

# Berniece

*by* Matt Potter

Justin cradled her head in his hands as she breathed her last. Berniece had been a good dog. But she was also twenty years old — blind, bald, bedridden, deaf, diabetic, and doubly-incontinent. We should have had her put down years before but Justin couldn't bear the thought.

We buried her in the back garden with full honours. Then I snuck off to make the call from my mobile in the car.

"I offer a professional service, Mr Smith," the hitwoman said over the 'phone. "I charge a cancellation fee."

"But Berniece died of natural causes," I said.

"I'm not an amateur." Her voice was measured and menacing.

"You told me your home had smelled of dog excrement for five years. And I offered you relief from that. I expect 50% of the agreed fee. In cash."

I dropped the envelope at the designated spot and parked up the street.

Leisure-suited at a snail's pace, she came walking three ancient, droopy dogs. Dipping behind the bush, she took the envelope, put it in her pocket, and walked on.

I got out of my car as she drew nearer. She glanced at me from behind huge sunglasses, red lipstick bleeding into the wrinkles around her mouth. Serious grey hair, svelte and bobbed, framed her face.

"Nice dogs," I said, knowing they were probably dribbly and demented.

"Yes, they're my life," she said.

I watched her turn the corner. And wondered how much blood money was keeping those dogs alive.

