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The Unlikely Traditionalism *of* Millionaire Matchmaker PATTI STANGER

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ROMAN GENN

Tocqueville's Matchmaker

Patti Stanger teaches anew an old lesson about the sexes

BY ELIANA JOHNSON

PATTI STANGER looks like a feminist hero. She's single, she's rich, and she, as they say, has it all. The host of Bravo TV's *The Millionaire Matchmaker* is herself a self-made millionaire whose empire includes her hit television show as well as an off-air matchmaking business, a podcast, books, DVDs, and, most recently, a line of California wines in "aphrodisiac flavors." She's an independent woman at the height of her powers.

It's in her work as a matchmaker that things get tricky. The laws of love, she has found, have not bent to the arc of the feminist movement. She has observed that men still like feminine women, and women still like masculine men. Men still prefer to chase, and women still prefer to be chased. Stanger is tough and outspoken, and her views have sent self-proclaimed feminists reeling. Here's the journalist Jodi Walker writing in the women's magazine *Bustle*: "I don't like the premise that one side of a relationship needs to have money. I don't like that the other side needs to have looks. I don't like Patti Stanger—she's mean."

Stanger is 54, but she regularly appears on set in a miniskirt and sky-high heels. Her cleavage is almost always . . . evident. She wears animal prints, jewel tones, and plenty of bejeweled clothing. It's all a way of announcing: Pay attention, ladies, this is what men want. Stanger regularly doles out beauty advice that many women are resistant to hearing: "Curly hair is like redheads—they just don't get a lot of play," she told the *New York Times* in 2011. "I just know that to be a dream girl you need straight, long, silky, humidity-resistant hair." It's no coincidence we always see her long, dark hair styled pin-straight.

The age-old system in which women exerted great control over dating and romance by making men wait for sex has largely vanished. The predominance of casual sex has shifted control to men, and today, college campuses are full of young women wondering, after sexual encounters, when they might hear from that young man again. (Usually, never.) They wait, worry, cry. They suppress their desire for something lasting. The men hold the reins: In a culture saturated by casual sex, there's little incentive for them to learn how to romance women. They don't have to.

Without rules, religious or social, to guide them, many women—and some men, too—find that dating has devolved into groping around in a dark closet, a confusing and often painful search for principles to guide the interactions between the sexes.

Stanger is trying to change all of that. She is the doyenne of what Alexis de Tocqueville called mores, which he defined largely as the "habits of the heart." In America, Tocqueville said, "it is woman who shapes these mores," through her clear-eyed view of the "vices and dangers of society." The American woman, unlike the European, wasn't sheltered or protected, so she developed a "singular skill" and "happy audacity" for navigating these vices and dangers, and an ability to steer her "thoughts and language through the traps of sprightly conversation." As a result, "she is full of confidence in her own powers." Though Tocqueville wrote in the mid 19th century, his words aptly describe Stanger.

Call it mean, audacious, or downright cold, Stanger's straight talk is how she gets through to her clients, who have included professional athletes, reality-television stars, and wealthy fortysomethings suspended in adolescence. This season alone, she tried to pair off the onetime child rap phenom Lil' Romeo; Lindsay Lohan's mother, Dina; and Olympic short-track speed skater Allison Baver. Stanger's goal is to get them married, and that requires the delivery of some harsh Stanger truths. Men must become "hunters." Women must curb their "male energy." And the use of her services (which, depending on the client, can include personal coaching, therapy, psychic readings, and lessons in flirtation) requires adherence to a sacred rule: No sex, of any sort, before monogamy.

By the standards of the day, it sounds archaic, and many of her clients greet the announcement with slack-jawed disbelief. But Stanger is a ruthless enforcer, and clients who break her rules regularly experience what has come to be called "the wrath of Patti."

Take Zagros Bigvand, a Kurdish real-estate executive, and Teal McKay, an aspiring model, who violated the rule after a handful of windswept dates. Enter Stanger. "Did he say, 'I want you exclusively?' Did he say, verbally, he wants you exclusively?" Well, Stanger discovers, he said he might want that "eventually."

"Okay, well, that's a bunch of baloney," the matchmaker says. "I'm not God here, I can only introduce two people together. But if you break my rules, if you do things I tell you not to do . . . " She leaves it hanging that having sex too soon kills the possibility of intimacy, and her anger is full bore. "You don't even know this person, you don't know this person, and you just gave him your vagina! . . . You could spend more time buying a house or a car in this economy or a mortgage than doing something like that. This is sacred."

