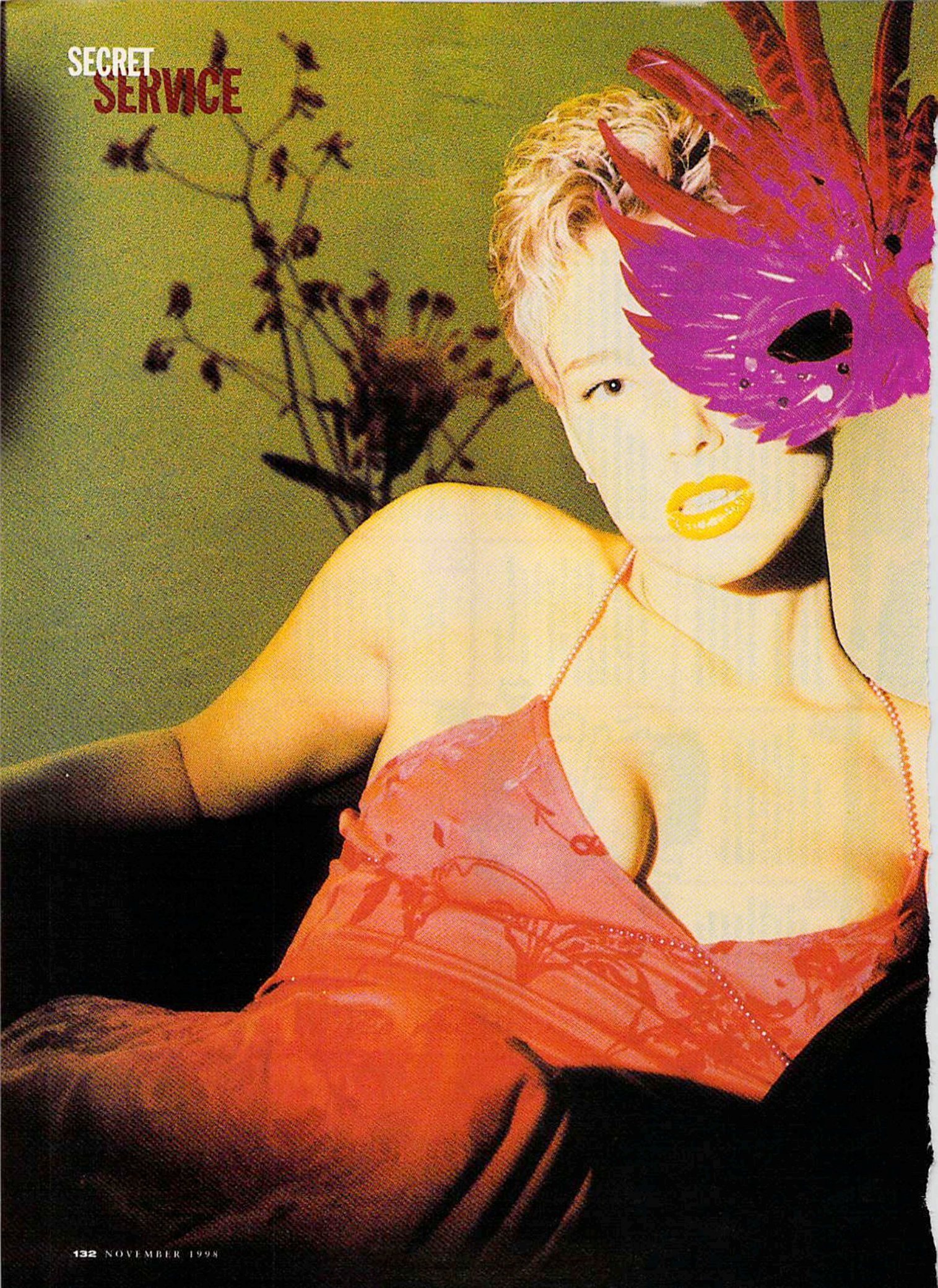
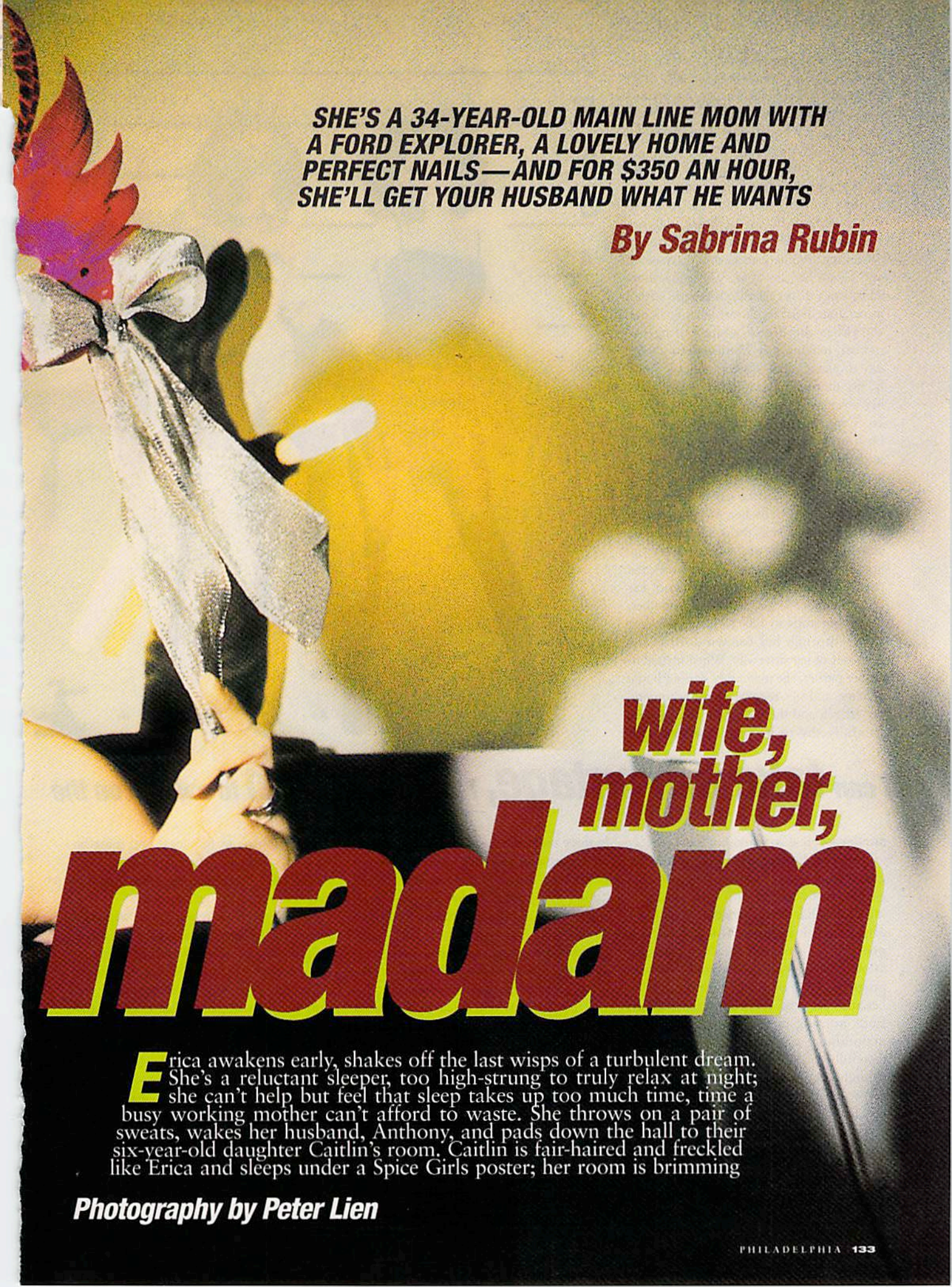


