

# The Puppy

500 words

Rauf Bolden, Orange Beach

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## The Puppy

Little Johnnie awoke.

His legs and body were tied to a chair in the basement. The solitary light focused on him, the rest was dark. The place smelled of mold and urine.

"He's awake boss," said a voice to Johnny's left, having a distinct northeastern accent.

"Make sure he's awake."

Johnnie saw a glimpse of the gloved fist just before it pounded into his jaw, sending blood erupting from his mouth.

"Mr. HoHoHo is going to ask you some questions," said the gloved voice.

Pain sprouted like tendrils from Johnny's ear as he was hit again.

"Do you understand?"

Johnnie nodded his head, expecting to feel another blow.

From the darkness in front of him he saw the signature red linen pants and black cowboy boots of Mr. HoHoHo extend from the darkness. He spoke in a kinder voice.

"I gave you guys a job to do and you let me down," he said.

Behind him at the far end of the corridor Johnnie saw a door open and heard Billy whimpering before he was thrust into the light at Johnny's feet. He cried even more when he saw how pulverized Johnny's face looked.

The kinder voice explained, "You were supposed to pick up a puppy from the owner, bringing it across the line, and leaving it at a shop on Main Street, but the puppy never arrived," he paused, letting it sink in. "You see the puppy's collar has a USB drive sewn into it with all my bitcoin addresses and payments I received for delivering presents across the line."

"Do you understand me?" he asked.

Johnny saw the gloved fist rise and shook his head yes.

"I know Billy here is deaf and dumb. The two of you use sign language to talk to each other since you were kids, and I want you to ask your friend or should I say your boyfriend," drawing laughter from several others in the room. "What he did with the puppy."

They cut Johnnie's hands free and he signed Billy asking him what he did with the puppy.

He replied.

Mr. HoHoHo asked, "What did he say?"

He said he picked up the puppy, drove across the line and gave it to the lady in the shop.

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The pain stung in Johnnie's ear as the gloved fist crashed into his jaw. He thought he swallowed a tooth.

Mr. HoHoHo took a pistol. Johnny saw him chamber a round, and HoHoHo asked, "What did he do with the puppy?" The barrel was pressed against Billy's temple. The hammer was back. Billy was on his knees, crying uncontrollably.

He signed, asking the question.

Billy replied, "I am so sorry. I hid the puppy in the old tunnel where we used to play as kids; he has lots of food and water. I barricaded him in.

"What did he say?" asked Mr. HoHoHo.

"He doesn't believe you'll pull the trigger."

ENDS.