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Urban Eden

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URBAN EDEN

Anne Tate



Urban Eden was conceived as a narrative imagining of the city we could be building right now if we were unfettered in our optimism and aspirations. As Frances Moore Lappe says in her book [Eco-Mind, Changing the Way We Think to Create the World We Want](#): "...over decades I've come to appreciate that central to our ability to solve a problem is how we perceive the challenge, how we *frame* it- that "seeing" determines our capacity for doing. "

We will not accelerate into a future we cannot imagine. So as designers, we should be helping the society imagine a better future. Urban Eden is an effort to simply imagine a better city, framed as four essays, each in a different season. The excerpt below follows a professional woman on her morning commute on a snowy winter day.



Excerpts from Winter

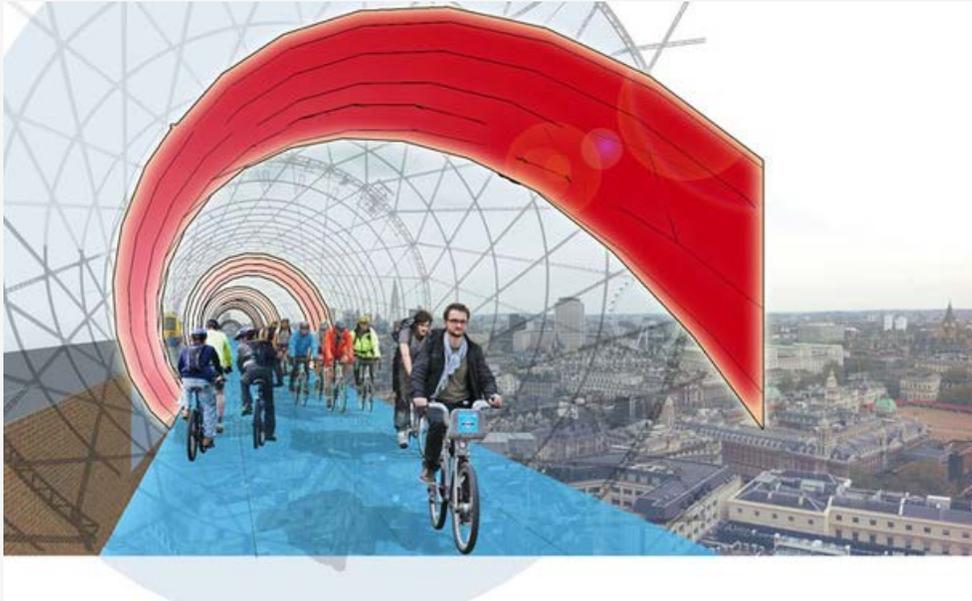
Looking out onto the street in the early morning, she drinks in the muffled quiet of the city street. *Ah, snow*, she muses. *I love riding to work in the snow! Funny to say that*, she knows. Years ago such a sentiment would have been unthinkable, especially coming from a dedicated cyclist. The city laid out below her window is quiet and bright, the sun sparkling off the fresh whiteness. With the advent of clean cars, the snowdrifts now stay white for weeks not hours and that fresh clean quiet of new snow lasts. Even the engines of the big rollers are muffled by the falling snow. All vehicles are equipped with high traction tires, so they can navigate slowly over the packed snow. The streets are rendered useful to other travelers as well, cross country skiers and, even the occasional sleigh, now use the streets along with the buses, taxis and the still popular private cars.



Leaving her apartment building in the morning, she stops around the corner at the café, for a quick latte. In the summer the café has a window on the street, a ride through for cyclists, but today it is too cold to drink outside so she wheels in and waits in the bike lane for service. Fresh OJ from local greenhouses is offered even in the dead of winter. The "dead of winter" no longer feels like a season of deprivation. Early on, when the locavore movement started, people thought it meant no citrus in winter and only turnips for dinner. This morning, the cold bite in the air, contrasts with the steamy warmth of the café and the tart sweetness of the fresh juice. *Ah, she thinks, the best of both.*

Coffee downed, she heads out into the cold winter day, bundled in her riding gear, She remembers, thankfully, that most downtown offices now offer showers and lockers so she can change before her big meeting this morning. The narrow snow-covered swale along the wide sidewalk delineates the bike lane and leads to the broader greenway about two blocks over. Tracing the same path as the storm water from yesterday's snow melt, she is soon on the greenway's broad bike path. Ever since the priority of cycling became a part of city policy, city crews have plowed the bike path as quickly as they clear the bus routes and trolley routes. The wide greenway allows for lots of snow storage and she marvels at the strange ride along the dry clear path lined with steep 6' tall sides of

snow and shaded over by the bare branches of the arching elms high above. *Am I really in the city?* she muses. Certainly this is not the city she heard about from her mother, who described the harrowing rides in the old city fighting for the narrow strip of asphalt left after dirty grey snow was piled up on the sides of city streets.



Crossing the highway overpass, she glances between the dry, vine-covered trellises to see the traffic, buses and light rail surging by in the canyon below, The snow-laden bamboo is bent over in the median strip, and below the bridge the slight hum of the wind turbines can be heard as they capture the turbulence the traffic generates and turn it into electricity. As she enters downtown, she slides up onto the elevated inner-city bike lane. This is her favorite part of the ride, as she zips over intersections without stopping and glides along outside the second story windows of offices. She spies a friend sitting at her desk in a corner office and waves. On the sidewalk below, pedestrians, sheltered under the arcade formed by the bikeway, are looking into the shop windows. The elevated track is always free of snow because it was built with pipes in the lightweight concrete deck that carry solar-heated water.



In a few minutes she passes the steamy windows of the great block-long greenhouse built on top of the city market. The warm moist air smells sweet and she smiles at the idea of the peppers and fruits growing inside all winter long. *Must remember to pick up some fresh carrots on the way home* she notes. Two more crossings, high over the streets and she arrives at the office, and enters directly into the building at the upper floor, wheeling her bike to the bike locker in the lobby and heads for the showers. Some mornings instead, she wheels down the ramp found at the building corner and stops at the newsstand on the way into the main entry.

