

EDEN'S STRAWBERRY DAY:
HOW SHE FOUND HER FAMILY STORY

by Julie Farnam

Once there was a little kitten named Eden. She lived in a house with her Mama whose name was Dora. Eden and Dora had a garden and climbing trees. She knew how to climb to the highest place in her favorite tree. And she knew how to climb down.

Dora knew all about important things like how to help other cats get well when they were sick. She even helped other mama cats have kittens. Eden loved to help. Eden and Dora went for long walks to find healing plants so Mama Cat could make medicine.

They found yarrow and chamomile, catnip and St. John's Wort. They collected dandelion roots and leaves for medicine. They gathered strawberry leaves to make Eden's favorite tea. Eden's loved picking lavender because it smelled so good. Eden blew dandelion puffs. Mama Cat said she was helping spread dandelion seeds so more would grow.

Eden talked to plants. One time when she was picking St. John's Wort, the plant told her that its leaves were good for helping the bladder. Dora looked it up in her herb book and, sure enough, that's what it said.

Eden had a Daddy Cat named Harry. Harry was VERY fuzzy. He had the longest hair that Eden had ever seen and he was an artist. He lived far away. Sometimes Eden wished Daddy Cat lived with her and Mama Cat. Especially when she was bored and Mama Cat was busy helping someone.

But sometimes she was glad he didn't. Especially when he came to visit and Mama Cat howled at him and Daddy Cat growled and they both hissed. When that happened, Eden wanted to hide under her bed and not come out. Sometimes big tears rolled from her eyes and soaked her whiskers.

One day when Eden was out picking herbs with Dora, she found a big patch of strawberries. Eden gathered strawberries, popping every fourth one into her mouth. Dora wandered over to gather catnip.

Soon Eden's paws were stained red with berry juice. She loved the taste of the sweet juicy berries. The red juice reminded her of the flowers in the picture Daddy Cat painted of her the last time she saw him. Eden started feeling lonely then and a tear rolled down her cheek and landed on a strawberry blossom.

The blossom blinked open, "Hey!" Surprised, Eden jumped backward. The blossom's face widened staring at Eden and she said, "What's wrong?" Eden licked her paw and cleaned her tears from her whiskers. Then she said, "I was missing my Daddy." The blossom nodded kindly in the breeze.

Eden said, "He makes me MAD and he makes Mama Cat mad too!" Again the blossom bobbed up and down. Eden said, "Daddy doesn't care about me at all." The blossom blinked up at Eden and tipped her head to the side, wondering. Eden said, "He went away when I was born and didn't come back for a long, long time."

Eden heard a soft rustle coming from the strawberry blossom. She bent her head down low and listened hard to what the strawberry blossom was whispering. The blossom swayed in the breeze as she said softly, "Your father loves you. Yeeees, he loves you.... Maybe he just wasn't ready." Just then Eden heard Mama Cat call.

Eden meowed to Dora to let her know where she was and then scampered up the path. Dora called again to let her know she was on her way up the path to the raspberry thicket. Eden trotted along. She tried to think happy thoughts but she just couldn't. Ready! She growled to herself. Ready for WHAT? Daddy Cat couldn't love her very much. If he did, he wouldn't have left her alone so long.

Suddenly Eden found herself lying flat on her face on the ground. She had tripped over a tree root and all her strawberries were scattered on the path around her. She stomped her paws in anger. Eden's nose was bleeding and she mewed softly. Big tears dropped on her strawberries as she picked them up again. She heard the rustle of pine needles above

her and looked up. The big tree groaned a long low moan, “So...o...o...o...o...
Wha...a...at’s the pro...o...o...blem li...i...i...ittle one?”

Eden looked up high into the branches and saw the old tree’s bark covered eyes. She said, “Mama Cat and I don’t like Daddy Cat. He went away when I was born and didn’t come back for a long, long time. Eden’s tears flowed down her face and she hung her head. “What does it mean,” she asked, “maybe he wasn’t ready?”

The old tree creaked as its branches waved in the gentle wind. “Hm...mmmmmmmmmm. We-e-e-e-ell now. That’s rea-al, rea-a-a-a-l sa-a-a-a-a-a-ad. Ev-v-v-vryone needs a da-a-a-a-a-ady.....Hm...mmmmmmmmmm.....”

