Inside a large white tent at Camp Wolf, just outside Kuwait City, young men and women push ammunition into steel M16 magazines. The bullets go *click, click, click* against the metal plate above the magazine’s spring. Each bullet hits the next, staggering left then right, left then right, like a steel zipper. Young hands rapidly push the bullets into place. They must load thirty bronze-colored bullets into every magazine until each has four of them fully loaded, enough firepower to get them across the desert. As thumbs push the blunt end of each bullet against the already placed rounds, the tent is filled with the sound of bullets hitting bullets, the *click, click, click* like a desert lullaby.

*Click, click, click, click.*

Someone is playing an Elton John record on their boom box. As the troops recline on stuffed duffle bags, some resting their thumbs in between loadings, the music reminds them of home. It has the sweet, slow rhythm of a lazy Sunday afternoon, and if they were to close their eyes some of them would picture themselves back in sunny parlors, sipping ice-cold beer and watching children play on the lawn. Some would smell apple pie and the earthy scent of mud and grass clippings, and in between Elton John’s lyrics they’d also hear the gentle laughter of children having fun.

If they try hard enough, some of them will be able to drown out the sounds just beyond their tent—the rush of air being sucked into airplane propellers on the Kuwait Airport runway or generators motoring along as they provide power for dozens of tents. Some may even forget they are in Kuwait.

*Click, click, click.*
Most of the soldiers know very little about Kuwait. They were too young to have participated the first time the United States was over here in 1990. Most of them were still in elementary school. They know nothing about oil and Saddam and the dozens of military camps that cropped up across the desert after the Americans pushed the Iraqis out of Kuwait. Camp New York. Camp Virginia. Camp Pennsylvania. These are places to remind the troops of home, but they will always feel foreign to traveling soldiers. Camp Doha. Camp Fox. Camp Arifjan. Camp Spearhead. Who would ever call these places home?

Click, click, click, click, click.

They stand in line under the towering floodlights. They’re covered from head to toe in camouflage and gear. Their skin is black, green, and brown, so much so that they can hardly tell each other apart. Their weapons are slung behind their backs so the muzzles point at the ground behind their right boots. Loaded ammunition magazines stick out from their breast pockets, within reach. They listen to a corporal explain the coming day’s activities as the sun peeks over the airport runway. Rays of sunlight throw themselves toward the soldiers, temporarily blinding them. Sand blows into their eyes and sticks to their sweaty faces. As the troops turn to gather their bags, nine buses pull up beside the white canvas tents.

They have ammunition. They have weapons. All the military needs to do now is point them in the right direction.