

Ashley Andrews
ashleyleeandrews@gmail.com

about 500 words

The Cactus at the End of My Desk
by Ashley Andrews

A man walks by every morning and yells at the cactus at the end of my desk. He hates how our world has changed. He calls me lazy for staying at home every day as he walks to work, day in and day out. He hates my *tap-tap-tapping* on my keyboard. He especially hates the cactus at the end of my desk.

The yelling man says that a cactus is a poor excuse for a plant. My friends tell me I should close my window so that I don't have to listen to the yelling man anymore. I laugh and say that I will. The next day I make sure the window is open, and my cactus is at the end of my desk.

The yelling man is right on time. He has something new to yell about today. He yells about bats, traveling, and something about buying a mask. I bite back my smile until he passes my window. On his way home, the man's yelling has died down a bit. He looks at my cactus, and for once, he sighs. He tells my plant that he's happy his wife isn't around to see what is happening. She always wanted to travel the world.

The yelling man walks silently to work the next day. He pauses at my window. His eyes are red and puffy like he's been crying. I open my mouth to speak, but the absence of my keyboard clicking reminds him of my laziness, and with a grunt, he resumes his walk. My cactus waits on the end of my desk for the yelling man, but he does not show up for his usual walk home that evening.

Every day the next week, my cactus awaits abuse that doesn't come. The streets grow increasingly solemn as more people take to their homes. There are no happy faces. I close myself off to the outside world, more so than ever before. I stay glued to the news for the first few days, and then I turn it off.

The cactus at the end of my desk mourns the loss of the yelling man's visits with brown and black edges. My windows have been closed for months now as the country has remained closed. People have begun walking the streets again, if only for necessities. I draw back a curtain and open my window in hopes of welcoming life in.

Now Hiring! screams at me from my window. A flyer is taped there, facing into my apartment rather than the street. I laugh aloud at the unexpected intrusion, and my cactus seems to stretch toward the flyer in encouragement. I've had enough solitude, I think.

A week later, I walk to my new desk across from the yelling man. On my way, I place my cactus at the end of his desk. He smiles.

END