

A Cautionary Tale

by [Alan Swyer](#) (July 2026)



At the Cafe, Rouen (Gustave Caillebotte 1880)

In the years that followed, whenever Jerry Klein was slated to meet Evan Connors for one of their periodic breakfasts, he would remember a fateful call from Rachel Green.

“What do you think about having a referendum?” she asked him way back when.

“About?”

“A vote of support for Evan.”

“Only one way it makes sense,” said Klein.

“Yeah?”

“If he wants to stop being Executive Director of the Writers Guild.”

When Rachel protested, Klein laid out his case. First and foremost, he stated, never initiate something that can potentially backfire. Rachel countered by saying that the membership was happy with Evan. With a laugh, Klein pointed out that a happy screenwriter was an oxymoron. Those who were working were at the mercy of directors, producers, stars, and studios, which meant that any day they could suddenly go from being only-the-writer, merely-the-writer, to no-longer-the-writer. Worse, those who were not working had little money coming in, plus far too much time on their hands. Above all, it's not those who are happy who are most likely to vote.

“Why,” Klein then asked Rachel, “do screenwriters secretly like to be on strike?”

“Tell me.”

“It's excuse for not working. And being on a picket line gives them somewhere to go and schmooze.”

“That's so negative.”

“But true.”

Strikes are many things, including an aphrodisiac. That was the case for Evan, who was negotiating on behalf of the Guild during their previous shutdown, and Rachel, whose zealotry owed, as Klein saw it, to her increasingly precarious position in the film industry. Passionate hook-ups after meetings led to a period of bouncing back and forth between each other's places, then finally marriage, which gave Rachel unlimited access to Evan's ear.

Her career, or what was left of it, had started in her early twenties when she wrote an original screenplay about two female bandits in the old west—Robin Hoods in skirts—which got her an agent who helped her become, in Hollywood terms, “the flavor of the month.” Though the script never got made, the heat led to a series of assignments. First, an adaptation of a novel about chorus girls. Next, a rewrite on a project about a female softball team. Then an idea she pitched about a woman in the space program. But in a realm lacking in cause-and-effect, none of them, for whatever reason or reasons, made it into production. Nor did a couple of commissions that followed. Inevitably, as Rachel moved into her early, then late, thirties, that translated into fewer and fewer overtures, and less frequent calls from her agent.

Little wonder that Rachel enjoyed wielding influence as First Lady of the Writers Guild.

As Klein feared, the plebiscite Rachel fought for was a disaster, with mainly those who were dissatisfied or disgruntled making the time to cast a ballot.

Without the hoped for vote of confidence, Evan Connors had little choice but to resign.

To Klein's dismay, that precipitated another call from Rachel.

“What do you think of Pete Archer?” she asked roughly three weeks later, mentioning a studio exec who had transitioned into producing.

“I like him.”

“So Evan should work with him?”

“I didn’t say that.”

“But if you like him—”

Klein explained that while he got on with Archer personally, those feelings didn’t carry over to the way Archer did business. Then he asked a question of his own. Was Rachel attempting to broker a deal between the producer and her out of work husband?

“What difference would that make?” wondered Rachel.

“It comes down to are you trying to help Evan? Or score points with Archer for yourself?”

“Always so negative.”

“So why ask me?”

Though Klein and Evan Connors had known each other professionally, it was thanks to Rachel, whom Klein first got to know when he and she were relatively new arrivals in Hollywood, that the two men began spending time together away from work.

So it wasn’t a complete surprise when Evan invited him to a Lakers game, explaining that his access to seats paid for by the Writers Guild would end soon.

Klein’s sense that it wasn’t simply a social outing was confirmed once they were seated in what was then known as

Staples Center.

"When," asked Brian, "do you think Rachel will work again?"

"Think the Lakers can win it all this year?" Klein replied.

"You're ducking."

"Can't put anything past you."

"Tell me truthfully."

"My money says maybe never."

Evan blanched. "How can you say that?"

"If you're managing a baseball team, would you hire someone who's batting .000?"

"But they love her at Paramount."

"Who? Mr. Paramount? Mrs. Paramount? The Paramount kids? If they love her so much, how come they've never hired her?"

Even gulped. "What," he began a moment later, "can she do to change things?"

"Start over by writing a spec script—an original that knocks everybody's socks off."

Evan grimaced. "She says her work speaks for itself."

"Sadly, so does her goose egg batting average," said Klein. "Plus, in case you didn't know, there's something called ageism."

"But Rachel's only turning forty."

"Know how they say fifty is the new thirty?"

"Yeah."

"In the movie biz," said Klein, "forty's the new sixty."

Evidence that Rachel was using Evan to ingratiate herself with Pete Archer came when she popped unannounced into Klein's office. Archer, she informed him, was willing to bankroll projects that could be shown on a cable channel he was initiating.

"Got something?" she asked.

Thinking about his fondness for Black music from the 1950's, Klein mentioned that it would be great to do a series where each week someone like Big Joe Turner, Big Mama Thornton, Lowell Fulson, or Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson spoke first to a class of kids at, say, the House of Blues, then did a mini-concert.

"I love it!" Rachel gushed. "Any chance you can get 'em?"

Klein nodded. "They're all here in LA, and I know most of them."

"I can't wait to take this to Archer!"

The next morning, a breathless Rachel called. "Archer thinks it's perfect! Call him."

"Can't he call me?"

"Please call him. For me."

The following afternoon yielded another call from Rachel, who wondered if Klein had reached out to Archer. He explained that he'd left word and was told Archer would call back immediately, which never happened.

