

**Characters:**

**Val-** medic, early/mid 20s

**Liv-** communications officer, mid/late 20s

**Morgan-** commanding officer, mid 30s

**Jules-** enemy soldier, mid 30s

**“Almost Home” (Scene 1)**

**Characters:** Val, Liv, Morgan

**Scene**

A bunk room on a forward military base located near a contested city. The room is sparse with few decorations and in spite of how lived in it is, doesn't appear homey at all.

*Faint sounds of artillery being fired are heard and will continue throughout the scene. Lights up on VAL, LIV, and MORGAN sit around a rickety table playing Texas hold 'em. Each has a small pile of poker chips, or ideally some substitute, in front of them. In spite of the casual game, the atmosphere is tense. VAL deals two cards to LIV, MORGAN, and herself.*

**Val:** Blinds in my friends.

*LIV and MORGAN toss their respective big and little blind bets in.*

**Val:** I call.

**Liv:** Check.

**Morgan:** Check.

*VAL deals the three flop cards.*

**Liv:** Check.

*MORGAN taps the table.*

**Val:** Raise you all seven.

**Liv:** Fold.

**Morgan:** Call.

*VAL deals the fourth flop card. LIV lets out a sigh of exasperation. MORGAN taps the table.*

**Val:** Raise you ten then.

**Morgan:** Call.

*VAL deals the river card. MORGAN taps the table.*

**Val:** Check.

*MORGAN and VAL reveal their cards. MORGAN looks on as VAL claims the pot.*

**Val:** Heh.

*MORGAN rolls their eyes. After VAL organizes their chips, they deal another hand.*

**Val:** Blinds in again my friends.

*LIV and MORGAN once again toss in their respective big and little blind bets. This time MORGAN seems far less interested.*

**Val:** I call.

**Liv:** Check.

**Morgan:** Check.

*VAL deals the three flop cards. MORGAN barely notices the cards.*

**Liv:** Raise fifteen.

**Morgan:** Call.

**Val:** I call.

*VAL deals the fourth flop card. MORGAN has now completely lost focus on the game.*

**Liv:** Raise twenty.

*MORGAN doesn't notice.*

**Val:** (To MORGAN) You going to call? I am waiting.

*MORGAN doesn't hear. LIV and VAL eye MORGAN worriedly.*

**Liv:** Morgan, call.

*Morgan still appears lost in thought.*

**Val:** Hey. Morgan. Are you alright?

**Morgan:** Oh. Yeah. Mine?

**Val:** Yeah. I am getting worried about you.

**Morgan:** *(looking at LIV)* What'd you bet?

**Liv:** Twenty.

**Morgan:** Twenty...hmph. Call, raise twenty.

**Val:** Fold.

*VAL folds the hand and is ready to deal the flop card.*

**Liv:** Call, raise ten.

**Morgan:** Confident hmm? Call.

*VAL reveals the river card.*

**Liv:** Raise fifteen.

**Morgan:** Call.

**Val:** I think you all have had your fun. Show me what you have.

*LIV and MORGAN reveal their respective hands.*

**Morgan:** Bluffing again?

**Liv:** I've got the law of averages on my side.

**Morgan:** Your precious law of averages doesn't care when there's a human element. You know what your problem is?

**Liv:** I have bad people skills?

**Morgan:** You didn't commit.

**Liv:** I was betting more than I normally do. Look at what I have left, I think I committed plenty.

**Morgan:** You're just prolonging the inevitable. How many more hands you have left?

**Liv:** One or two.

**Morgan:** So why not risk it all and get me to fold?

**Liv:** Cause I might get something better next hand. Spread the risk.

**Morgan:** Conducting triage isn't how you win.

**Liv:** It's how you survive.

**Morgan:** What's better surviving or winning?

**Liv:** And your answer is why you're our fearless leader?

**Morgan:** Winning. Isn't that right Val?

*VAL starts but doesn't say anything.*

**Liv:** Is that some sage wisdom or something? Are you just trying to say you're smarter than me?

**Morgan:** In the practical sense.

**Liv:** Care to enlighten me, wise master?

**Morgan:** Who's been winning?

**Liv:** ...Val.

**Morgan:** Do you think Val is better at this than me?

**Liv:** Um...well...

**Morgan:** Go ahead. It's off the record.

*VAL looks up from the poker chips.*

**Liv:** Yes?

*MORGAN laughs.*

**Morgan:** Oh Liv. All the intelligence in the world won't mean anything without a hint of wisdom...

*MORGAN smiles and leans down, pulling out a gun and pointing it at VAL. The table is silent and motionless for a moment. VAL remains frozen for a moment before shaking their sleeve over the table, revealing a card.*

**Morgan:** Ah...a "val-uable" card indeed.

*Another pause as MORGAN tries to keep the false tension afloat.*

**Liv:** What kind of cheater are you? Folding with that kind of hand?

*All three can't hold their laughter in any longer and chuckles emerge, finally relieving the false tension.*

**Val:** One who knows when the game is up. Besides, I cannot stack the deck *that* much here, it is too obvious. If we were in some seedy back room, all wearing our transparent green visors, and playing under a single light bulb, then you would see what I am capable of.

