

FOR SALE

*The story of the Great Crested Newt*

By Sarah Hancock

Windows that gleam, gardens that bloom and doorways that lead to large sized rooms.

No leaky roofs, strong bricks and mortar, somewhere to park with very clean water.

Friendly neighbours who wave and smile, the perfect house for the perfect lifestyle.

Just some of the things us humans desire, making us quite the picky home buyer.

But what about those much smaller than us, that tiptoe around and don't make a fuss?

Those who have just a simple list, well there's one person who can certainly assist.

She's organised, efficient and just back from lunch, we'd like to introduce you to Miss Jackie Crunch.

Weaving through the long grass and dipping under the willowy tree branches, Jackie stumbles her way to the water's edge, sipping on her extra hot, sugar free, caramel oat latte as she goes.

"Well, this could work," she excitedly cries, before beginning to swiftly fluff the blades of grass.

Jackie is the number one top selling Estate Agent across the Vale, but she doesn't specialise in your typical human shaped homes. Her expertise lies more in the creature kind. Beautiful burrows for friendly foxes, handsome hedgerows for modest mice and even cosy caves for bashful bats. Jackie helps creatures big and small to find the perfect place to flourish and set up camp.

"Now, my client today is rather mysterious," mutters Jackie as she sifts through her clipboard notes. "I can't say I've ever had the pleasure of showing this particular type of creature around. I do hope they like the area."

The area does seem rather pleasant. A glistening pond with clear water ripples in the centre, as long blades of grass hug its steep edge. Although nestled in the shade, there is still plenty of light peeking through the tree tops - the perfect home for someone who isn't too keen on the heat.

Efficient as ever, Jackie glances down at her watch to check the time. Usually, she is well prepared, knowing lots about the creature she is booked to show around, not to mention the type of home they would find desirable, but for some reason, this particular client wants to remain secretive.

"It could be a frog," Jackie questions, "or perhaps even a toad? Ooh, maybe it's a celebrity creature! That's why they've remained secretive."

As Jackie bounces back and forth in an attempt to guess her client, she pays no attention to a dark coloured creature, wiggling its way toward her. For a split second, its warty skin catches the light, leading Jackie to swiftly turn around.

“Hello there?” Jackie cries before gazing around at the water’s edge.

Suddenly, an abrupt tap on her shoulder pulls her attention, spinning her around to reveal an orange bellied creature standing before her.

“I’m here for the showing.” the creature explains.

“Oh, yes! You must be my three ‘o’ clock appointment. A pleasure to meet you,” she says, extending out her hand. “I’m Jackie Crunch. The Vale’s number one estate agent for critters and creatures. Forgive me, but I don’t seem to have much information about you in my notes. By the warty skin and dinosaur-esque look, I’m assuming you are a reptile?”

“Amphibian.” replies the creature.

“Oh my apologies - Mr, ummm?”

“Newt.”

“Mr Newt. How wonderful to meet you. I must say I’m rather relieved. I was concerned for a second that I wouldn’t be able to find you the perfect home, but I have had many newt customers in my time, all of which have been very happy with their purchases. Why I sold a delightful garden pond to a smooth newt just the other day. Although it did not have such a striking orange coloured belly as yours and forgive me, wasn’t as large.”

Newt looks around in a secretive manner, whispering in a hushed voice.

“That’s because I’m a great crested newt, Miss Crunch.”

“Oh my! Oh my! Oh what an honour! Well thank you Mr Great Crested Newt for trusting me to find your home. I won’t let you down!” squeals an excited Jackie.

“Please, just call me Newt.”

“Yes, yes of course. Well we must begin the showing right away,” exclaims Jackie in her professional manner. “We would truly love a rare and endangered amphibian such as yourself to move to the area and I have just the place for you. Please do follow me.”

Jackie quickly ushers Newt to the other side of the pond, preparing for her important pitch.

“Firstly, as you can see, this pond boasts the most pristine waters this side of the Vale. The perfect spot for you to show off your swimming skills and with its steep edges on the outside you can just dive straight in,” exclaims Jackie.

Newt looks displeased. “Ah! Probably not for me then. You see, I have a slight issue with cleanliness and tidiness. I like things a little more - mucky. Sediment, vegetation, that sort of thing. Also the edges are far too steep, I prefer a more gentle slope down to the water. Thank you for your time Miss Crunch,” exclaims Newt before turning to leave.

Jackie in a flustered panic stops Newt in his tracks. “Oh of course Mr Newt, I understand, but did I mention that this water has absolutely no pollution whatsoever. No pesticides, sewage spills or empty cans of Diet Coke.”

“Well, a non-polluted pond is very hard to come by these days,” Newt reveals as he mulls over Jackie’s information. “Is there anything else you think this home could offer me?”

“Why of course. If you step this way, you can get a real sense of the cool waters. I’m sure, like me, you’re not a lover of the sunshine and this pond offers the perfect place to shadebathe till your newty heart is content,” says Jackie in an attempt to distract Newt from his previous disappointment.

“Ah, again Miss Crunch this could be a slight issue for me,” replied Newt. “You see, I actually prefer waters where the sunshine is beaming down. I guess you could say, I am a bit of a sun worshipper.”