Eden looked up again, sniffled, and said, “Ready for what?” The tree spoke back slowly, “Re-e-e-e-e-eady to be-e-e-e a Fa-a-a-a-ther.” The old tree reached a branch over to wipe away Eden’s tears. “Even Mo-o-ommies and Da-a-a-addies make mista-a-a-a-akes sometimes. He shook his branches slowly above her and tiny bits of yellow pollen settled on her fur. “Sa-a-a-a-ad for him. Sa-a-a-a-ad for you. You missed out on each other for a lo-o-o-o-o-o-ong time, didn’t you?”

“I had the same problem as a sprout. A squirrel took me far away from my family. Hm...mmmmmmmmmmmm. Two hundred and twenty two years ago, I was a pine cone falling from a tree.” A purple butterfly fluttered down in front of Eden and she leapt at it without thinking. It gave its big wings a flap and soared to a honeysuckle vine. Eden watched the butterfly, remembering the lavender she was holding in the picture Daddy Cat made of her.

Eden cleaned her face with her paw taking special care with her long white whiskers. The pine groaned on, “Parents make mistakes. Just li-i-i-i-ike kittens – only bigger.” Eden started, “But Mama Cat said...” The old tree rustled its needles, “Mamas and Daddies don’t always see things the same. And we don’t always know the reason why.”

Again, Eden heard Mama Cat call. This time it was a loud yowl that Eden knew definitely meant she'd better hurry to catch up. Eden scampered up the path, racing a dragonfly. The dragon fly won. Eden stopped when she caught up and blurted, "What's wrong with me. I'm not good enough to win a race. And I'm not good enough for my Daddy to love me!" Now she was angry again. The dragonfly tinkled back in a merry voice, "You're perfect just the way you are. Except you could use some wings!"

She laughed joyfully, flew a circle around Eden, and disappeared into the brush." Eden smiled after the dragonfly and scampered toward Mama Cat, pretending she had wings. Dora looked relieved when she saw Eden and they pounced together wrestling in a furry ball in the sunlight and purring loudly.

When Eden and Dora got home, Eden drew a picture of the old pine tree to put in her Daddy Box. She told Mama Cat she missed Daddy Cat. Dora licked Eden's face. That night, after a dinner of warm milk and bread and strawberries, Eden lay curled in her bed. Dora purred Eden a bedtime lullaby and her purrs made Eden feel safe and home. Eden sent a purr of love to Daddy Cat.

As she drifted into sleep, Eden thought about the strawberry blossom, the purple butterfly, the old pine tree and her race with the dragonfly. She thought about Daddy Cat coming back to see her someday. Then she heard a little whisper, "Sweet dreams". She thought it was from her Daddy but she wasn't quite sure.

A NOTE FOR PARENTS: A Daddy or Mommy Box can help a child cope with separation and loss from a parent. It is a shoe box to store keepsakes that the child wants to save for someone who is not with them. Children need ways to love those who love them imperfectly. While they need honesty about facts, information given needs to be appropriate to their ability to understand. Children have a right to develop their own understandings and opinions. To do this they need protection from adult hurts.

GUIDELINES FOR PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM EMOTIONAL DISTRESS DUE TO PARENTAL CONFLICT

1. Don't badmouth the other parent in the children's presence or where they might overhear you.
2. Do not participate in your children's angry feelings about the other parent.
3. Allow your children to speak about their difficulties with the other parent but don't push them to do so.
4. Encourage your child to talk to an objective third person (friend, relative or counselor) about their problems with their parent.
5. Do not EVER talk to your child about your concerns with the other parent. Talk to your child's therapist if you have a concern. Report safety concerns, of course.
6. Do not ask your children about the other parent's life or circumstances (including information about your ex-spouse's significant others or relatives).
7. Give the other parent's motives the benefit of the doubt when talking to your child.
8. Do not threaten to send the child to live with the other parent under any circumstances.
9. Do not tell your child about your fears, if you have any, about loss of custody or about visitation concerns.
10. Do not say things that will elicit sympathy from the child for either parent.
11. Reassure children that they are loved by both parents and that you support them in loving both parents and sides of the family.
12. Do not ask your child to keep any secrets (other than for special events such as birthdays or Christmas).
13. Do not engage in conflict with the other parent in front of the children under any circumstances.