

STORY MAP

A Few Good Men



SETUP:

Daniel Kaffee is a lawyer with a knack for plea-bargaining. He's incredibly likable: charming, witty, and clever. But there's something off; despite his nine months and 44 cases as a lawyer, he's never actually tried a case in the courtroom.

OPPORTUNITY:

Kaffee is assigned the case of two marines accused of murder at Guantanamo Bay.

NEW SITUATION:

Kaffee decides to handle his case the way he always has: by negotiating a plea bargain. With the help of his friend, Sam Weinberg, and Jo Galloway, special counsel for Internal Affairs, he gets started. It's revealed that Kaffee's father was an incredibly famous and successful trial lawyer before his death many years earlier. It's also clear right away that Jo doesn't like Kaffee, and one of his clients, Dawson, holds him in disdain. Almost immediately, Kaffee is offered the plea bargain deal he was hoping for, but instead of accepting it, he decides to wait until after his trip to Cuba.

CHANGE OF PLANS:

Kaffee goes to Guantanamo to interview witnesses and gather information. When he meets Colonel Jessup, the base commander, and his executive officer, Markinson, Kaffee realizes that they're hiding something—that Jessup very likely ordered the Code Red that resulted in the victim's unintended death. This means that his clients were following a fairly simple order with no intent to kill, and when things went wrong, Jessup cut them loose and is now setting them up. Worried that his case is becoming increasingly complicated and difficult to win, Kaffee suggests that Dawson take the plea bargain offer. Tensions between them escalate; Kaffee doesn't understand why Dawson would refuse such an amazing deal, and Dawson calls Kaffee a coward for being too scared to do the right thing. Kaffee decides to quit the case and have new counsel assigned. When Jo finds out, she challenges him, accusing him of avoiding a court case because he's afraid of not living up to his father's expectations. After a night of contemplation, Kaffee decides to continue to represent his clients and try the case in court.

PROGRESS:

Kaffee and his team put together a defense. They research, gather evidence, prep their witnesses, and start the court proceedings. Kaffee excels at cross-examination, while Jo makes mistakes that weaken their case. A conflicted Markinson privately admits to Kaffee that Jessup ordered the Code Red and has altered key pieces of evidence to cover it up. Kaffee subpoenas the reluctant Markinson to testify accordingly, which will essentially win them the case.

POINT OF NO RETURN:

Due to a second mistake on Jo's part, a critical discrepancy in their clients' story is revealed in court, threatening their chance at success. The same day, Markinson kills himself before he can be made to testify. Kaffee goes on a bender and gives up. Jo tries to convince him that the only way to save their clients now is to put Jessup on the stand. But due to Jessup's high rank and decorated history in the marines, there are repercussions to accusing him of a crime without being able to prove it; if Kaffee can't make him admit in court that he ordered the Code Red, Kaffee will be court-martialed and thrown out of the navy. He will lose his case, and his fear that he can't live up to his father's reputation as a trial lawyer will be proven true. After a pep talk from Sam, Kaffee realizes that he must stop comparing himself to his father and try this case his own way—the way he would do it instead of the way his father would have done it. He commits himself fully to his clients and his case and subpoenas Jessup.

COMPLICATIONS AND HIGHER STAKES:

They put together a new strategy to get Jessup to admit on the stand that he ordered the Code Red. They also come up with new arguments to support their case. Just before Jessup is called to testify, Jo reaffirms to Kaffee what's at risk if he can't get a confession from Jessup: a court-martial, getting thrown out of the navy, and losing his license as a lawyer. In Kaffee's mind, such a failure will prove correct his fears that he can't be a successful trial lawyer and that he would never have been able to make his father proud.

MAJOR SETBACK:

Jessup isn't falling into line on the stand and it doesn't look like he's going to admit to ordering the Code Red. Kaffee must make a split-second decision between following his line of questioning and pushing Jessup (putting everything at stake) or backing off and letting him get away with everything (ensuring that Kaffee will lose his case and his clients will be found guilty.)

FINAL PUSH:

Kaffee becomes more forceful and holds nothing back. He continues questioning Colonel Jessup, who fights him every step of the way.

CLIMAX:

After an impassioned and emotional courtroom battle, Kaffee flat-out asks him if he ordered the Code Red, and Jessup admits to it.

AFTERMATH:

Jessup is arrested. While exonerated of most of the charges, Kaffee's clients are found guilty of conduct unbecoming a marine and are dishonorably discharged. Still, Kaffee has earned Dawson's respect and he's saved his clients from both death and imprisonment. Most importantly, he's honorably and respectably tried a case in court, and he now has a future as a trial lawyer. He's found fulfillment in finally stepping out from under his father's shadow; he's able to do the job he's always wanted with self-respect, in a way that would have made his father proud.