

“The Broken Pencil”

Written by Alex Block

At the dawn of every new day, ISA (a 9-year-old girl) hurried to her desk to work with DIXON, the wooden pencil, and ISA's most important writing mate. Sure, there are other utensils, but Dixon was there from the start of Isa's writing aspirations. For every story she wrote, Isa trusted Dixon to carry her through. They were a remarkable writing duo. However, Dixon was protective of preserving Isa's childlike imagination. When they saw her words turning dark, Dixon broke his graphite tip, preventing Isa from finishing her disturbing thoughts and story. As Dixon broke more and more, Isa's patients withered thin. She detested wasting potential writing time to sharpen Dixon only for them to break once more. Something had to change.

One day, Isa brought in a new mechanical pencil named CLICK. Click quickly usurped Dixon. No longer did Isa have to waste time when Click's graphite broke. Every time Click's tip broke, she just had to press the button for a new one. She finally had a pencil that could satisfy her desires.

From the dusty confines of the desk drawer, poor Dixon sat alone. Every now and then, a light would peer into the drawer, and there was Isa looking in. Hope lifted Dixon's sorrow as they assumed she was reaching for them. Unfortunately, she always reached for Click's capsule to refill Click's graphite before abandoning Dixon again. With no clue what Isa was writing, woeful thoughts cluttered Dixon's mind. They worried for Isa's innocence: was someone else protecting her from her bad thoughts?

Dixon had to know, but the one with the answer was the one Dixon resented most: Click. It took all of Dixon's willpower to swallow their pride and ask Click. To their horror, Click

lacked their concern. Click had no care for what Isa wrote. All they wanted to do was put Isa's words to the page like a mindless drone. Dixon pelted Click with talks of responsibility and the greater good. Anger and outrage rained upon Click, but alas, Click had no shame for being just a pencil. To Dixon, someone had to protect Isa, and only they had the heart to do it. Dixon became determined to remove Click.

After another day of writing, Click was desperate for rest. Dixon hooted and hollered any gibberish that could keep Click awake. Eventually, Click had enough and searched the desk drawer for a quieter spot under Isa's books. With Click hidden from view, Dixon eagerly waited for Isa's return. The morning welcomed another day of writing. Isa plopped down in her seat and opened the drawer. Dixon happily greeted her, but she didn't see them. She only noticed Click was absent. She searched the drawer, relieved to find Click under her books. With Click in her hand, she closed the drawer, discarding Dixon to the darkness once again. Desperate to be seen, Dixon rammed the walls repeatedly, attempting to roll up them. Suddenly, the shattering of graphite halted Dixon; their sharpened tip had broken. Even if Isa noticed them now, Dixon's broken tip would remind Isa why she replaced him. The drive that compelled Dixon quickly yielded to grief. Dixon lay in the dusty drawer, defeated.

Then, a light creaked into the drawer as Isa peered in. Dixon knew better than to have hope. Isa was only reaching for Click's graphite capsule. Deep in sadness, Dixon didn't notice the capsule was empty. Isa was in need of graphite, and there was only one writing utensil that had it. Her fingers wrapped around Dixon and carried them to a pencil sharpener. To their dismay, the feeling of being held and sharpened was not encouraging to Dixon. Not even touching the paper at Isa's desk could deliver an ounce of joy. Dixon understood this was all temporary; there was no point in being more than just a pencil.

Isa began writing another story, which Dixon lacked care for until some words stood out to them. Words like defeat, sadness, and useless became more frequent on the page. Soon, Dixon recognized the story as one they could relate to. Usually, they would break to prevent Isa from continuing these bad thoughts. However, this time, Dixon wanted to see how they ended. It was bittersweet. Despite being depressed, the protagonist kept moving forward because if they remained in the same place, they wouldn't have found happiness again. Dixon took it to heart.

With their new outlook, Dixon broke less for Isa to complete her stories. They trusted Isa to handle her dark thoughts and help them cope with theirs. Unfortunately, once Click's graphite was refilled, Isa returned Dixon to the dark drawer. Nevertheless, Dixon patiently withstood those sorrowful hours, knowing Click's graphite wouldn't last long and Isa (being 9 years old) would take forever to buy more. Dixon valued - more than before - returning to Isa's grasp as her pencil and her audience.