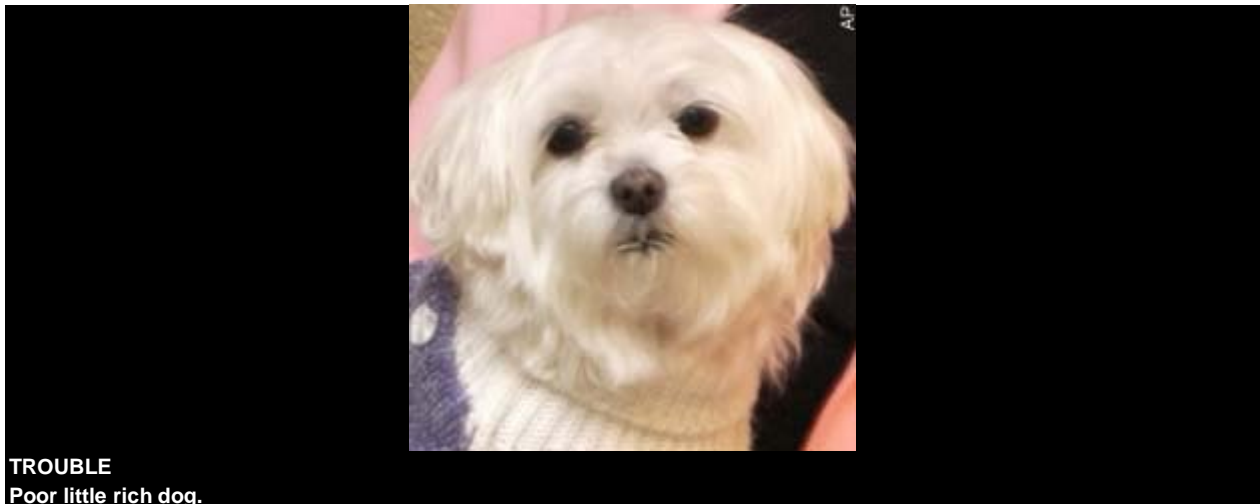


LEONA PAL PET PEEVED

LEGAL 'TROUBLE'

By DAREH GREGORIAN



TROUBLE
Poor little rich dog.



September 5, 2007 -- Leona Helmsley's little dog Trouble should lawyer up.

That's according to attorney, Helmsley family friend and pet-trust specialist Rachel Hirschfeld, who says the Queen of Mean's persnickety princess is getting royally messed over by Helmsley's lawyers and family.

"It's outrageous what's happening here," she said, citing a report in yesterday's Post that Trouble isn't even living with the man Helmsley asked to take care of her, her brother, Alvin Rosenthal.

Instead, the poor little rich dog - to which Helmsley left \$12 million in her will - is holed up at her late owner's Connecticut estate, where she's being tended to by Helmsley's housekeepers and other hired help.

A knowledgeable source said Trouble is staying at the 28-room mansion because Rosenthal "doesn't want it."

Hirschfeld said that's not right - and the judge who's handling Helmsley's estate, Surrogate's Court Judge Renee Roth, should appoint the pampered pet her own lawyer to make sure her rights are protected and Helmsley's wishes are carried out.

Appointing a lawyer for the dog would be unusual, but not unprecedented - a judge in Tennessee appointed a lawyer for a dog caught in a custody battle between his dead owner's parents earlier this year.

Hirschfeld said the move is necessary in this case because Helmsley's lawyers were clearly not well-versed in pet law. She cited Helmsley's directive that the dog be buried with her and her husband at Sleepy Hollow Cemetery after she dies as proof the hotelier had barked up the wrong legal tree.

"What kind of estate lawyer doesn't know you can't bury a pet in a human cemetery?" she asked.

She said that Helmsley could have had other options, including being buried at a pet cemetery or having a private funeral plot built for her, Trouble, and her family, but she had evidently gotten bad advice.

The dog-loving Hirschfeld also said those close to Helmsley let her down by taking Trouble away from the 87-year-old billionaire when her health started failing.

"The value of pets to seniors is statistically well documented. They lower blood pressure, boost mental acuity, reduce anxiety and can reduce stress and loneliness," she said.

It's unclear exactly when or why the notoriously nippy canine was taken away from Helmsley. Hirschfeld said if the dog had started biting Helmsley, she could have just been muzzled.

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