



# The Art of Dying

a short story  
by KJ Bishop

## Introduction

Not counting school assignments, "The Art of Dying" was the first story I ever wrote. Readers of *The Etched City* will recognise Gwynn, and might see adumbrations of other characters. Galuth is a sort of beta version of Ashamoil (the city in *The Etched City*). A nameless version of Galuth appears in the epilogue of the book.

The story was first published in *Aurealis* #19 in 1997. For this electronic edition I tried to fix it up without drastically changing it. Though I brought a couple of things into line with *The Etched City*, the story still takes place in a world slightly different from that of the book, not that the latter is exactly fixed in concrete.

N.B. 1: The names Galuth and Geulah are Hebrew words, galuth meaning exile/alienation, geulah meaning redemption.

N.B. 2: I don't know why the river doesn't flow over the cliff, except that this is dreamland.

## The Art of Dying

In a corner of the smoking-room under the Amber Tree cafe, recumbent on brocade cushions, lay Mona Skye, the duellist and poet of tragic fame.

She was the city's pre-eminent invalid. Fever made her long, austere face beautiful. It reddened her lips and made her grey eyes gleam and smoulder. As her lean body wasted towards frailty it had come to exhibit the strange sensual grace of a strong thing weakened and perversely unashamed of its new tenderness. Even her pale hair appeared softer and brighter.

*The disease turns her into that old cliché, the beautiful and beloved thing that can live only a little while ...* Vali Jardine experienced the taste of anger as if it were sour honey smeared on the mouthpiece she suckled. The narghile sat in the middle of their little circle, an antique of engraved glass with three velvet-covered pipes. Opiate smoke bubbled drowsily through rose-water inside it.

Anger had been a close companion to Vali since the summer night of the Lantern Crossing, when Mona had drunkenly sworn to catch her death at last. They were standing on the bank of the Geulah at Jubilee Bridge, surrounded by the crowd who were gathered to watch the thousands of paper lanterns floating down the river beneath the backdrop of floodlit palaces.

She would humble Death, the grinning bastard -- she said -- by being more ardent than he, so that in the end, when it came, it was she who would look him in the teeth and say, "I am here, and you are not."

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