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# AVRA CADIVRA

*Karen Alkalay-Gut*

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Avra Cadivra by Karen Alkalay-Gut

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AVRA CADIVRA:  
Charms and Blessings for  
Wishing Others Well and  
Making Good Things Come True

**Karen Alkalay-Gut**

# Avra Cadívrá

It will become  
as we have said

The word  
makes the world

# Introduction

The word makes the world.

This is the principle of poetry as well as of magic. Although every explanation I have read gives different sources for this word, a dying friend once convinced me that the magical word *Abracadabra* comes from the Aramaic phrase I have adapted here as the title of this collection and translated in the title poem. *Avra*—it comes to pass, and *CaDivra*—as was spoken. It indicates that within the shaping and ordering of language is a power to change the world as we find it, that things happen as we say.

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for the power to work charms)**

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# Avra Cadívrá

# Invocation

The source  
is always pain  
what remains  
in the night  
from the struggle  
to continue  
to exist

This distress  
becomes  
fruitful  
in the day

food for the roots  
of new life

# To the Muse

Meet me where we have met before  
deep in the forests of longing  
down the slim path along the lake of fulfillment

I will carry my empty golden cup  
you will bring our brew of ambrosia

## Learning to Fly

As a child, I feared letting my body  
float on the water, kept a solid foot  
on the floor of the pool to be sure.

Today there are times when I trust the sky  
can lay my heart over the wind  
and swim—with nothing holding me  
but the desire  
to feel air from all directions.

## A Love Charm

Today you will not know why  
but you will dress early and walk  
the long street from your house to mine.  
You will make up some story on the way  
and pray I will not see through it.  
If ever you looked at me with love  
it will all come back to you now  
as your feet bring you to my door  
to my home, my bed, your blood  
forever at my call

# Not Me

See me

see me first from over there  
see me standing on a stair  
see my shadow long  
before you  
see me

Not me

let me see you singly  
let me learn to leave you be  
let this chant begin with this  
let me see your shadow  
let me see your bounds

Not me

Even as I say this  
you are turning  
turning to my stair  
you are turning caught in air  
you are learning to love me  
loving you

# Wedding

All lovers  
enrich the world—  
proving union possible  
in these times of division

All lovers  
are enriched by  
the world—  
absorbing warmth  
as a tree does water,  
and blossoming  
blossoming

Blessings settle  
on all our heads  
at weddings  
by grace of the groom and bride

We catch the bouquet of their love  
and throw back  
all the wishes  
of our years and our dreams

# Conception

Here  
inside  
I wish  
to emerge

You wish  
me with you  
as well.

Wishes are stronger  
than tears  
than voids.  
Wishes are stronger  
than fears,  
avoidance.

Wishes are winds  
that blowing can change  
even the shape of the universe.

Wishes are waters  
that flowing can bear  
fertile soil to barren shores

bring me to birth bring me to birth bring me to birth

# For the Gathering at the Birth of a Baby Girl

Each one of us  
Is illuminated by you  
Each one of us here  
Is enlightened by you

Your presence forms  
a new wholeness  
connecting every one here  
with the light of a new generation,

connecting your parents  
in an even greater bond  
by the mutuality of your creation  
and the responsibility  
for your well being

Connecting generations together  
with your naming—  
past with future—  
making a new beginning  
for yourself  
and each one of us here

May your own life ever continue  
to be one of illumination and enlightenment  
for yourself  
and all those you will grow to love

# Birth Blessing

In these happiest of times  
we think of those who are absent  
from this celebration  
those we love  
who would have loved  
to share in this joy today

and yet they are all with us today  
all sharing in the joy  
as they share in their own regeneration  
and as much as they are missed  
they are blessed in this event

# Blessing for New Parents

The ceremony of the redemption of the child,  
the practice of buying back the first born  
from the priestly class  
is also a lesson to all parents  
that raising children is a privilege  
beyond price

and those nights when you do not sleep  
at first because she is hungry for food  
and later because she is hungry for life

remember – it was not something that came  
by nature or by chance  
but a privilege you bargained for  
and won

# Marriage Renewal

In this house  
is enormous strength  
shekhina rain  
falling on the roof  
and down the gutters,  
rushing from faucets  
and slithering into drains.

In this house  
are pillows suffused  
with wasted tears,  
cushions  
thrown in mistaken places  
smothering when they could  
support

In this house  
is an old furnace  
waiting  
only to be stoked  
deep deep into genuine feeling

Now is the time  
for all that is here  
in this house  
to appear  
in its primal  
complete form,  
its true order

Now is the time  
in this house  
to channel the power

to even, equal  
maternal divine healing

Now there will be love  
When it is time

Now there will be love  
When it is time

Now there will be love  
When it is time

# Against Insomnia

Moon, soothe this night  
that thunders like horses  
leaping cross the bed  
then turning back to trot, gallop and leap  
again and again, stirring the air  
with old sorrows and fears

Moon, let your fingers caress  
the soft neck of sorrow, clearing  
the fuddled synapses,  
searing painful scars from tiny nerves.

Moon, you know the woe of sleeplessness,  
have watched life reviewed and suffered in the night,  
fathom the depths of cure. Give of your wisdom,  
your comfort: soothe this night.