*VAL attempts to end the description on a serious note but can't help smiling.*

**Liv:** If Morgan caught you here, what makes you think changing venues will help?

**Val:** The lighting.

**Liv:** The lighting?

**Val:** The lighting.

*The lights dim briefly for emphasis along with the sound of an explosion The three pay it no mind and their smiles and chuckles turn to laughter. Finally, after the three have regained their composure.*

**Val:** Morgan, what was on your mind?

**Morgan:** I'm fine.

**Val:** We are your friends...You can talk with us.

**Morgan:** Deal another hand...

**Val:** I am supposed to help.

**Liv:** Morgan-

**Morgan:** -Deal another hand Val.

*Silence.*

**Morgan:** Deal another hand.

**Val:** Talk first, game second.

*A pause as MORGAN stares at VAL and ponders what the best option is.*

**Morgan:** ...Home. I've been thinking about home...

**Val:** We are in a warzone...that subject has been on my mind too.

*A pause.*

**Val:** Keep going, please.

**Morgan:** I don't know if I can go back.

**Val:** What. Why not?

**Morgan:** This war has been my life for almost four years. I don't know if I can live without it.

**Val:** But... going home should help keep everything in perspective right?

*A pause as MORGAN stares at the flop of five cards in the middle of the table.*

**Morgan:** It does...For a time...

*A pause as VAL waits for MORGAN to continue.*

**Liv:** What do you know about what we're going through?

**Morgan:** Easy Liv.

**Liv:** ...How could you understand? This isn't personal for you.

**Val:** I...I apologize. I forget where we are more and more it seems.

**Liv:** Well try and remember sometime.

**Morgan:** It's easy to forget out here. You need to keep what matters close, right Liv?

**Liv:** mhm.

**Morgan:** It's show and tell time. You're turn.

**Liv:** Really?

**Morgan:** Yes, really. Time to open up, lest we forget the quality time we spent together here in this godforsaken place.

**Liv:** Who am I to argue with that.

*LIV produces a small piece of paper from inside their jacket and hands it to VAL.*

**Val:** She is your sister?

**Liv:** Yeah. It's an old photo now.

*Liv snatches the photo back.*

**Liv:** How old was she when I took that? Twelve...no...no...thirteen.

**Val:** How old is she now?

**Liv:** Just had a birthday, so sixteen...I think

**Morgan:** Two more years...

*MORGAN motions to the three of them.*

**Val:** We should win in two more years...right?

**Morgan:** If you believe what you hear. Four years of this and we're at most a dozen miles from where this whole thing started.

*LIV puts the picture back into their jacket.*

**Val:** What about your family Morgan?

**Morgan:** I said what's on my mind. Deal another h-

**Val:** -Not yet. There is more.

**Morgan:** There's always more, now deal-

**Val:** -Not until you talk to me about it.

*VAL waves the deck at MORGAN. MORGAN tries to grab the deck from VAL and fails. A pause.*

**Morgan:** Deal.

**Val:** Oh you want to talk now?

**Morgan:** You know what I mean.

**Val:** I am a filthy cheater Morgan, what do you expect from me?

**Morgan:** Deal. The. Cards.

**Val:** Talk.

*VAL waves the deck at MORGAN again.*

**Val:** Your family?

*Another pause as MORGAN sighs and begins to think.*

**Val:** I know you want to...Come on.

*A pause.*

**Val:** We certainly do not have to keep playing you know. I can just take my winnings...

**Morgan:** My family...god. A son a bit younger than Liv's sister. My wife...forgive me...You happy?

**Val:** Almost. How long has it been since you saw them?

*MORGAN doesn't answer.*

**Val:** Please. You want to keep playing?

*A pause.*

**Morgan:** Three years.

**Val:** Jesus.

*A pause.*

**Val:** Why has it been so long?

*Nothing.*

**Val:** I know you want to tell us.

*MORGAN continues their silence.*

**Val:** At least to get back to the game. I promise, no more cheating.

**Morgan:** I don't know if I can face them like this, okay?

**Liv:** I don't know, you look pretty good for someone who's given four years of their life to killing people.

*MORGAN shoots LIV a cold look which immediately ends LIV's playful attitude.*

**Liv:** I'm sorry. That was inappropriate.

**Morgan:** No Liv, I appreciate the thought, but your timing needs work.

**Val:** Like what Morgan?

**Morgan:** Will you ever be satisfied?

*MORGAN reaches for the deck but VAL slides it away.*

**Val:** When you feel better.

**Morgan:** Then we'll be here until the war's over.

**Val:** One more and we can get back to the game.

**Morgan:** If you're lying...

**Val:** I promise. Why do you not want to see your family?

**Morgan:** You know Liv's sister?

**Val:** Sure.

**Morgan:** The way she's smiling?

**Val:** Yes?

**Morgan:** I don't know if I can do that anymore.

**Val:** I have seen you smile plenty of times. Today you even laughed.



**Morgan:** I'm not talking about fleeting moments. I'm talking about smiling without fear or worry. Smiling when you're filled with joy.

**Val:** I would not expect that out here.

**Morgan:** Of course not. You done? Can we get back to it?

**Val:** Sure.

*VAL begins to deal another hand. A telephone rings in another room, MORGAN exits to answer.*

**Liv:** I know what you're trying to do, believe me, I've tried too.

**Val:** There must be something, I mean I can try and convince our superiors that-

**Liv:** -Morgan can still do the job so there's nothing wrong...Some medic isn't going to change anyone's mind.

**Val:** But-

*MORGAN enters.*

**Morgan:** Grab your gear, we're going out.

**Val:** Again? How many does this make this month?

**Liv:** Was I supposed to keep track? *(muttering)* Seventy...seven...

**Val:** Just us?

**Morgan:** They like our record and we have that light touch they're so desperate for.

**Val:** What are we doing then?

**Morgan:** Recon.

**Liv:** Always. Can't we get something interesting like bomb disposal?

*MORGAN shoots LIV a disapproving look.*

**Liv:** I know...I know...

*VAL exits, LIV moves to follow but MORGAN stops them. MORGAN maintains eye contact with LIV long enough for the "we'll talk later" to sink in. LIV exits followed by MORGAN. The lights fade down to blackout as the artillery grows louder then is replaced by gunfire.*