"Call him again."

“Nope.”

“But he loves it!”

“Some way of showing it.”

“Pretty please?”

Klein again said no, explaining that he had zero intention of chasing.

Never did Klein get a return call from Archer, meaning Rachel got to score no points.

Several weeks went by during which Klein worked on a rewrite for an indie film that would lead to his first outing as a director, breaking away only to scout locations and work on paring down the minimal budget. When he drove to Hollywood to have lunch with a potential leading lady at the iconic restaurant known informally as Musso's, he was immediately spotted by Evan Connors.

“Why didn't you say Pete Archer was a pain in the ass to work with?” asked Connors, who looked as though he hadn't slept in a week.

“I did.”

“To?”

“The man in the moon.”

Connors looked perplexed. “Rachel said you like him.”

“To talk to, not work with. How awful is it?”

“Fucking brutal!”

Klein almost asked why Rachel had withheld information, then decided not to.

Directing a low-budget thriller was exhilarating but grueling, gratifying yet relentless, leaving little time for Klein to check messages or return calls. Only once the jam-packed fifteen-day shooting schedule came to an end did he at last make an effort to see what he might have missed.

Among the calls from well-wishers, old friends, and offers for light bulbs that would last a lifetime, was a progression of ever more desperate messages from Rachel, who went from asking to demanding then to begging and pleading for help.

Though his first impulse was to wonder *Why me?*, Klein girded himself, then returned the call.

What he learned was that after severing ties with Pete Archer, Evan Connors had undergone a crisis of confidence. Reeling from back-to-back failures, he'd launched into a binge of alcohol and cocaine that showed no sign of abating.

When Klein asked what Rachel was doing during Evan's descent, she replied that her mother had gone into a coma.

"That's her," Klein said. "What about you?"

"I'm sitting by her side."

"Let me get this straight," said Klein to Rachel when they met at a little coffee spot in Santa Monica. "Evan's going to pieces, but you're sitting by your mother's side."

"She needs me," countered Rachel defensively.

"Sounds more like you need her. With all due respect, being in a coma makes her about as aware as a stalk of celery."

"That's cruel."

“Crueler than allowing your husband to self-destruct?”

Rachel took a deep breath, then gritted her teeth. “Next,” she began, “you’ll make it sound like I forced him into the referendum. And to work with Archer.”

“Didn’t you?”

“You’re so impossible!” Rachel screamed.

“So how come you always reach out to me?”

It took not one, but several interventions by Klein and others, including confiscating his car keys and threatening to lock him in a room, for Evan to emerge from his downward spiral. When he did, his marriage was over. So was his interest in show business. Prioritizing the greater good over a high salary, he started a law practice focused on 1st Amendment rights. representing people—many of them pro bono—who had been fired or otherwise punished for exercising their freedom of speech.

In many ways it turned out that Evan got out just in time, since the movie business he and Klein knew started going through change after change, none of them good.

Leading the way were two seismic shifts at the studios. First was the rise of the blockbuster, which meant that a series of successful movies was less important than one mega-hit. Next, as a result of that mentality, was the ascent of the marketing departments. Instead of movie-loving execs green-lighting interesting films, then handing them to the marketers to sell, the marketing people took over the decision-making process, turning movies into “brands.” In came new jargon—analytics, demographics, quadrants, etc. —plus a premium on prequels, sequels, remakes, and re-imaginings, rather than an emphasis on creativity.

Then onto the scene came Netflix, plus the other streaming platforms that followed, changing movie-going from a common occurrence to a special event.

That transition was exacerbated by Covid, with the pandemic resulting in the closure of scores of movie theaters.

Then came a strike in which the members of the Writers Guild tried to make up for the mistakes made in previous negotiations in which, despite pleas from Klein, higher minimums were prioritized over a fairer cut of video revenues. Lasting 148 days, it proved to be yet another blow toward movie-going, and therefore movie theaters.

Before the film business could even begin to recover, Los Angeles was devastated by never-before-seen wildfires impacting many members of the movie community.

Klein serendipitously survived the changes in the movie business by moving into documentaries. Instead of languishing in what was know as "development hell," his projects almost invariably got made without being burdened with analytics, demographics, or other forms of what he called gobbledygook. Even better, whether commissioned or self-started, they allowed him to focus on subject matter he could sink his teeth in, from sports and music to Eastern spirituality and judicial reform.

As for Rachel, she went through a series of McJobs before finding a spot writing advertising copy. There, for the first time as a writer, she got a taste of cause-and-effect. For a new hipster coffee chain, she came up with *We've got the grinds to blow your mind*. For an exterminator, she coined *Got vermin? Call Herman*. For a mortuary seeking a different kind of approach, she flirted with *Put 'em in the ground with no money down*, then went instead with *Everyone's dying to get in*. To her dismay, that humorous take won a local marketing award.

Except for an occasional reference in passing when Klein and Evan Connors met for breakfast, Rachel's saga was only invoked when Klein was asked to speak at the American Film Institute or some other film school. Without mentioning her name, every so often he would use her career as a cautionary tale, albeit one with a somewhat upbeat ending.

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Alan Swyer is an award-winning filmmaker whose recent documentaries have dealt with Eastern spirituality in the Western world, the criminal justice system, diabetes, boxing, and singer Billy Vera. In the realm of music, among his productions is an album of Ray Charles love songs. His novel *The Beard* was recently published by Harvard Square Editions. His newest production is called "When Houston Had The Blues."

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