SECRET
SERVICE





**SHE'S A 34-YEAR-OLD MAIN LINE MOM WITH
A FORD EXPLORER, A LOVELY HOME AND
PERFECT NAILS—AND FOR \$350 AN HOUR,
SHE'LL GET YOUR HUSBAND WHAT HE WANTS**

By Sabrina Rubin

**wife,
mother,
madam**

Erica awakens early, shakes off the last wisps of a turbulent dream. She's a reluctant sleeper, too high-strung to truly relax at night; she can't help but feel that sleep takes up too much time, time a busy working mother can't afford to waste. She throws on a pair of sweats, wakes her husband, Anthony, and pads down the hall to their six-year-old daughter Caitlin's room. Caitlin is fair-haired and freckled like Erica and sleeps under a Spice Girls poster; her room is brimming

Photography by Peter Lien

with stuffed animals and the mostly purple clothing she picks out herself. Erica gently wakes her, then heads downstairs to the kitchen of their Main Line home to pack lunches and make breakfast. All three family members sit down to eat together, a ritual Erica and her husband agree is important for family unity.

After Anthony leaves for the construction company he owns, Erica watches Nickelodeon with her daughter, sprinting off during commercials to dab on makeup and locate her car keys. When the show ends, Erica drives Caitlin to private school in her blue Ford Explorer. Back at home, she tidies the house while calling her mother, making sure Mom knows it's her day to pick Caitlin up from school. Finally, her domestic duties done, Erica checks her voice mail. Already a handful of messages are waiting, all from men. Some are brisk and businesslike, some are quaking with nerves, but all have that pleading note in their voices Erica loves to hear.