Bigvand, the charming millionaire, is not spared, either. "Zagros, for your information, women need to emotionally connect before they loosen up downstairs. It's Sex 101. . . . You guys didn't even know each other, you moved too fast. You should have slowed it down and done the courtship thing." One can almost visualize the women of America nodding in appreciative agreement.

While we're far removed from Fifties culture, Stanger reels in a sizeable number of Bravo's overwhelmingly female viewers. *The Millionaire Matchmaker*, which just finished its eighth season, premiered this year to an audience of 1.5 million. Even Millennials, who have marinated in feminist dogma their entire lives, are tuning in: The show's most-watched episode, which aired in late March, drew 2.2 million viewers, including 1.2 million in the coveted 18-to-49-year-old demographic.

On each episode, Stanger sets up two of her millionaire clients, usually two men, handpicking about a dozen potential women for them to choose from before asking each to settle on one for a full-fledged date. Beforehand, and at the outset of each episode, she reviews a one-minute introductory videotape the men have submitted; then she sets off to meet them in person. After watching these tapes, Stanger usually, but not always, diagnoses her clients: delayed adolescent, control freak, commitment-phobe.

In his video, David Sheltraw, a great-looking 50-year-old divorcé, says he's looking for a wife—a woman with Meg Ryan's bubbly personality—and a family. Stanger hasn't met Sheltraw yet, but she sizes him up for the audience. "I'm a little bit stumped," she says. "On the video, he's perfect! But no guy is perfect. There's something really wrong with him, otherwise he wouldn't be here."

At an initial meeting, Stanger pushes, probes, and challenges on matters both profound and petty. She asks Sheltraw, for example, what feedback he gets from his friends about his approach to women. But he doesn't approach women at all, he tells her. "I have probably walked up to two people in my lifetime," he says.

Stanger has found the problem. "A common syndrome for good-looking people, male or female, is that when they're really that good-looking at a very young age and they grow up like that, they never have to work for it," she says. "But generally speaking, you see this in women, not men." She sends him off to a life coach and promises him that approaching women is like riding a bike—once you get the confidence to do it a couple of times, it won't be a problem again.

After she diagnoses her clients in this way, Stanger organizes a cocktail-party-type "mixer" where both of the week's millionaires mingle with the singles she has picked for them. They're allowed two "mini dates," or five-minute conversations, with their favorite women, and one "master date," a proper date that the TV audience will watch unfold. Some matches work, some don't, but Stanger likes to say that all her clients learn something.

Michael Persall is 30 and handsome, but he isn't aggressive with women. And he isn't attracted to the spunky woman he chose for his date, either. "Well, if the two people are subdued, they might as well be corpses in the ground," Stanger says. "So, you don't like aggressive girls, you need to be the leader, you need to be the aggressive one, you need to collect those Bambis in the woods."

During *The Millionaire Matchmaker*'s first season, the feminist magazine *Bitch* published a piece headlined "True Confessions: The Millionaire Matchmaker—WTF Am I Watching This?" The author, Anna Breshears, dismissed as a "puritanical twist" Stanger's concern with delaying sex until the woman is in a monogamous relationship. But she admitted that she enjoyed "watching Patti rather savagely describe what's wrong with these guys and why they have trouble getting and keeping themselves in real relationships." She concluded by asking whether she could "continue to watch this show and write for *Bitch* in good conscience."

Stanger gets this sort of approbation from men and women alike because she's demanding of both sexes. She takes chauvinists to task, and she spends a lot of her show bossing men around. She's also built a multimillion-dollar empire from the

ground up: Her line of romance-friendly wines, PS Match, is the latest in a litany of Stanger-themed products. So feminists can't easily dismiss her. But fundamentally, there's a growing frustration, among Millennials in particular, that there simply are no rules governing relations between the sexes, and Stanger offers some.

She insists that men behave like, well, men. They must act masculine but well-mannered, and women must give them the space to do so, by allowing them to plan and pay for dates, by containing their own aggressive impulses, and, of course, by withholding sex until the man has made a monogamous commitment. These are the sorts of unwritten cultural norms that the feminist movement did away with and that, on her show, Stanger is trying to put back in place. This might make her the most powerful messenger of conservative social values in popular culture, at least when it comes to sex and romance, although most social conservatives have probably never heard of her.

There's a growing frustration, among Millennials in particular, that there simply are no rules governing relations between the sexes, and Patti Stanger offers some.

Stanger grew up in New Jersey, the adopted daughter of Ira Stanger, who worked in New York City's garment district, and Rhoda Goldstein, a part-time clerk for Macy's and the now-defunct high-end giftware retailer Settings. Her father, she says, "hated when my mom worked."

