

HELPER HOUNDS™

Louis

Helps Ajani Fight Racism



Caryn Rivadeneira



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CHAPTER 1

I did a double-take.

A shaggy dog stared at me through the window. I turned my snout to the left and then to the right. The shaggy dog turned with me! I woofed my smallest woof at the huge, curly-headed dog. The dog woofed back, but I couldn't hear it.

Behind me, Mrs. Tramill laughed. "Louis, who do you think you are woofing at? You're too smart to fall for that!"

Wait a minute... Was that goofy-looking guy *me*?

I tilted my head. The dog in the window followed.

I shoved my tongue out. The dog did the same.

That floofy-faced fellow *was* me.

Thank goodness I was standing on the grooming table at Mrs. Tramill's Poodle Grooming Salon. Lisa had really let me go. Sure, Lisa had been really busy at work, but this was ridiculous. Good thing, I looked adorable in my shaggy "puppy cut."

But still. This was silly. I was a Helper Hound! We had standards! Well, at least I did. I was a standard poodle after all. My friends Penny and Sparky, King Tut and Spooky, may not care much about their looks. But let's face it: how they looked didn't affect what they could do. Our fancy haircuts help us standard poodles do our jobs. Besides making me look handsome, my smooth snout, properly placed poofs, and fluffy cuffs are there to keep me warm and help me float. And you never know

when a Helper
Hound is going
to need to jump
in some
cold water.

Speaking of
water. *Spritz.*
Spritz. Spritz.

Mrs. Tramill
sprayed my hair with
her special “poodle mix
spray” and combed through
my fluff.

“It has been far too long since I’ve seen you,
Louis,” she said. “You haven’t even heard the
latest...”

Mrs. Tramill loved to talk while she trimmed
my hair. She’d catch me up on all the dog
news. She would tell me all about which dogs
failed obedience classes, which got a little too



snappy, and which dogs were putting on a little too much winter weight. I didn't really care what she had to say, but I did like to hear Mrs. Tramill talk. Her voice was very soothing. And she knew a lot—about the dogs in town, but also, about the world.

“I *did* go to Harvard,” Mrs. Tramill told everyone—whether they asked or not.

Mrs. Tramill would giggle as she said it, but the tagline on her website and business cards said: BEST-EDUCATED DOG GROOMER IN THE WORLD.

“Oh, people think I'm showing off,” she would say. “But I hate it when people *assume* things about me, you know? I love to surprise people!”

Her love of surprises is probably why she loved transforming raggedy poodles into perfectly *coiffed* (that means, hair-done) dogs.

After blowing my hair dry, Mrs. Tramill

said, “Ah, *much* better. You’re a proper poodle now!”

She slid a mirror in front of me and said, “Whatcha think?”

Now that was the Louis I knew! Back to my usual amazing self. Mrs. Tramill had worked her magic and made Harvard proud—and not a moment too soon.

While I was enjoying one of Mrs. Tramill’s homemade and *organic* chewies in my waiting kennel, Lisa came back to get me. Mrs. Tramill snapped open the cage and handed my leash to Lisa. I wagged and wagged. Lisa told me how handsome I looked—and how nice I smelled.

“It’s the spray,” Mrs. Tramill said. “I add a bit of lemon.”

“Wonderful. And sorry I was late!” Lisa said. “But I got a phone call as I was leaving.”

“Oh?” Mrs. Tramill said. “A new case?”

Mrs. Tramill *loved* hearing about our cases—probably so she could tell her next client all about them.

“Actually, yes!” Lisa said. “Though, it’s a rough one.”

“Oh, *really*,” Mrs. Tramill said. Her eyebrows raised high on her face.

“This isn’t something to be gossiped about,” Lisa said. “These are real people, with real feelings!”

“Of course,” Mrs. Tramill said. “I only repeat this stuff to the dogs.”

Lisa laughed. “Of course, I can’t tell you details—Helper Hounds work is private—but a boy is being teased because of his race.”

Mrs. Tramill gasped. “That’s horrid!”

“Yes, it is. The kids in his class laughed at him when they heard him speaking Danish. They thought it was funny to see a Black kid speaking it.”

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