She tells the IRS she owns a greeting-card store. She tells her in-laws she's a homemaker. She tells the neighbors she's a criminal lawyer—and often leaves the house toting a briefcase so she looks the part. She gives her daughter's school her beeper number in place of a work number. She never stops to talk to neighbors, just waves through her car window as she peels out of her driveway. When invited to dinner parties, she invariably sends a bottle of wine and her regrets. Her community, her church and the PTA think she must be painfully shy to be such a recluse, this



"If I can take advantage, I will. For a man to call me on the

attractive young wife and mother.

"Anyone looking at me would never guess what I do," says a gleeful Erica (whose name, along with other identifying details, has been changed). "Just like I always tell my girls: 'You might be a prostitute, but don't let everyone else know it.' That's my golden rule." As proprietress of one of the area's most upscale "escort" services, the Main Line Madam finds nothing more fundamental than maintaining a low profile. She dresses tastefully and doesn't drive flashy cars, though she could easily afford to. She allows herself few friends, since "as long as I live this life, the less people who are close to me, the better."

Erica's discretion is appreciated by her elite clientele: prominent doctors, lawyers, suburban executives, professional athletes—the sort of people who can afford her \$350-an-hour prices. Her fees are near-

ly three times the basic rates most call-girl services charge, yet she's never at a loss for customers; Erica's staff of what she calls "nines and above" makes the high price worthwhile. And so although by Erica's count there are 100 Center City-based agencies and a dozen more in Montgomery County, Erica is Queen Madam in the hearts of wealthy suburban johns.

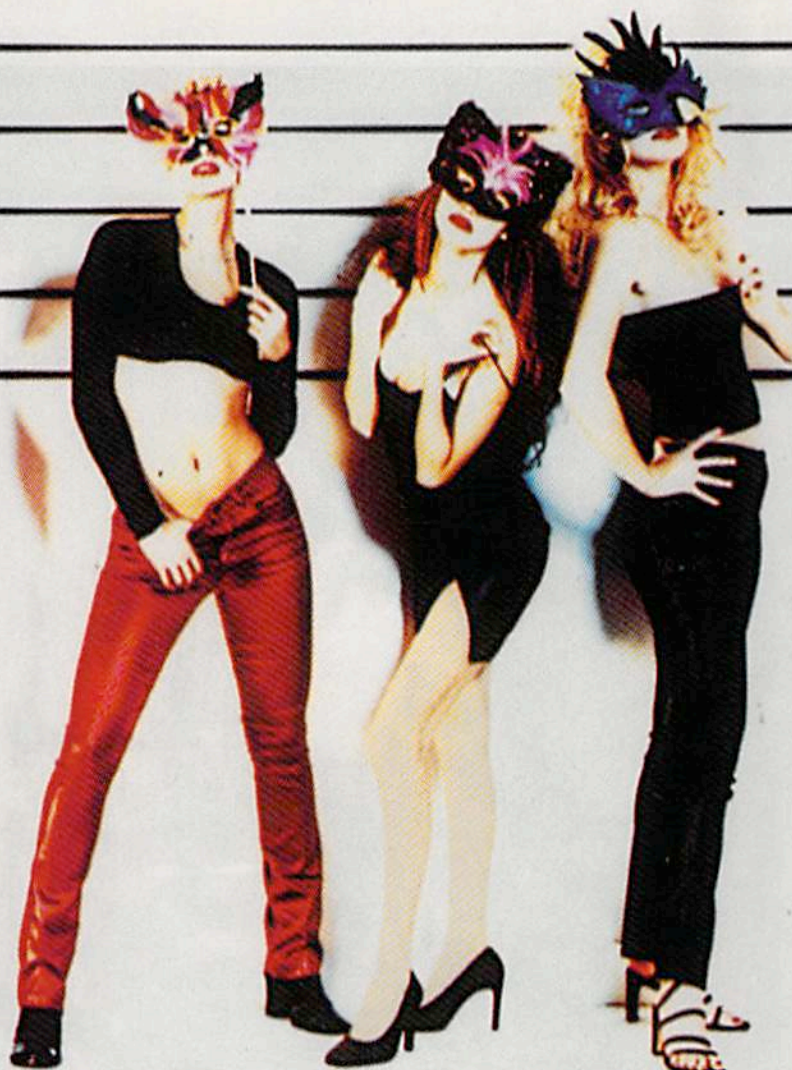
Sometimes, when Erica looks at her life's accoutrements—the manicured lawn, the closet full of Donna Karan suits, the college fund for her daughter, all paid for with money from the flesh trade—she has to laugh at how easily she's getting away with it, right under the noses of respectable society. Her lifestyle differs little from that of her Main Line peers, what with her four-bedroom home 15 minutes from Bryn Mawr College and her annual take of \$300,000. Erica considers it a minor nuisance that her chosen

career happens to be illegal and must be furtively hidden from her Main Line neighbors—ironically, the same virtuous neighbors who are her customers.