Jackie feels a small fluster brewing. “Oh yes, oh me too! I absolutely agree!”

“Really?” Newt replies, a little perplexed. “I thought you just said a moment ago that you’re not a lover of the sunshine?”

“Did I?” Slowly, we see Jackie beginning to panic. Concerned that Newt is onto her tip, top selling techniques, she changes tactics. “Oh, well I haven’t even told you about the neighbours here, have I?”

Ever the professional, Jackie smoothly distracts Newt in a desperate attempt to get the showing back on track.

“Yes, the neighbours. Oh, they really are the friendliest. Mr & Mrs Hopsalot live just the other side with their three hundred and thirty two eggs,” explains Jackie, pointing across the pond waters. “They holiday a lot in the nearby shrubbery, but when they are here in the warmer months, they are just a joy to be around.”

“Interesting,” replies Newt.

“Then of course you have Miss Damsal the Dragonfly. Beautiful young thing! Really brightens up the place with her acrobatic displays. Oh, and I haven’t even gotten round to mentioning the Gill family!”

“The Gill family?” questions Newt.

“Yes! Lovely family of fish who live-.” Before she can go any further, Jackie is stopped mid sentence.

“I’m sure the Gill family are lovely and it’s nothing personal, but they are fish. If I was to one day start a family here in these very waters, they could be a huge threat and very dangerous Miss Crunch,” explains Newt.

“Well, I’m sure if you spoke to them and explained the situation, they would be very understanding. We could draw up some boundary plans if you wish?” replies Jackie hastily.

“I’m not sure the Gill family would like that Miss Crunch.”

“Well, I can certainly pose it to them and let you know their reply.”

A gentle gust of wind blows through the tree tops, rustling the willowy branches above. Newt sharply looks around, as if on edge by something he has heard.

“Is everything alright Mr Newt?”

“I apologise. I’m a little on edge today. You see, finding a new home has been quite a difficult process up till now and I do feel a huge sense of pressure on my warty shoulders.” replies Newt.

“Why is that Mr Newt?” Jackie asks, curious to find out more about her new client.

“Well, we are of course endangered, Miss Crunch. That’s why I can take no risks. I need to reside in a place where I can feel safe and at home you see. May I?”

Newt points toward the outside of the water’s edge. Jackie invites him to investigate further, watching as he wiggles his orange bellied body around the grassy blades. It seems he is looking for something, bending down low toward the ground before dipping back up and peeking around. As Jackie watches on, her mind wanders as to what she will eat this evening. Steak with an accompaniment of pepper chips or perhaps her famous spaghetti bolognese? A displeased Newt swiftly returns to Jackie’s side and she is pulled from her day dreaming back to the job at hand.

“I do appreciate your help here Miss Crunch, but I’m afraid between the pristine waters, steep pond edges, shaded grounds and now the list of neighbours, I simply cannot go ahead and make this my home,” cries Newt, sharply turning and beginning to wiggle away.

“But Mr Newt, what about the open areas around the pond!” cries Jackie.

“Far too open for me! I like a few rocks, a few crevices where I can hide out,” replies Newt from a distance.

Jackie quickly thinks on her feet. Losing this important client is not something she plans on doing.

“Well, maybe there is something else in the area I can show you instead?” she cries, instantly regretting the words which have just fallen from her mouth. As the top estate agent in the Vale, she knows that homes like these are few and far between.

“I’d be happy for you to show me around another potential home, Miss Crunch,” replies Newt. “However, I must insist it has all the things we have discussed today, otherwise I will have to take my search much further afield. I’ve heard there’s another great estate agent in Bridgend.”

Jackie is slightly offended, but brushes Newt’s comments to one side. “Yes, of course Mr Newt. How about another showing tomorrow - same time? I can send you the details.”

“Sounds good to me!” replies Newt, before swiftly disappearing out of sight.

“Great! Would you like them emailed or-? And he’s gone.”

Jackie stands alone, gazing out from the water’s edge. She takes a sip of her now cold, oat latte. She looks displeased and a little disheartened.

“Well Jackie, looks like this one is going to be tough,” she mutters to herself.

She pulls out her clipboard and notes down the list of preferences from Newt.

“Muckier waters, gentle sloping edges, no pollution, exposure to the sunlight and definitely no fish” she lists, scribbling down as she goes. “You know this really shouldn’t be that hard to find!”

Jackie takes a moment to think, whilst staring at the list. Finding homes for creatures and critters has become increasingly difficult as the years have passed and Jackie knows this. She takes a breath, reminding herself that she is the best in the business, number one and certainly skilled enough to bring such a rare customer to the area.

“Right Miss Crunch, you’ve got this!” she cries, as she motivates herself with a little shake.

She pushes a branch just above her head, placing it a little sideways to let some sun rays shine through. Jackie waves to the nearby neighbors, before fluffing the blades of grass once more.

She turns and begins to head back to her office, determined to find her VIP client the perfect home. As she wobbles and teeters over the rocky terrain, she mutters to herself, “humans eh? Why can’t Persimmon Homes build ponds instead?”