

More Trouble for aptly named Helmsley pooch

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NEW YORK - It seems trouble is following Trouble, Leona Helmsley's beloved pooch.

The late hotelier left the eight-year-old Maltese \$12 million and asked her brother to see to it that her pampered, buttoned-eyed canine live out her life in the lap of luxury.

But it seems that brother Alvin Rosenthal, to whom Helmsley left \$15 million and a percentage of her charitable trust, is not interested.

The New York Post, citing an unidentified source, reported Tuesday that Rosenthal, 80, expressed no interest in caring for Trouble. Whether her grandson David Panzire, Helmsley's second choice, would step in was not known. A message left for an A. Rosenthal in Manhattan was not immediately returned.

Someone answering the phone at Panzire's home in Westchester said he was not home.

It was also Helmsley's wish that Trouble _ once she is no longer for this world _ be interred with her at the Helmsley mausoleum at Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. But that isn't to be either. The cemetery says state law forbids animal remains to be buried in human graveyards. Helmsley died last month at age 87.

An even bigger legal headache could turn out to be Trouble's huge \$12 million inheritance.

Helmsley's former housekeeper claims the dog bit her numerous times during her three-month job with the self-described hotel queen. She now wants a bite of that money.

The housekeeper, Zamfira Sfara, 48, had sued her employer in 2004 over one of those bites, but lost the case when a judge ruled Helmsley was protected from liability under the Workers Compensation Law.

The specifics of Helmsley's gift to Trouble are spelled out in private trust documents and aren't publicly known. Her will says only that the dog will be cared for by her brother, and that when Trouble dies, the remains will be buried next to her own in a lavish family mausoleum.

Sfara's son, Remus Pop, told The New York Times this week that his mother was asking lawyers to look at going after Trouble's inheritance. "That is the next step," Pop told the Times. "That dog got money. That money is going to be taken away from that dog."

Sfara, who says she wears a hand brace because of nerve damage, claims she was not the only one for whom Trouble bared her teeth. Others included Helmsley's bodyguards, a dog groomer, a nurse and at least one hotel guest, she says.

A listing for a Samfira Sfara in Queens was not a working number. There was no listing for Pop.

According to Rachel Hirschfeld, an estate lawyer in New York who specializes in pet trusts, a strongly written trust could likely protect the dog's gift from becoming the subject of a court fight.

New York state law allows a court to reduce bequests to pets, if a judge finds they are more than needed for the animal's care, and there is always the possibility that disappointed relatives might be waiting in the wings to argue that the dog got too much.

Helmsley left the vast bulk of her multibillion dollar estate to charity.

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