Sitting at the kitchen table with the phone to her ear, Erica begins her day's calls with a name she recognizes, one of her die-hard regulars. She dials his direct office line, bypassing his secretary. By the time he picks up, Erica has assumed her madam's voice, a languorous, sexy purr. "Hi," Erica breathes, without identifying herself. She doesn't have to. He's been expecting her.

"See that guy over there?"

Seated in a leopard-print banquette at Manayunk's Cotton Club, Erica juts her chin at a 50-some fleshy-faced man in aviator glasses and a business suit. "He's a trick," Erica announces. "He sees prostitutes. You can just tell."



Who Have sold their bodies and Those Who Have Not. Those who *have* belong to a tragically noble sisterhood, that of proud women who grit their teeth and “do what they gotta do.” Those who haven’t—who wouldn’t even consider it—are the prudish, the sheltered, the soft. The lucky. I might as well be another species altogether for the way Erica is studying me.

It angers Erica that prostitution is illegal; she suspects it has something to do with men wanting to keep women “from making real money.” But what really bothers her is that some think it’s immoral as well, since Erica is a devout Catholic who goes to church twice weekly and considers herself an exemplary human being with a strong sense of values. She thinks women should be applauding her for what she does: promote a unique form of feminism.

“Women in any other business, they’re up against a boy’s club, and I refuse to play that,” she says loudly, thumping her fist on the table for emphasis. “Let me tell you something: I bring my car in for an oil change and end up spending \$300. A man goes in, and it’s \$20.” She turns her palms up: *You see?* “Men take advantage. So if I can take advantage where I can, I will. For a man to call me on the phone and *beg* to spend his money, that’s power. For a man to beg a girl to fuck him, and pay money for it—*that’s* power.”

After she skims through her list of callers, it’s time for Erica to go to the office. She dresses conservatively—gray

phone and **beg to spend his money—that’s power.”**

She takes a demure sip of chardonnay, relishing my round-eyed innocence. Dolled up in a sand-colored suit and heels, Erica is a waifish woman in her mid-30s with long blond hair and haunted blue eyes. She’s pretty enough to turn heads and has a hip-twitching walk. “A whore will *always* know a trick,” she explains, tapping ash from her cigarette. “Just like a whore will always know another whore. You can just look at someone and go, ‘Okay, *she* sold her ass.’”

Erica is a saucy expert on the matter: She’s a former prostitute who claims to have serviced a thousand men. She has a hard, jaded way about her, peppering her speech with obscenities and tough-girl phrases like “I do what I gotta do.” She’s got a business degree from Rutgers, a gun she keeps in a lockbox at home and a pierced tongue, which she swears didn’t hurt a bit. She watches a young woman in

a skintight dress wiggle across the dining room and toss an over-the-shoulder giggle at a tableful of men. Erica is unimpressed. “She’s a slut. She sucks dick for free,” she pronounces. “This is the way I see it. If you’re sleeping with every guy who looks your way anyhow, wouldn’t you rather get paid for it?”

Erica looks across the table at me.

“Would you ever?” she asks. “Be a prostitute?”

I’m shocked by her question. I stammer a no.

“Really?” She regards me with curiosity. “Why not?”

We stare at each other, bewildered. Our differences have just been laid out so starkly that we’re both rendered speechless. Erica views the world through the prism of prostitution—every man is a potential customer, every woman a potential hooker—and all women are divided into Those

Calvin Klein suit, charcoal Blahnik heels—and throws a few fashion magazines into her briefcase, to give it some heft. If anyone asks, she’s on her way to the courthouse. Of course, nobody’s likely to ask, since Erica keeps most people at arm’s length. When she and Anthony first moved to this area four years ago, the neighbors welcomed them with invitations to barbecues and Flyers games; mercifully, their enthusiasm dimmed after Erica’s countless lame excuses. Even so, Erica hops into her Explorer in a hurry lest some neighbor ambush her for a chat—or, worse yet, legal advice.

