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Helmsley dog faces trouble

When Leona Helmsley left her dog \$12 million in her will, she unwittingly opened a world of trouble.

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Many pooches may owe their future security to Trouble.

The four-legged Maltese friend of legendary hotelier Leona Helmsley may have seemed like the luckiest dog in the world after it was left \$12 million in Helmsley's will.

But her last wishes also stipulated that Trouble be cared for by Helmsley's 80-year-old brother, Alvin Rosenthal, who it turned out wasn't so interested.

Despite all the canine cash, Trouble suddenly had, well, trouble. And if it could happen to Trouble, it could happen to any dog.

"The Trouble case is a very unusual case but it brings attention to the issue," said Manhattan estate lawyer Frances Carlisle. "I've certainly seen more and more people setting up trusts for their animals."

Rachel Hirschfeld, another Manhattan estate lawyer, said setting up a pet trust might be a better option than putting an animal in your will.

"Leona brought awareness to the fact that there is a pet trust and there are ways to do that," Hirschfeld said.

But not everyone preparing for the great beyond can afford the cost or complexity of setting up a trust.

"There is the need for an uncomplicated and low-cost means of providing," said Hirschfeld, who's developed a boilerplate pet protection agreement she plans to launch in the next few weeks.

Compared to a pet trust that can easily run 60 pages and cost thousands in legal fees, Hirschfeld's agreement will be available for download for \$49.95.

Pet owners fill in info such as favorite food and usual habits to health conditions. The owner can choose a guardian, even tying an inheritance to it. The guardian or any alternates must sign the agreement, and owners are also advised to pick a shelter or sanctuary for the pet.

Such an agreement could have put Trouble in a better situation, Hirschfeld said. After all, Helmsley left her brother \$15 million, but without tying it to Trouble's care.

"People need to learn from what happened to Leona," Hirschfeld said.

"In her case, you've got the brother taking the money but not the pet."