



*Illustration by Jackie Morris*

# ***Conker***

**C**abinet-maker, could you craft me a conker?

**O**il its wood, burnish its veneer, set it glowing from within?

**N**ever. *Not a chance. No hope at all.*

**K**ing, then, could you command me a conker?

Compel its green spikes to grow, its white plush  
to thicken? *Impossible. Impracticable. Inconceivable.*

**E**ngineer, surely you could design me a conker?

Refine its form, mill its curves and edges?  
Manufacture me that magic carpet?  
*Unfeasible. Unworkable. Unimaginable.*

**R**alize *this* (said the Cabinet-maker, the King and  
the Engineer together), *conker cannot be made,  
however you ask it, whatever word or tool you use,  
regardless of decree. Only one thing can conjure  
conker – and that thing is tree.*

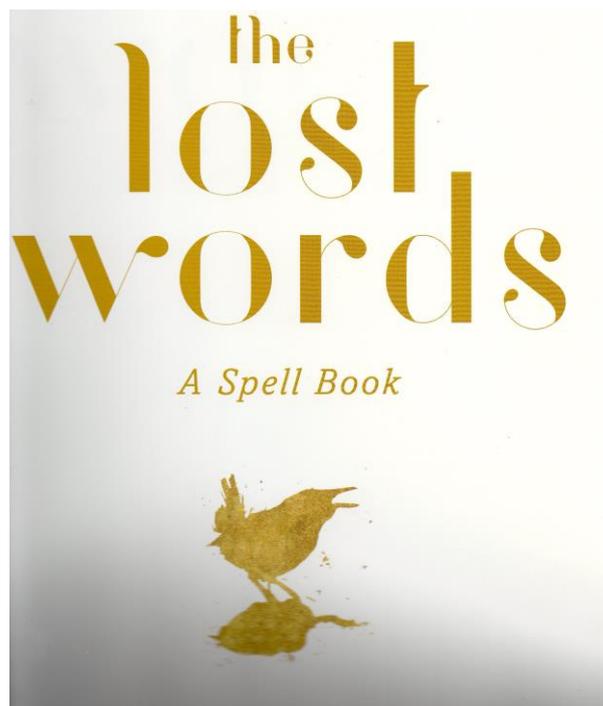
**Robert Macfarlane**

This poem and illustration are from *The Lost Words*,  
A Spell Book by Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris.

*Once upon a time, words began to vanish from the language of children. They disappeared so quietly that at first almost no one noticed – fading away like water on a stone. The words were those that children used to name the natural world around them: acorn, adder, bramble, conker – gone! Fern, feather, kingfisher, otter, raven, willow, wren... all of them gone!*

Robert Macfarlane is a fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and the author of a number of best-selling and prize-winning books, including *The Wild Places*, *The Old Ways*, *Holloway* and *Landmarks*. He is a word-collector and mountain-climber. The American Academy of Arts and Letters awarded him the E. M. Forster Award for Literature in 2017.

Jackie Morris has illustrated for the *New Statesman*, *Independent* and *Guardian*, collaborated with Ted Hughes, and has written and illustrated over forty books, including *The Snow Leopard*, *The Ice Bear*, *Song of the Golden Hare* and *The Wild Swans*. She lives in a cottage on the cliffs of Pembrokeshire.



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