Her office is a small space that she rents under an alias, since she’d rather not keep her incriminating computer database under her own roof. During the 10-minute drive, Erica mulls over her schedule. It’s Wednesday, an unpredictable day for lonely men. (continued on page 202)

MAIN LINE MADAM

(continued from page 135)

Saturdays tend to be brisk; Erica always sends out at least seven "calls." Friday's also reliably busy—she laughingly dubs it "Asshole Day," since the guys are usually cocky sons of bitches with paychecks in their pockets, fresh from happy hour. Oddly enough, Monday nights can be fantastic. One Monday in July, Erica had 11 calls, six of which were multi-hour jobs—a \$6,000 night. All that changes, however, as soon as football season begins. "It's not even worth it to sit by the phones on Mondays during football season," Erica says disdustedly—especially when the Eagles play.

At the office, Erica hangs up her jacket, flicks on her computer, and searches her files for the men who called her that morning. Some are new names, but most are regulars, among either the hundred who call once a month or the 20 devoted patrons who use her services once a week. Her clients are mostly in their 30s and 40s, high achievers whose workweeks are too long and busy to permit a social life. A quarter admit to being married, although Erica prefers not to service the wedded because, as a married woman herself, "that goes against my morals." Most discovered Erica's service by stumbling across her ads, which run in the back pages of local publications read by her target audience: moneyed gentlemen from Wilmington to Princeton.

Erica doesn't mind returning calls from her regulars all that much, but with strangers, she's always prepared for the worst. She routinely fields calls from men who try to engage her in phone sex, or from guys asking how soon she can send a "bitch." Occasionally, Erica hears from men who ask to see children; she hangs up on them, copies their names off her caller ID, and anonymously mails the list to the local police under the heading POTENTIAL CHILD MOLESTERS. "Just in case," Erica shrugs. "I don't want that on my head."

On the phone with a first-time caller, Erica's throaty madam's voice hardens into that of a prickly businesswoman. "Hi, I'm returning your call," she begins, then runs down her price list: \$350 for an hour, \$650 for two, \$900 for three—cash only. If the guy balks, she snaps at him: "You want to pay less, go get yourself a Kensington girl. I don't have time for this. You call me back when you make up your mind." When he does call back, humbled, it's a thrilling first-round victory for Erica.

For round two, Erica makes him call

from home, so she can confirm his identity on her caller ID. Round three, she asks for his home address, which Erica confirms in the phone book or on the Internet. If she still harbors doubts about a guy, she'll invite him to come to her office so she can look him over, eye his driver's license and make certain he's neither a cop nor a potential Ted Bundy. Erica's decisions are mostly guided by instinct; just to be safe, she's got friends on her payroll who can pull up credit reports on potential clients. Knock on wood, it's worked so far—Erica has never been busted by the police or had what she ominously terms a "bad call."

Erica tends to be a lot more relaxed on the phone with her regulars. Most know what they want, though a few still agonize over the selection. She's got 12 attractive young ladies on the menu, with as many as 20 more on reserve during the busy seasons—from late September through Valentine's Day, then April 15th through June. The holiday blues

Erica tolerates
her clients'
clinginess, but
only to open
their wallets
wider: "I think
they're pathetic,"
she says frankly.

mean good business: She makes nearly half her income between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day.

"What about Claudia?" she'll ask a client helpfully, glancing at her girls' stat sheets. "You liked her, remember? Five-four, long blondish hair, olive complexion?"

Erica tries to keep her clients focused, or else they'll start feeling chatty. All those stealthy phone calls help forge a strangely intimate relationship between madam and trick, and gradually her clients open up to her, proudly informing her of their accomplishments and promotions, even crying over breakups. This past summer, when Erica told a client she'd be closed on July 4th for a barbecue, the man asked if he could come, too.

"No, no—only family," Erica hastily replied.

"No friends?" the client pleaded.

Erica tolerates her customers' clinginess, but only in the interest of getting them to open their wallets wider. "I think they're pathetic," she says frankly. "Clients always call up depressed, saying they don't

have anybody. And I feel like saying, 'That's your own fault, because your work came first!' They work and work and work and have a big bank account, but there's nobody to spend it on."

After Erica hangs up with each client, she calls a girl with the assignment, giving just a name, an address and a time. The girls are supposed to be waiting by the phone for her call. If they're not, Erica punishes them by not giving them any work for a week. She runs a tight ship; she can't afford not to, since if you give a hooker an inch, she's going to take a mile. Erica knows—she was the same way when she was working.

