**Deadline**

Sangeetha G

Cardamom, cinnamon, and bay leaf sputtered in butter, filling the house with its aroma. In half an hour, the family was around the table. The children could not wait to dig into the biryani bowl for the juiciest chicken pieces.

“Don’t be gluttonous. I will make all your favorite dishes before we leave,” mother said.

The children quickly came out with a list of their favorites.

While ladling the biryani into the children’s plates, father looked sideways towards the door on his right-hand side. The door of the room lay ajar. He accusingly looked at his son, who apologetically got up from his seat, walked towards the door, latched it, and came back to his seat.

“Just one month is left. We have to make all the arrangements from now on. The visa papers and other documents will be ready soon. My friends will finalize a home next week. They have identified a school for the children,” the father said.

The children were excited to move to the new country with kangaroos and koalas.

“Before that, we have to settle things here,” he looked at the wife. She nodded her head.

A fortnight passed fast. All the arrangements were made, and the packing started. “Will we be able to move out as per our plan?” he asked his wife.

“I hope so,” she was optimistic.

Two days later, she came running to him. “It is over,” she said with relief in her voice.

“Is it?” He too was relieved.

The couple walked towards the closed room. He opened the door to see his mother lying still. He took the body to the hospital to confirm the death. The doctor examined the body and wrote, “…death due to starvation for over two weeks.”