Dappled sunlight filtered through the weeping willow which dangled above my head like an angel mourning a lost soul. Water raced through the rushes, who whispered grumpily as they were tossed about. A herd of deer milled around the side of the holy river, in which I was fishing, like a heron waiting for its prey. Stooping low, I held my precious woven basket in the surging water, which tried desperately to snatch it away. The basket was very special because it had been passed down my family for many decades. Absently, I gazed at the village where my family was living. It was surrounded by an orange grove and to the east, the holy river in which I was poised flowed playfully. I snapped back into action as I felt a hard jerk from the basket; a large common carp fought desperately against the current, trying to escape my basket. I hoisted it out of the river, while it flapped wildly in the draining water. As gently as I could, I lifted it out of the basket and onto a hard rock. Picking up a large pebble, I delivered the blow to its head, killing it without suffering. With my back to the river, I didn’t notice my precious basket being swiftly stolen away.

As I snaked speedily through the sweeping current, a small object whisked past my face. I stopped abruptly and the current slowed. Peering around, I caught sight of the strange scrap. As I looked closer, I saw it was a meticulously woven basket created from the finest hazel. I sniffed it, my tongue flicking in and out while my wide tailfin held it up to my face. On the far bank, a small girl, only about ten summers old was casting about wildly with a large fish in her hands. I ducked into the water, now invisible as I meandered toward her.

No! I thought, staring about fretfully. Where did it go? Stomach churning, I dropped the carp and rushed to the water. As I glanced downstream, my heart skipped a beat. My precious basket was streaking toward me, against the current! I pelted to bank, skidding on the wet clay. Reaching out, I caught my basket by the handle, snatching it up in order to not lose it again. Tying it to the floor with rushes, I collapsed, panting heavily from the stress. Heart slowing, I came to my senses. How was it flowing upstream? As I pondered, I did not notice the water rising in front of me.
I watched the scant being’s shocked face as the basket drifted upriver. It stretched out its arm and snatched the basket away. As the human lay down, I noticed something. *It didn’t give me my sacrifice!* Hissing, I rose from the river, my body unfurling gracefully as my tailfin shook with rage.

As she rose out of the water, I shifted backward. Her snake-like body untwined, eyes fixed me with a cold stare. She looked like a serpent but was made out of water and had a wide tailfin. *This must be her.* I realised, *It must be Aila, the Goddess of the River.* As I crawled backwards, Aila advancing, I felt something slimy. Yelping, I spun around. There lay the carp, which I had dropped when I rushed to get my basket. Realisation dawned upon me. *I forgot to give Aila the sacrifice! She wanted to trade the fish for the basket!* Acting fast, I seized it, turning around to face Aila. She stopped in her tracks as I kneeled and held the fish above my head chanting,

“I bow to thee, Goddess of the Rivers, I offer you this sacrifice,
My first and largest catch,
Please accept my offering.”

There was a deafening silence as nature held its breath, the river’s current almost ceased. Even the wind stopped to listen. She leant forward and took the fish from my hands with her forked tongue. Aila slinked back into the river, holding my gaze as she went. I stood there for a moment, utterly bewildered, when hundreds of carp were washed onto the bank. My jaw dropped as they floundered toward the retreating water. Excitement flooded my body as I realised that I must have pleased Aila. I sprinted to the village to inform the elders...

“Did you like that one, my child?”
“Yes mummy, but what happened to the girl?”
“She grew up, holding the memory close to her heart. A decade passed and she found a wonderful man who loved her more than anything in the world. They got married and had a beautiful child and named her after the river goddess, Aila.”
“That’s my name mummy!”
“I know my child, I know.”