Erica checks her beeper for the time. It's still early in the afternoon, but she has an appointment for her weekly manicure at her favorite Rittenhouse Square salon. "I'm going for a hooker red today," she tells the manicurist with a sly smile, and laughs out loud when the woman chooses a rusty crimson called "Hoe-Down Brown." Her nails are just part of the equation; Erica spends nearly every afternoon in hair salons for touch-ups, at spas for body scrubs and facials, or boutique-hopping along Walnut Street for clothing, jewelry, shoes and makeup. "I'm a clothes whore," she says cheerfully. She rationalizes her extravagances as a prudent business expense. When she meets her girls to pick up her money—usually late at night, when they are tired and sore—she wants them to covet her looks, her clothes, her car, and be inspired to work harder.

Her nails still damp, Erica lightly grips the wheel of her Explorer, inching along through rush-hour traffic on the way to her mother's house to pick up Caitlin. Erica appreciates the way her family pitches in to help care for her daughter. Her mother picks Caitlin up from school three afternoons a week; the other two days are covered by Erica's sister, a 23-year-old exotic dancer.

Their mother pretends not to know the truth about her daughters' careers. She is a typically indulgent grandma whose backyard is a maze of jungle gyms built just for Caitlin. Erica's mother is only 16 years older than Erica herself, a petite woman whose body is scarred from a string of abusive husbands, including Erica's father, who was murdered by his "business associates" when Erica was nine. Her mother is married to a nice guy now, is happier than she's ever been, and has recently taken to babying her grown daughters in embarrassing ways, as if to make up for the childhoods they never had. For Erica's birthday last year, her mother presented her with Barbie dolls

and purple feetie pajamas.

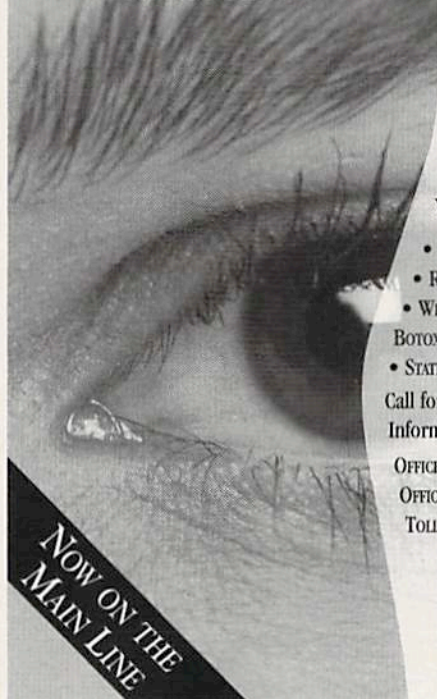
Erica chats with her mother for a few minutes, then gathers up Caitlin. She's in a hurry now: She still needs to stop at the grocery store and the cleaners before making dinner, supervising Caitlin's homework and violin practice, doing dishes, catching up on Anthony's day at work and getting Caitlin to bed. Erica's got to have everything wrapped up before 9 p.m., when her girls' first calls of the evening are scheduled to begin. She's got a long night ahead.

He answers the doorbell, palms sweating. She's standing there on the porch, a 23-year-old redhead packed snugly into a pair of jeans and a satiny gold short-sleeve shirt, buttons straining under the thrust of her D-cup breasts. She's not wearing a bra. "Hi, I'm Julie. I need to use your phone," she says, striding imperiously into the living room. It's one of Erica's ironclad rules that each girl "check in" once she arrives at a trick's house, to show that she got there safely and on time; Erica can also double-check by the readout on her caller ID that her girl is, in fact, calling from the client's home. She trusts no one.

Julie stands, waiting expectantly. "Um, I need the money first," she says. Three hundred fifty dollars changes hands. Julie counts the money efficiently, then dials Erica's number and speaks into the receiver for less than a minute before hanging up. She turns to face her client with a smile. "So," she says, all small talk now that the meter's running, "great place you have here."

Erica keeps a whole spectrum of girls on hand to accommodate her clients' assorted tastes. She's got cornfed blondes, brunettes, Asian girls. She keeps a black girl or two on staff, although their services are rarely requested. All her girls are in their 20s, are tested for AIDS every three months and are exceptional-looking. "Anybody can spread their legs," Erica is fond of saying, "but it's hard to find the kind of girls I'm into." She prefers well-dressed, classy girls; those who show up wearing fishnets and dog collars don't even get interviews. The interview itself is simple enough: The girl fills out a basic application—name, address, phone number, beeper number, measurements—while Erica discreetly scrutinizes her face, her body, the way she carries herself. By the time the applicant puts down her pen, Erica knows if she's Main Line escort material. The result is a staff made up of everything from aspiring actresses and models to

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MAIN LINE MADAM

Penn students, and even a Jefferson medical student who doesn't have a great deal of spare time but is up to her garter belt in school loans.