Stanger was raised Jewish—she calls herself a "food Jew"—and her show has a Jewish feel. She's a third-generation matchmaker, but the first in her family to make a career out of it. Her mother and grandmother reveled in pairing up singles at the local synagogue, she tells me, and *The Millionaire Matchmaker* is peppered with Yiddishisms. She often talks of doing a "mitzvah," or a good deed, for a client, or of finding his "bashert," a Yiddish term that means literally "destiny" but is colloquially used to refer to one's divinely predestined soul mate.

Stanger is part of a tradition of socially conservative and, in fact, Jewish voices in pop culture that acknowledge fundamental differences between the sexes and call for a standard of conduct to govern the relationship between them. There's the strident Dr. Laura Schlessinger, who talks openly about her conservative politics and traditional values. There's also the more soft-spoken Dr. Drew Pinsky, who for years now has used his various radio and television platforms to criticize the hook-up culture and warn about the dangers of casual sex.

Stanger is neither particularly political nor particularly religious. "I'm not a Republican or a Democrat," she tells me. "I'm more for the best person." She loves Hillary Clinton and "would like to see a woman president, but a smart woman, not a stupid woman—maybe a businesswoman." She has worked as a psychic and an astrologer and once consulted a rabbi to ask why she was still single (she broke off an engagement some years ago and is now dating the mortgage banker David Krause). "He said it was because I don't observe Shabbat," she tells me. "Okay, buh-bye, that was the end of that."

Stanger is a disciple of the psychotherapist and renowned relationship expert Pat Allen, whose work is devoted to dismantling what she calls the "pop theories" about relationships that have arisen in the wake of the feminist movement. Allen describes her views as "politically incorrect but scientifically accurate." The problem with feminism, she has written, is that the equality it championed invaded the bedroom. "With both men and women vying for the same position, the courtship dance was abandoned to two partners struggling for the lead," she wrote in her book *Getting to "I Do"* (1994). "Relationships became a battleground on which men and women sought equal status, equal degrees of power and prestige." Romance died.

Both Allen and Stanger say that while men and women may be equal, they're fundamentally different. On her show, Stanger demands that they act accordingly. "That's life, that's biology. People need to study science before they throw stones at me." Does she consider herself a feminist? "I didn't choose Gloria Steinem as my poster woman," she replies. "Feminism, to me, is equal pay for equal dollar. We still want chivalry, we still want doors opened."

In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville observed that the notion of equality between the sexes was taking Europe by storm. "There is no subject on which the crude, disorderly fancy of our age has given itself freer rein," he wrote. "There are people in Europe who, confounding together the different characteristics of the sexes, would make man and woman not only equal but actually alike. They would give to both the same functions, impose on both the same duties, and grant to both the same rights; they would mix them in all things—work, pleasure, public affairs."

This desire for sameness is championed by many feminists today who offer all kinds of advice to women about how to climb the corporate ladder. A proliferation of female role models encourages women in the workplace to act more like ambitious men and "lean in." But 50-plus years after the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*, many women have realized that casual sex and professional success aren't, in fact, all that fulfilling. And now there's a scarcity of advice about how to find the things that might prove more important and satisfying: a romantic relationship, a husband, a family.

To find what they're looking for, Stanger says, women shouldn't confuse equality with similarity—because similarity emasculates men. "You really have to be a woman, a feminine woman. People think that's anti-feminist, but it's not."

Tocqueville was blunt in his critique of what we might now call "sameness feminism." "It is easy to see that the sort of equality forced on both sexes degrades them both, and that so coarse a jumble of nature's works could produce nothing but feeble men and unseemly women." That's what Stanger confronts on her show. "We're raising our sons horribly," she tells

me. "We tell them, 'Don't be mean to so and so, you shouldn't have done this, now here's a lollipop.' And then they grow up to be men who have man-child personalities." On the show, Stanger calls them "Peter Pans."

The most persistent issues Stanger faces among her male clients are, on one hand, infantile chauvinism and, on the other, the sort of feebleness Tocqueville predicted would become common. She attributes both to a lack of manliness. The 40-year-old trust-fund millionaire Justin Levine, for instance, describes himself as "30 plus ten" and says he's never going to grow up. Levine, Stanger says, "needs to become a man in order to catch a woman."

Stanger is equally tough on women. This is the kind of rebuke one is apt to hear as she shoos the rejects out the door: "Did you go through your grandmother's closet, what is that?" And: "Are you a man, are you a woman? Are you a mouse?" Or simply: "Are you pregnant? Because you need to lose some weight."

