In the beginning, we were nature.  
  
The first humans moved through forests like deer, read the weather in the flight of birds, knew the language of streams and the grammar of seasons... We were not separate from the world but woven into its fabric—predator and prey, hunter and hunted, children of the same earth that sprouted our food and claimed our bones. The cave painters of Lascaux understood this: their bison breathe with living force across stone walls, their horses gallop through eternity. Art and animal were one; human and nature shared the same sacred darkness.  
  
We lived by mimesis — becoming the bear to hunt the bear, learning the eagle's patience and the wolf's cooperation. Shamans wore antlers and feathers, transforming themselves into the spirits they sought to understand. Nature was not other but self, not resource but relation. The Australian Aborigines sang their landscape into being, walking songlines that mapped both geography and cosmology. Every rock helda  story; every tree, ancestry.  
  
Then came the gardens.  
  
Mesopotamian kings carved Eden from wilderness, channeling rivers into geometric precision, ordering chaos into rows of grain and groves of dates. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon rose like a green mountain from the desert—humanity's first great declaration that nature could be improved upon, domesticated, made more beautiful than itself. We learned to make the earth serve our dreams.  
  
The Greeks gave names to this tension. *Physis*— nature as a dynamic force, ever-changing, creative. "Techne" — human art and craft, the ability to shape and make. Aristotle walked his Lyceum gardens, teaching that humans were rational animals, separate from but responsible for the natural world. Yet even as philosophy lifted humanity above nature, the Greeks preserved their sacred groves, knowing some wildness must remain untouched. Pan still danced in the olive trees; Dionysus still ran with wolves.  
  
Rome conquered nature as it conquered nations. They drained marshes, built roads through forests, brought lions from Africa to die in the Colosseum. Nature became a spectacle, commodity, and province of empire. Roman villas showcased tamed wilderness—topiary shaped into swans, fountains that defied gravity, gardens that existed only to display human mastery over the elements. Yet in their poetry, they mourned what they destroyed. Virgil's \*Georgics\* sang of farming as divine art, but also of a golden age when humans and nature lived in harmony.  
  
The medieval mind found God in every detail of creation. Saint Francis spoke to birds; Hildegard of Bingen heard music in the movement of stars. Nature was God's second book, written in leaf and in stone, wind and flame. Monastery gardens became metaphors for paradise—enclosed spaces where human cultivation and divine creation worked in harmony. The Gothic cathedrals soared like stone forests, their vaulted ceilings reaching toward heaven while their carved leaves and flowers brought the garden indoors.  
  
But also fear. The forest was home to wolves and witches, bandits and beasts. Nature's wilderness was fallen, dangerous, requiring redemption through human labour. The wilderness must be cleared, cultivated, sanctified. Paradise was a garden, not a forest.  
  
The Renaissance discovered perspective — and with it, the landscape as a scene to be observed rather than an environment to be inhabited. Leonardo dissected corpses and flowers with equal curiosity, seeing both as machines whose secrets could be unlocked. The scientific revolution taught humanity to question nature, to experiment upon it, to unlock its laws through reason and observation. Francis Bacon proclaimed that nature must be "bound into service," made to "reveal her secrets" under torture if necessary.  
  
The Enlightenment completed the separation. Descartes split mind from matter, reason from instinct, humanity from the mechanical universe. Newton revealed nature as clockwork, predictable and quantifiable. The rational mind stood outside nature, observing, measuring, controlling. Gardens became increasingly geometric. Versailles stretched to the horizon in perfect symmetry, nature disciplined into mathematical precision.  
  
But the Romantics remembered what was lost. Rousseau declared civilization corrupt, nature pure. Wordsworth found the divine in daffodils, Coleridge in ancient mariner's cursed seas. They walked the Lake District seeking transcendence in wild places, finding in nature a mirror for human emotion, a refuge from industrial smoke and urban noise. Nature became a homeland for the soul, even as it grew more distant from daily life.  
  
The nineteenth century industrialized the separation. Factories darkened skies; railways carved through ancient forests. Darwin revealed humanity's animal kinship even as technology promised to lift us above natural limitations. The city became humanity's natural habitat—gas-lit, steam-powered, increasingly disconnected from seasonal rhythms. Nature was relegated to parks and paintings, weekend escapes from urban reality.  
  
Yet also preservation. Thoreau built his cabin at Walden Pond, living deliberately, seeking wildness as an antidote to civilization. The first national parks preserved wilderness as museum pieces—nature under glass, protected from itself and from us. Conservation emerged as a guilty conscience, attempting to save what progress destroyed.  
  
The atomic age revealed nature's ultimate power and humanity's ultimate responsibility. We learned to split atoms and splice genes, to orbit the earth and photograph its blue fragility against infinite darkness. Suddenly we were gardeners of the entire planet, our actions rippling through ecosystems we barely understood. Silent Spring warned of chemicals cascading through food webs; the environmental movement was born from the recognition that we had become a geological force.  
  
And now, this moment of climate change and mass extinction, of virtual reality and genetic engineering—we exist in an unprecedented paradox. We have gained godlike power over nature while losing intimate knowledge of it. Children recognize corporate logos more easily than native plants. We can clone mammoths while forgetting how to read weather signs. We livestream sunset from our apartments, ordering groceries from farms we'll never see, living in climate-controlled bubbles that shield us from the seasons we're disrupting.  
  
Yet something ancient stirs. Urban gardens bloom on rooftops; rewilding projects restore damaged landscapes; indigenous wisdom guides conservation efforts. We begin to remember that we are not nature's masters but its members, not separate from the web of life but woven into its every strand. The old shamanic knowledge returns: to heal the earth, we must heal ourselves; to save nature, we must remember that we are nature.  
  
Our relationship with the natural world has traced a great circle—from union through separation toward integration. We began as children of the earth, learned to become its gardeners, discovered ourselves as its destroyers, and now struggle to become its healers. The cave painters knew what we were learning again: there is no line between human and nature, no wall between garden and wild.  
  
We are the earth dreaming of itself, nature becoming conscious, wilderness learning to tend itself with hands that remember they are made of clay, hearts that beat with tides, minds that mirror the vast sky they came from and to which they return.  
  
The ancient song continues: we are nature, nature is us, and the dance goes on.