## For Refreshing Sleep

Sometimes you can't sleep at night because your waking life is so suppressed and restraining only the night can free you and when you take those pills to put you to sleep you sleep but you've slept through the only part with any meaning

Then you must leave your sad restless bed  
And say to the bathroom mirror:

Tomorrow at waking I will begin  
to win my life back, skinning the fat  
existence I have padded myself with.

Tomorrow at waking I will do  
one thing to make the day  
a new beginning

# Salvation of Trees

*“I would have fallen from the cliff, but the tree saved me”  
—Nijinsky*

Tell me the truth little Hawthorne,  
Let me lean against you Pine  
Tell me what you see Acadia tree  
I need your wide arms, your weight  
Your permanence

# To Ease Unrequited Love

**(To Be Said Before a Mirror)**

You have gone too long  
Longing  
The heart leaking  
Weakening  
The secret source of self

Let now be the time  
For beginning  
A new love  
The love within

## To Ease Agues

Every word we do not say helps the sickness go away  
Every letter erased brings you to a better place  
Each word less brings you closer to silence  
Each silence brings you closer to bliss  
Speak in diminishing lengths  
And wholeness will return  
Health will spring.  
End with a  
smile.

# Destroying the Disease

First we make friends.  
I will ask you  
where you are from,  
who you admire, which  
candidate you would support  
if there were elections tomorrow,  
what animal you wake with  
when your partner is asleep.

Then we fall  
in love—you  
charm me, focus  
all my thoughts,  
dreams, night  
mares, take my sex  
from all who are not  
you

And you weaken me  
pull out my hair  
leave me aching and red-eyed  
so that I do not dare  
think of all the things  
that were once  
so pivotal  
to my being

Then I wake,  
as decadent lovers do  
at last, and see  
you are only  
a common vampire

and I take the stake  
gather my life  
all that holds me dear  
channel it all  
for your demise.

# For a Friend Whose Needs Are Greater Than Our Abilities

My love will one day  
break through the limits  
of my confined abilities

My love will one day  
make you forgive  
these days I am not here  
for you

## A Charm to Soothe Withdrawal

It is, of course, the choice of life.  
That act forced upon you at birth  
is now a deed of creation, joy  
you can embrace, make your own.

Let this verse aid the midwife, you,  
to sooth the pangs of birth,  
for in this you are all,

mother and child.

# For an Adolescent Offspring

*“One day honey, one day onion”  
—Arab saying*

Today you will be  
Honey to me,  
Onion to your friends

Today you will not  
be destroyed by  
our likeness  
fear our oppositions

Today you will be  
honey to me,  
onion to your friends.

# The Morning After You Have Made a Fool of Yourself

This day is for healing  
wielding  
the power for good  
released  
by the recognition  
of the limitations  
of humanity

# Becoming Friends with Familiars

Black cat, who knows  
the evil  
we do each to each,

teach me  
the velvet secret  
of clarity  
in darkness

# Against Agues

Wear the word  
around your neck  
a triangle of  
diminishing letters,  
increasing intensity.

Wear the word  
that shows control  
over the world  
of invisible agues

Wave the wand  
make it be

abracadabra

## Descry

Oh my gold earring,  
so much a part of me I cannot tell  
where your circle begins  
speak to me with that language  
you learned in my ear  
tell me where you are hiding

# For Inspiration

Do not look at the moon.  
Do not contemplate emptiness.

Talk to those you love  
ask of their moons  
give them plenty

# A Charm Before an Examination

What is dull is made sharp  
what is blurred is made clear  
what is many is made one  
what is many is made one  
what is many is made one

What is said is made true  
what is acted is made real  
what is many is made one  
what is many is made one  
what is many is made one

What is true comes to light  
what is hidden is revealed  
what is many is made one  
what is many is made one  
what is many is made one

# The Forest Replies

Remember the pines  
that woke you mornings  
redolent of belonging

The earth soft with their needles  
the sky filtering down.

Remember the circle of water  
carved in the stone rising  
deep from human eyes,

buoying swimmers with icy fellowship  
on hot summer afternoons.

Remember the fire  
I gave you  
those nights

of dark cold

## About the Author



Born in London on the last night of the Blitz, Karen Alkalay-Gut grew up in Rochester, New York, completing a Ph.D. in 1975 at the University of Rochester. Since 1972, she has been in Israel, raising a family, teaching poetry at Tel Aviv University, writing, and living. Alkalay-Gut chairs the Israel Association of Writers in English and is vice-chair of Federation of Writers Unions in Israel. She is a coordinating editor of the *Jerusalem Review* and a trustee for the Alsop Review.

Alkalay-Gut has published on Dowson, Wilde, and Swinburne in such journals as *Criticism*, *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, *Victorians Institute Journal*, and *Victorian Poetry*. She is now at work on a study to be titled "The Logic of Late-Victorian Poetry." Four books of her poems have also appeared in Hebrew translation. She has also translated poems from Hebrew, Yiddish, and Arabic.

Her interests are Modern and Contemporary American Poetry, Rock Music, and various combinations of the above.