Invited to sit down, Julie eases herself onto the couch and lights a Virginia Slim. She's been with Erica's agency for just a year, but she's been working since she was 18, when she became a single mother and found that waitressing wasn't paying the bills anymore. Julie is no longer with the baby's father; she's seeing a wealthy guy who was once her customer. When they began dating, he demanded that she quit the escort service, and she tells him she has.

"I lie out my ass," she says, blowing smoke.

It didn't take Julie long to figure out that lying is an occupational hazard. She lies constantly, beginning with the name "Julie," which, of course, is her "stage name." All the other working girls she knows have to lie, too. They lie to friends about why they can't go out on Saturday nights. They explain to family and friends that their new jewelry, cars and luxury apartments were bought with money from recent raises at work. Tonight, Julie told her boyfriend she'd be doing her laundry at an all-night laundromat. Julie knows he wouldn't like the idea of her having sex with other men, but in her heart, she's still being true to him, since she doesn't consider having sex for money to be cheating. Prostitutes don't have to worry about their boyfriends for long, though, since their relationships eventually crumble. It's hard to maintain a romance when you're constantly lying, and it's difficult making love to your boyfriend after you've already had sex with three other guys that day.

Seated on a stranger's couch, blithely smoking cigarettes and making conversation, Julie has one thing on her mind: avoiding sex if at all possible. She's certainly not about to raise the subject herself, and tries to get away with socializing for as long as she can. Luckily for Julie, Erica's prices include only plain vanilla sex acts. "Freaky shit" costs extra, and even then, Julie explains with a sour look, she'll only perform acts on the client—never the other way around. It's a safe policy to have, since there are bound to be unusual requests—like one regular who'd greet his hired companion in boxing trunks and gloves and hand her a pair of gloves of her own. They would fight a carefully choreographed match, always ending with the girl kicking him down,

then planting a foot on his chest and yelling, "I rule!"

Not all the calls involve sex—a fact that overjoys Erica, since the alibi she plans to use, if worse comes to worst, is that her escort service only provides men with "time and company." Once or twice a month, men will hire Erica's girls as arm candy for corporate functions or trendy restaurant openings. Julie had one elderly client who'd pay a thousand dollars merely to take her shopping for a day. "I fucking owned Neiman's," Julie remembers fondly. There tend to be a lot of non-sexual calls around the holidays, like one last December, when Erica dispatched a girl to a trick's house for one hour. The girl ate some cookies, helped decorate his tree, was given \$750 and a Christmas card, and was sent on her way.

To Julie and her sisterhood, such glimpses into the world of these unhappy men have a soundly depressing effect. Over time, girls learn to scorn such men to keep from feeling sorry for them, and

Her **staff** has everything from **aspiring actresses** and **models** to a **med student** up to her **garter belt** in school loans.

vow to never end up so profoundly isolated. But it's already too late: Prostitution has emptied out their own lives as well, leaving them with few friends and little self-respect. And so they comfort themselves with material goods. Julie's no exception; she has bought herself a diamond-and-emerald ring, breast implants, a house in Lower Bucks and a Ford Explorer just like Erica's. When two of her Chanel suits came back from the cleaners with tiny pulls in the fabric, she threw them in the trash. What's unusual about Julie isn't her reckless spending, but the fact that it hasn't been her downfall—yet. From a moderate three-day workweek, a girl can take home \$800 to \$1,000 in cash, then instantly spend it on cars, clothes and, eventually, drugs, until despite her income she begins to fall behind in the rent. Erica can pinpoint the moment at which girls begin unraveling—it seems to happen after about four months on the job, when they start showing up late to calls and are either high or have alcohol on their breath.

Erica tries to keep them on the straight and narrow. When she swings by their houses or dorm rooms late at night to pick up her share of the money—Erica gets half of everything—she stays for a short while, sitting around watching *Philly After Midnight* on TV with them and letting them vent. "I'd like to say they do it for the money," Erica says, "but I know that's not true. A lot of them just never really felt love, and this is their way of feeling love. Or of being in control." She gives them the best advice she can, telling them to save their money and go easy on the drugs. And when they're in psychic pain, she tells them how she learned to manage her own anger, shame and frustration during her working days, gaining release through physical pain, with multiple piercings and tattoos.

But Erica never tells her girls about her primary outlet for rage back when she was working: how after finishing a call she'd sit in her car with the motor off, a razor blade or shard of broken glass pressed against her skin. She'd press until the sharp edge bit in, releasing just a droplet of blood. Somehow, it made her feel better.

