

Custody of pets can be tricky in a divorce

By Ben Steverman, Bloomberg

Rudy is a 9-year-old German shorthaired pointer with a regal personality and loving owners who are divorced. The humans in his life agreed to a shared-custody arrangement: Every two weeks, Rudy goes back and forth between their two homes in Western Massachusetts.

It was an informal deal, worked out with no help from a divorce court. During the breakup, however, Christina Trincherro and her ex-husband brought up the subject of Rudy with their lawyers. “Both of them said: ‘Sorry, we can’t help you with that. You have to figure it out on your own,’” she recalls.

Traditionally, the law sees pets as property, no different from a couch or a house plant. That can feel bizarre, given that the average dog or cat has a market value of zero—and, in fact, can cost thousands of dollars to feed, walk, and keep healthy. But emotional attachment can turn a beloved pet into a valuable bargaining chip in divorce negotiations.

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