



EYE TO EYE

by Lucy Ann Unwin



We lay on the carpet nose to nose, eye to eye.

I was flat on my belly, chin pressed into the ground. I couldn't help but think about all the mites and dirt and other hidden nasties camped out between the carpet threads. I sealed my lips shut and breathed slowly through my nose.

"You *do* understand why I'm upset, don't you? It's like I'm invisible to her!"

I paused for a second as Cassie just gazed into my eyes. She slow blinked at me but didn't say anything.

"*Fine!*"

I hauled myself onto my elbows and rubbed at my sore chin. *Ouch*. From a distance, the carpet was all soft and bouncy, but up close it was *rough*...don't be fooled! And it smelt funny. I settled back down, this time laying my chin on my hand. Now I could mainly smell a me smell, and it was extra mite protection too.

"I know you get it," I said. "Like when I've done something wrong without even meaning to. All she wants to do is talk! About my "behaviour" and how "rude" I am, when I don't even know what she's talking about! But when *I* want to talk, her eyes glaze over!"

I tipped my head forward to rub my nose on my flattened hands, I had an itch, right on the very tip. When I looked back up, Cassie was gazing out of the window, *her* eyes glazed over.

"Hey!" I swiped my hand from under me to tap her on the head — really gently — and she slowly turned to look back at me.

"Am I boring you, too?" I couldn't stop the sarcasm, but I couldn't be mad at Cassie, not really. Nobody listens to me like she does.

I stared into her dark eyes and imagined what her life must be like. Home all day, only me to talk to. No wonder she can make time! Perhaps Mum just needs a less exciting life too. She's *never* doing nothing.

I thought back to our Minecraft chat, when Mum hadn't even bothered to listen. Fair enough, she'd been making dinner, so a *bit* distracted.

Cassie's head tilted ever so slightly to one side as if she were reading my thoughts, pushing me to go deeper.

And I *guess* she'd said something about a stressful meeting tomorrow that she hadn't prepared for...

I huffed. "Is *that* what you want?" I wanted to be mad at Cassie for making me feel bad about Mum, but I just felt a bit guilty.

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Just then, my mum yodelled through the house, calling me to eat.

I pulled myself to my knees and hooked Cassie up beneath her shell, placing her carefully back in her tank. "I'll check on you again before bed," I said. "I hope you're not too lonely, Cassie!"

The tortoise scratched one leathery foot through the wood-chip and started making her slow way to her favourite rock.

I thought she looked a little smug, but she'd earned it.



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