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Life Is Judi-Ful On 94th Street

I always knew my time would come. I just didn't know it would happen this way. And so unexpectedly.

But yes, at last, in movie-star mode, I am suddenly facing the paparazzi who lie in wait like jackals, springing from their director-style chairs outside my apartment building with cameras poised as I emerge, better dressed than I've ever been before, to buy a coffee at Timothy's or some Q-Tips at the Ricky's next door.

Maybe it's because, before I emerge from the gloom of the lobby, I could be mistaken for their prey—a standard issue dark-haired woman of medium build with large sunglasses. Like Katisha in *The Mikado*, who "in the dark with a light behind her" could be mistaken for someone much younger, I could probably pass for someone her age.

The fact that photographers quickly sink back into a slump the minute they see who I am—or rather, am not—doesn't really matter. When that door opens and I come through I know, for just a second, how all those stars emerging from their limousines on Oscar night must feel.

And it isn't only me who no longer wears worn-out sneakers and baggy exercise pants to go shopping. Everyone in my building is dressing better, standing up straighter and carrying themselves with a blasé air of "Been there, done that," although I suspect that most, like me, are secretly thrilled that their moment has arrived.

The house transvestite—or someone who sure looks like one—is strutting around in higher heels and tighter skirts than I've ever seen, with a broad smile on his (her) hony but attractive face. Eric, the blind guitarist who sometimes sits in the lobby and practices, now spends entire days playing on the bench outside the coffee shop next door, and the taciturn Chinese man, another lobby regular, who rarely moved from his easy chair, is showing more activity than I've seen in the 10 years I've lived here. Just this morning, I saw him laughing and chatting up the doorman as the bored photos looked on, cameras dangling.

The morning doorman, who in the past was usually inside in endless conference with the concierge as I approached laden with groceries in one hand and a briefcase in the other, is suddenly right there at the door with a smile on his face. He's greeting me by name these days.

What brought about this sudden change in our otherwise humdrum lives, this sudden spotlight on our day-to-day existence? It seems that those of us residing at 94th and Third share our address with none other than Judi. Yes, that Judi. The one with the "very good friend" Rudy.

Not that I've ever seen her, mind you. Or maybe I have? Who knows, while I've been watching the dry cycle in our laundry room, maybe she was only steps away, inserting her laundry card into a washer. Now I'm sorry I didn't spend more time there. I'm more the put-it-in, go-upstairs, come-back-later type. Or maybe at the mail boxes, it was her dog whose leash tripped me up.

And then there's the health club on the premises. I had a membership there for a while. Judi was probably one of those fit ladies, unlike me, who could handle the Stair-Master without huffing.

Or maybe she's been in Ricky's choosing a wig for a disguise? Sometimes I hang out there speculating on how I'd look as a redhead with a pompadour. I've always wondered why they stocked that line so far from their headquarters in the Village. Now it all makes sense.

But even before my cousin called and breathlessly informed me that she had seen a large photograph of the new celebrity walking her dog outside my building's entrance in one of the papers, I'd noticed a frisson of ex-

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citement in the lobby.

And to think that Trattoria Al Bacio, the tiny Italian restaurant where I often go for dinner, is in the back-ground of that picture. *Al Bacio*, A Kiss. How perfect!

And do I only imagine it, but isn't the deck of the Barking Dog Luncheonette across the street suddenly much busier than it used to be? Judi could be a boon to all the local businesses.

Already she has enhanced the real estate. I'm marveling that our address is now considered tony, our apartment house described in the papers as "fancy." As far as I know, up to now, Third Avenue in the 90's, while a popular yuppie haven, was hardly considered a fancy neighborhood—except for the rents. But suddenly we are right up there with Fifth and Park. Such is the curious effect of being home to a celebrity resident. Next thing you know, the rents will go even higher.

Not that she's our only celebrity, mind you. Claire Bloom lives here, too. But even though she got raves for her role in *Electra* last year, and had her own mini-scandal when she wrote about her life with Philip Roth in *Leaving A Doll's House*, nary a cameraman was in sight. In fact,

I think I'm the only one in the building who knows who she is. What's that adage about fleeting fame? But clearly, we have hit the big time now.

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Some of the tenants tell me they've been interviewed, but I guess my timing is off. But what would I have to tell them? Would they be interested in my take on the situation? Doubtful. No, only if maybe I'd seen a certain party slipping in the side door to the health club for a secret tryst on the exercise mats. God knows,

there's no other way to get in and out of the building without being seen. In fact, if for no other reason but logistics, I tend to disbelieve the Cristyne Lategano story. It seems to me it boils down to a question, not of whether, but of how. And where?

The fact is, like a lot of people, I feel this whole situation has humanized the robot, infused our Frankenstein Mayor with life.

Not that I don't feel for Donna, too. But somehow I feel she's a survivor.

Today, while I was home eating lunch, I watched Giuliani's press conference. He didn't discuss Judi this time, or his marriage. It was a prostate and politics day. But suddenly, I felt connected to him in a way I never had before. After all, now I know how it feels to have all those lights shining on you. And besides, the man is practically my next-door neighbor.