Her female-millionaire clients often come in for a rude awakening. Nicole Sherwin, a 40-year-old divorcée and the founder of an eco-friendly events company, hears from Stanger that she must tone herself down—advice Stanger gives other female millionaires who come to her for help. The dating pool for women shrinks when women "have to do a man's job in order to survive, and nobody ever talks about that," Stanger says. "We are taking men's jobs. They feel emasculated. They see that and go, 'Well, what do you need me for anymore?' It's becoming a matriarchal society, but we're lonely."

Tocqueville would probably say that American society has always been matriarchal in important ways, or at least that it's at its best when women control dating and sex, and men are forced to prove their worthiness. He liked the influence of democracy on romance, because it gave women power. "There is hardly a way of persuading a girl that you love her," he wrote, "when you are perfectly free to marry her but will not do so." As Beyoncé might put it: If you liked it, then you should have put a ring on it.

Like Stanger, Tocqueville's American woman is gutsy and self-assured; Tocqueville also made the broader point that she is critically important to the democratic project. All of society's ills, according to Tocqueville, begin at home. In Europe, where he saw the relationship between men and women being thrown off kilter, men felt "scorn for natural ties and legitimate pleasures," he wrote. They brought that instability, that "taste for disorder," into the public square. Not so in America, he believed, where women were able to provide steadiness amid the rough and tumble of democracy, and stability in a country where men could make a fortune one day and lose it the next. That's why, he said, "if anyone asks me what I think is the chief cause of the extraordinary prosperity and growing power of this nation, I should answer that it is due to the superiority of their women."

So to women, Stanger says: Be patient, and keep your standards high. "Men are like buses, they show up every 15 minutes. Make sure he's going to the right place. Most women are desperate. We need to qualify our buyers and know that we are the deal, not the men." Heartbreak and frustration are the alternative: "You're going to end up having sex, thinking he's cute, and then he can't afford to pay for your Caesar salad." NR

The Riot Show!

News media glamorized anarchy and reinforced lies in Baltimore

BY HEATHER MAC DONALD

WHAT if they held a race riot and the media stayed away? At the very least, we would be spared the nauseating spectacle of sycophantic reporters fawning on opportunistic thieves, as was repeated yet again during the latest outbreak of anti-police violence in Baltimore. More important, the vandals would lose a bounty as valuable as their purloined booty: notoriety and legitimacy.

The Baltimore riots of April 25 and 27 were held in the name of Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old drug dealer with a lengthy arrest record who died from a spinal injury a week after being transported in a Baltimore police van. Gray had taken off running after making eye contact with an officer on bike patrol in a high-crime area; police reportedly claim he was involved in illegal activity. After a chase, he surrendered and was cuffed, searched, and arrested for possession of an illegal knife. According to the Baltimore prosecutor, he asked for an asthma inhaler but was not given one; he was not secured by a seatbelt while being transported in the police van, and though the officer driving the van repeatedly checked up on Gray, the officer did not provide requested medical assistance. It was during this time, according to the prosecutor, that he suffered his ultimately fatal spine injury.

These latest riots followed a drearily familiar script: Upon the first outbreak of violence, a crush of reporters flock to the scene with barely suppressed cries of glee. Surrounded by sound trucks and camera crews, outfitted with cellphones and microphones, they breathlessly narrate each police–looter skirmish for the viewing public, thrusting their microphones into the faces of spectators and thugs alike to get a "street" interpretation of the mayhem. The studio anchors melodramatically caution the reporters to "stay safe," even though the press at times may outnumber both looters and the police. Meanwhile, the thieves get to indulge in the pleasures of anarchic annihilation while enjoying the desideratum of every reality-TV show cast: a wide and devoted audience.

The performative quality of the live, televised race riot has created a new genre: riot porn, in which every act of thuggery is lasciviously filmed and parsed in real time for the benefit of at-home viewers. "Did you see that?" CNN reporter Miguel Marquez asked studio anchor Wolf Blitzer as vandals slashed a fire hose brought in to try to save a burning CVS store on April 27. (Marquez is given to philosophizing on social justice as he walks alongside protesters during anti-police demonstrations.) "Wolf, if you just saw that, they just, while we were talking there, they just cut the hose with a knife, trying to—and then ran, trying to thwart the efforts of the authorities to actually turn out this fire."

Wolf confirmed that he had in fact seen the close-up footage: "I just saw that guy, yeah, I just saw that guy cut the hose as well, [a

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