

MAGIC WORDS & MORE MORE MORE MAGIC WORDS

Eskimo (Inuit)

MAGIC WORDS (after Nalungiaq)

In the very earliest time,
when both people and animals lived on earth,
a person could become an animal if he wanted to
and an animal could become a human being.
Sometimes they were people
and sometimes animals
and there was no difference.
All spoke the same language.
That was the time when words were like magic.
The human mind had mysterious powers.
A word spoken by chance
might have strange consequences.
It would suddenly come alive
and what people wanted to happen could happen —
all you had to do was say it.
Nobody could explain this:
That's the way it was.

You, you caribou
yes you
 long legs
yes you
 long ears
you with the long neck hair—
From far off you're little as a louse:
Be my great swan, fly to me,
big bull
 cari-bou-bou-bou.

Put your footprints on this land—
this land I'm standing on
is rich with the plant food you love.
See, I'm holding in my hand
the reindeer moss you're dreaming of—
so delicious, yum, yum, yum—
Come, caribou, come.

Come on, move them bones,
move your leg bones back and forth
and give yourself to me.
I'm here,
I'm waiting
 just
 for
 YOU

you, you, caribou
APPEAR!
COME HERE!

MAGIC WORDS FOR HUNTING SEAL

O sea goddess Nuliajuk,
when you were a little unwanted orphan girl
we let you drown.
You fell in the water
and when you hung onto the kayaks, crying,
we cut off your fingers.
So you sank into the sea
and your fingers turned into
the innumerable seals.

You sweet orphan Nuliajuk,
I beg you now
bring me a gift,
not anything from the land
but a gift from the sea,
something that will make a nice soup.
Dare I say it right out?
I want a seal!

You dear little orphan,
creep out of the water
panting on this beautiful shore,
puh, puh, like this, puh, puh,
O welcome gift
in the shape of a seal!

— *English versions by Edward Field, from Knud Rasmussen*