A piece of imaginative writing that explores the complexity of family life in the Year 2115, where a ticket features as an important element.

As the shuttle prepared for take-off, Leo looked down at the ticket he held in his hand and frowned. This small, slightly crumpled piece of paper was all that separated him and the billions of people that were sentenced to death. It seemed so incredibly surreal; he thought that the ticket would be more extravagant, more reflective of the standing and calibre of its recipients. Not that it mattered a great deal to Leo; the ticket itself didn’t have to be anything special when what it promised was so astounding. The Earth was dying but Leo was leaving. He was going to be able to watch its passing from thousands of kilometres away, surrounded by a sea of stars.

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The bright, angry sun glared at Leo as he walked down the street, the heat of the pavement rising up through the soles of his leather shoes and the thick, heavy air leaving the inside of his mouth feeling like sandpaper. He tugged at the sleeves of his new Armani suit where it stuck uncomfortably to his skin and attempted to ignore the beads of sweat collecting at his temple. Leo should have known better than to attempt walking to work today – it may technically be winter but the Earth was no longer existing within the restraints of technicalities. It wanted everyone to know it was sick.

Of course, people have been speculating about the end of the world for as long as can be remembered, but it always seemed so incomprehensively far away. The premise only served to make for a great premise for disaster movies and a tool to convince people to install solar panels or take shorter showers. Now it wasn’t so much a question of if the planet was going to end anymore, but rather How long do we have? and How do I get out of here before we all burst into flames? Television screens flashed angrily and frequently with images of violent floods and bright, biting flames and the frantic voices of overworked newsreaders served as a constant and not-so-friendly reminder that everyone was running out of time.

Leo attempted to avoid the topic at all costs; his father was and always had been good at being a critic of everything, preferring to believe the apocalypse was a government plot to distract the people from “the real issues”. Trying to reason with him resulted in loud, drawn-out arguments and alcohol fuelled violence. (Hurting Leo was another thing that his father was and always had been good at.) So he learned to keep his mouth shut and focus on keeping the family business
running smoothly until everything came to an end. It comforted Leo to know that he would at least have the satisfaction that came with an ‘I told you so’ when the world began to unravel.

Leo walked through the sliding glass doors, grateful for the rush of cool air that greeted him and passed the reception desk, slowing down only to smile briefly at the receptionist before stepping into the large glass elevator. He watched the numbers rise and rise until the top level: his father’s office. He knocked loudly on the door and instinctively stuck out his chest and straightened his tie. He waited for footsteps behind the door to reach him.

Leo’s father was a large man – it wasn’t so much that he was tall, but his nature and presence meant he commandeered the entire room. He had a strong, sharp jaw covered in a thick black beard, big solid fists and cold eyes that, even as an adult, Leo had trouble meeting. When the door opened, however, he was greeted by a man who did not resemble his father in the slightest. This man was skinny, reminding Leo instantly of a stick insect, and his thinning blonde hair was slicked back against his scalp. He shoved his wire-frame glasses further up his nose with one hand and struggled to open the heavy door with the other. When he saw Leo standing there, he gave a small sigh.

“Ah, Mr. Robinson? Forgive me for intruding, I figured you would want to receive this away from the inquisitive eyes of others.”

Leo frowned. Mr Robinson? He was being mistaken for his father, but before he could correct the error, the man pulled a large envelope from his suit pocket and handed it to him.

“We thought it best to deliver something as sensitive as this in person. Wouldn’t want some unsightly individual to get it and keep it for themselves, would we?”

He chuckled. Leo tried to join in but his mind was racing: what could the envelope contain that was so secretive? The sound caught in his throat and came out so strange that Leo attempted to cover it up by extending his hand for the man to shake and gave a small smile.

“Of course not. Thank you very much for bringing this to me personally.”

The man nodded and proceeded down the corridor. Once he was out of sight, Leo walked in and locked the door behind him. The office was everything you would expect from a wealthy CEO; it was large, extravagant and seemed to scream money and power. His feet glided across the plush carpet as he walked past the shelves of trophies, leather-bound books and gifts from overseas investors that lined the walls.

Leo moved to sit at his father’s mahogany desk, and while turning the envelope over in his hands he noted that in empty space on his desk where most people would keep a framed photo of their
families, his father had placed a framed copy of his stock certificate. This was enough to make Leo rip open the envelope and investigate what was inside.

Leo exhaled a breath he didn’t realise he had been holding. It was a ticket. Not any ticket: a ticket baring a striking resemblance to the tickets he had seen on the news at night. *Those rich enough to acquire one of these tickets will free themselves of humanity’s burden,* he recalls one reporter saying, voice dripping with disdain. From what Leo could gather from reading and rereading the inscriptions, anyone with a ticket was guaranteed a seat on a one-way trip into space. A chance for the human race to start fresh. Leo double-checked the envelope before resting his head in his hands. One ticket. His father, the man who didn’t believe in global warming, had purchased himself a ticket and was going to leave his only son on a self-destructing Earth alone.

Then the door swung open and his father walked in. The temperature in the room seemed to drop a degree or two. He flinched and, ignoring the beating of his heart, calmly tucked the ticket into his pocket.

His father frowned when he saw him. “What are you doing in here?”

“I had a problem. But now I know exactly what I have to do.”

Leo smiled at his father and headed towards the door. He let it swing shut behind him before his father had time to respond, and walked slowly down the hallway. Leo searched his mind for something that would compel him to turn around. As his mind travelled back to his childhood, all he could recall was the distinct feeling of loneliness, long nights spent alone and hot summer days wearing sleeved shirts to cover the splotches of purple and blue skin. The thought of leaving this all behind made Leo feel weightless; he wondered if this was what being in space will feel like. He walked out onto the street, the reassuring weight of the ticket in his pocket, not nearly as bothered by the harsh sun as he had been that morning.