Three Pistols
     Three different bullets mark the significant times of his life in which he holds a gun. Three times, maybe it's more than some people, but he's just grateful that it's less than many more.

     The sky is setting with a scarlet red and he is fourteen years old. His father passes the rifle to him, shows him how to load, and lets him hold it. Then he observes with wide eyes as his father takes his own and squeezes off a single shot without a moment’s hesitation. The gun, warmed by sunlight, is hot beneath his touch.
     Thirty feet in front, the deer falls limp.
    The first bullet, he is the bystander.

    The sky is a bright, baby blue and he is barely eighteen. He hates it here, amid the metallic smell of gunpowder and the sounds of men destroying men, but he hates the sky most for having the audacity to be painted blue, cheerful and innocent, when the battlefield below is colored with blood. He watches as the man beside him goes down, eyes under his helmet dark with fear, as he draws his weapon close. The trigger is warm under his fingers. Memories flash of a deer and a forest, and this time, he's the one who acts.

     Thirty feet in front, the soldier falls limp.

The second bullet, he is the hunter.

    The sky is a radiant gold and it is his twenty second birthday. There is no one else left, bombs and bullets collapsed the trench’s exit, sparing half his troops on the other side and burying the other half. Too soon, he hears the enemy footsteps drawing closer, a monotone *thump thump*, and pulls his last pistol out of its holster. When he enlisted, they told him he’d be a hero. He doesn’t feel like one, trapped in trench warfare with dust in his eyes, dirt on his face, and death at his back. And he finally understands, far too late, that wars aren’t won with heroes; they are won with martyrs.

     There’s nothing left to do but fight the futile fight, so he clutches the pistol tighter, aims at the first of approaching enemies, and reminisces a day under a scarlet sky. The gun metal glows gold in the morning sun.

     Thirty feet in front, the pursuer opens fire.

The last bullet, he is the prey.

By Jane Wu