Erica was still a working girl when she met her husband for the first time, but she was off-duty for the night. She was at the now-defunct Old City nightclub Revival with some girlfriends when Anthony spotted her dancing and strode right up to her.

"I'll give you money," he whispered.

Erica stared at him, stunned that he had recognized her for what she was. Her face filled with fury. "What are you saying to me?" she screeched. She spat at him, cursed him out, and stomped away. Two weeks later, while shopping on South Street, Erica was startled to see Anthony again. "I knew I'd find you here," he told her. "I've been watching you." Erica soon discovered that Anthony commanded a decent income and was from a moneyed family. They were engaged a month later.

Anthony asked her to stop working, and Erica agreed. But before long, she pined for something all her own; they were shopping for a house in the suburbs, and Erica couldn't picture herself as a Rosemont housewife. Anthony didn't object to her getting a job, since he wanted her busy enough that she wouldn't return to prostitution.

"Well, what field do you know about?" he asked her.

Erica thought. "Porn," she answered.

It was true: Over half of Erica's life has been spent in the sex biz, starting when she

ran away from home at 14, fleeing a life of abuse. With her prettily freckled face and twiggy physique, she tried modeling but slipped instead into a nasty coke addiction. Desperate for more money, Erica answered an ad seeking a "phone hostess." Turned out they were looking for nothing of the sort; instead, a scantily clad Erica was paid to writhe on one side of a pane of glass until a patron slid enough money through a slot, at which point she'd come around to his side and give him a hand job. She was 15.

At 18, Erica suddenly got her act together: She kicked the drugs, passed her GED test and was accepted at Rutgers. But then she decided to pay her tuition the best way she could think of: prostitution. She joined escort services that specialized in dominance, which Erica imagined would suit her well: The idea of tying men up and beating them until they bled seemed almost therapeutic. Instead, it fueled Erica's thoughts of suicide and self-mutilation. By the time she graduated, though, Erica couldn't stop. Not only was the money too good to give up, but she had convinced herself she wasn't suitable for anything else.

Erica was intrigued by Anthony's suggestion that she open her own business. Most call-girl services she had worked for

were either run by men or were husband-wife operations; starting one by herself would make Erica a pioneer of sorts. She called up her hooker friends. "Look, I'm gonna do this on my own, and you're gonna come work for me," Erica told them, tingling with pride. "We're all gonna make a whole buncha money."

Now that Erica is a businesswoman, she feels almost vindicated for her years of misery. But Anthony has recently begun needling her to stop. "We don't need the money," he begs, and it's true; between Anthony's construction company and his family's resources, Erica doesn't have to work at all. But she is reluctant to let it go. The escort service has become the emblem of her independence. It represents her hopes for her daughter, who Erica is determined will always have the best of everything. But already Caitlin is growing up closed-off and secretive, like her mother; she's gotten into the habit of hiding her toys around the house, fibbing about their whereabouts, then playing with them when she thinks no one's looking. Erica finds it cute.

Erica can't argue, though, when Anthony points out the toll her job is taking on her. She's become paranoid, scrutinizing every stray comment, every glance

from Anthony's coworkers or Caitlin's teachers for signs of suspicion. She worries about her own safety and has started carrying her gun in her purse. She worries that she might be developing an ulcer. On top of it all, Erica is plagued by vivid nightmares in which Caitlin is drowning while she stands on the shore watching, powerless to save her little girl.

"Am I glad I have the business?" Erica ponders the question for a long beat. "In general, yes," she decides. "But for my own self, no." It's not something she's going to do forever, she insists, just "till I get to where I'm going." Where's that? Erica looks tired. "I have no idea," she answers heavily.

Some days, Erica thinks she *should* get out while she can, before her neighbors catch on or the IRS audits her or the police show up in the middle of the night and haul her off to jail. She could finally live an ordinary, stable suburban life, the life she always thought she wanted. But then Erica listens to her messages, hears the sweet desperation in the voices of rich, influential men. She remembers the rubber-banded piles of cash she keeps stashed in a fireproof safe and imagines Caitlin at her college graduation, class of 2014. She feels that familiar surge of power and gets back to work. ■■

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For the March of Dimes Third Annual

Salute to Philadelphia Women of Achievement Awards Luncheon

Thursday,
November 19, 1998
11:30am at the
Philadelphia Marriott

The March of Dimes will be honoring these three outstanding women who have distinguished themselves through excellence in their field and a commitment to the Philadelphia community.

Reserve your tickets or table today by calling the March of Dimes at **(610) 341-6050**.



March
of Dimes
Saving babies, together

All proceeds raised through the event will go towards supporting the March of Dimes efforts to prevent birth defects and low birthweight and to reduce the incidence of infant mortality.