

The River by Alexandra Croft

Perched upon a huge River Red Gum, the Sea Eagle gazed out upon the river, his home. Absorbing the warm sunshine. The gentle breeze ruffled his feathers comfortably as he closed his jet black eyes.

When he opened them again he saw the deep emerald leaves of the tree, string with delicate beads of the early morning dew, glistening like tiny diamonds.

Out past the dense green canopy of gums was the river; *his* river- the most beautiful river on Earth. He watched as the stream carried twigs and leaves, even small insects unable to escape the current, further and further upstream until they disappeared around the bend.

This was where the river branched off into thins, sandy beaches, perfect for fish. Around the corner were a few large logs and branches to snag fishing lines, meaning that it was a popular place for fisherman.

The Eagle didn't like humans – they were so, *weird*. What kind of creature walked on two legs and had arms? And what was that ridiculous fur covering the crown of their heads?

Not only were they without fur, scales, hair or even a tail, but they were also covered in bizarre looking materials from head to toe. They didn't even preen themselves. All in all, he tried to stay as far as possible from them.

The Eagle loved the river. It was his home, his life and, to him, was paradise. There was always an abundance of fish to support his family; no shortage of materials to build his huge nest and a variety of trees on which to call home or simply watch the world go by.

He loved being a Sea Eagle. He loved being respected by the other birds; even the broody magpies didn't dare attack *him*. He was lord of the skies *and* water.

How he loved his life! How he loved the river! But, unknown to him, all that was about to change.

The next morning began very much the same as all the others; he was awoken yet again by the pitiful chirps of his two hungry chicks.

Although they were only a few weeks old, they were already covered in a soft, fluffy white down. Their eyes were wide open and awake, despite the fact that it was only dawn.

He was incredibly proud of his chicks, even though they were extremely incessant when it came to food and would often peck their parents until fed, but that is what happens when you have eagles as babies.

He glanced at his mate hopefully, but she was fast asleep, her head tucked beneath one wing, the other sheltering the tiny chicks from the icy breeze blowing from the south.

Winter was harsh next to the river.

He stretched his huge wings which spanned almost two metres and took to the sky.

No human has experienced the adrenaline rush of flying like that of the Eagle. Aeroplanes, paragliders or even sky diving cannot compete with the unique sensation of soaring through the air, swerving and plummeting, cruising the wind current gracefully, then diving at tremendous speeds toward the ground before pulling upwards seconds before crashing headfirst into the earth.

Such aerodynamics is preposterous for almost any creature except the bird of prey.

He flew along the river, searching for tiny ripples belonging to that of the fish to feed the chicks and abandoned the carcass to the crows and foxes who scavenged along the river at night and early morning.

On the way back home he saw one of the Rive Red Gums lying across the undergrowth. Assuming it had fallen down of its own accord he ignored it and flew on. Yet if he had looked properly, he would have seen the characteristic teeth marks of a chainsaw. A foreboding sign of things to come.

When he reached his home tree, he landed, greeted by the usual hungry beaks and cries of hunger, demanding food.

The years passed, much the same as usual. The chicks were now adults, and had long left home. But they were not the only things gone.

Sensing the oncoming change, the Eagle flew above the forest. A trail of destruction met his horrified eyes. More and more trees were being removed for firewood, until there were none left. The river was being destroyed.

The waters became polluted with rubbish as more and more humans moved in, killing the fish and other aquatic life that depended on the river. Seeing the danger to his family, the Eagle had no choice but to leave. Reluctantly he took to the skies above, seeing what was left of the Home Tree and the once beautiful river for the last time.

What had once been the heart of a stunningly beautiful river now accommodated an enormous complex of buildings; the river was drained and turned into a huge artificial lake.

Now the only birds were sparrows, starlings and feral pigeons. The only animals were stray cats and dogs abandoned by their owners. Even the homeless had taken refuge there.

And so the animals were long gone, their home destroyed as the area was turned into another suburban metropolis. What had once been paradise was now hell, one of the many victims to the reckless creatures called humans. And the place they named "Paradise Waters" was paradise lost.