

Magic Words

By after Nalungiaq (an Inuit poem, translated by Edward Field)

In the very earliest time,
when both people and animals lived on earth,
a person could become an animal if he wanted to
5 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.
10 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
15 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.