom Cruise.

"WHADDAYA MEAN YOU'RE NOT STONE?" Back at China Club, I flee the just-cast actor, who won't let up despite my denials. Following the beckoning of a bouncer, I duck into the VIP room. Big mistake: "OLIVER!" A newspaperman pounces. After I inform him that we share the same profession, a reasonably enjoyable conversation ensues for twenty minutes or so—until he leans over and whispers, "C'mon, Stone, you can trust me."

Panic-stricken, I bolt, only to have my path blocked by a blond, who takes my hand in hers. "I just had to tell you, I think you're wonderful." I lift her hand and kiss it—then push her aside, a little roughly maybe, like he would have done.

Upstairs, at my table in front of Taylor Dayne's and Julian Lennon's, I slump in my chair, miserable and disgusted. All this attention makes me realize how pitifully little I get in the real world. "Go with it—let them think what they want," says my new friend the

journalist. "That's what this town is about." Appalled, I sink deeper into despair and resolve not to lead anyone else on—and how the hell did I get this great table?

The torment continues. At a restaurant in Beverly Hills, Tim Conway jokingly yells at a waiter who fawns over me (I get dessert on the house) but ignores him. At a blues bar in Santa Monica, a film student listens to my denial, then pipes up, "But if you *were* Oliver Stone, this is what I wanted to ask you."

Then a strange and wondrous coincidence occurs—so ironic, it never would've made it out of development. On the jam-packed boardwalk in Venice, the specter that has haunted my every move becomes flesh and leather: Oliver Stone, with a director's viewfinder around his neck, scouting locations—entirely unrecognized, except by me. Who said life was fair?

Some force propels me after him as he rushes away with his entourage. In a kind of déjà vu turned inside out, I address him: "Excuse me, Mr. Stone." He glances back but doesn't break stride. "This is embarrassing, but I always get mistaken for you." He takes a few more steps, stops, lowers his shades, and gives me a good look. "Of course, you're much more handsome," I add. He smiles and may-

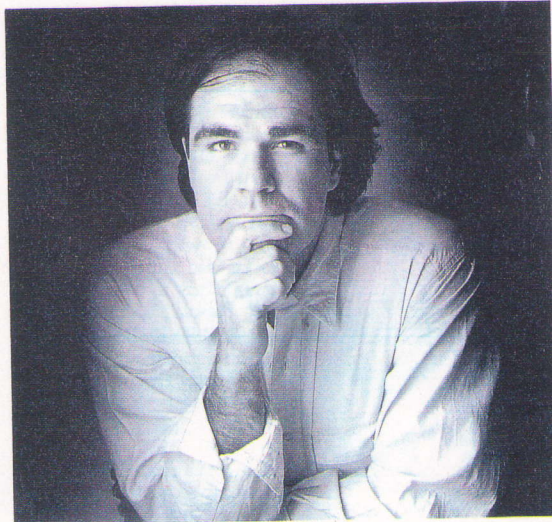
be even nod—he certainly doesn't disagree. In a moment of catharsis (for me, anyway), we stand side by side for a picture. His witty film pals cut up. "He could be your double, Oliver!" None too flattered and looking for a quick exit, he says, "Yeah."

Believe me, Oliver, I know how it feels. I return to New York purged of my demons, my identity restored. Two months and not a single Stone encounter. I am pleased when he doesn't sweep the Academy Awards. As far as I'm concerned, the less visibility for him, the better for both of us. Mom and Aunt Dec from Scranton call to congratulate me when he wins Best Director, but I shrug it off. That's history now, a closed chapter, I decide.

Until I open a magazine and see the full-page Oliver Stone ad for the Gap.

Oh, Oliver! How could you do this to us?

Tom O'Neill is a New York-based freelance writer



WILL THE REAL OLIVER STONE PLEASE STAND UP? TOM O'NEILL (ABOVE) DOES STONE (RIGHT) DOING GAP.

