It was a few weeks ago now, a lovely spring morning, the first day of the year when you wanted all the windows open. I was just finishing folding the laundry so it must’ve been a Tuesday, when the doorbell rang. Twice.

‘Hold on, I’m coming,’ I yelled, it’s a bit of hike from the laundry room to the front door. I passed through the living room I straightened my dress, checked my hair, you never know, Brad Pitt’s available again, and the bell rang again, longer this time, insistent.

‘Hi Joan,’ said Mary, as I opened the door, ‘have you seen him? The weird guy at number twenty seven, have you seen what he’s up to now?’ She’s a bit flighty at the best of times, is Mary, and it was apparent that today fell well short of the best of times.

“Haven’t a clues what you’re talking about Mary dear, why should I have seen him? Come in and have a cup of tea, I was just going to …’ She grabbed my arm, pulled me through the front door out onto the step.

‘Look!’ She said and pointed across the street and down a few houses; ‘He’s been at it for about an hour now.’ And then I saw him, dragging a sofa across his front lawn. He set down the end he was holding, the whole thing facing the street and stepped back a few steps and inspected it for a few moments, then stepped back and moved one end forward a few inches.

‘I guess the Feng Shui was a bit off,’ I said.

‘Yes, I thought the Chi was a bit off myself,’ she replied, suppressing a girlish giggle. Evening classes at the local school, time wonderfully wasted. Anyway, he then carried over the seat cushions from just inside the garage, beat the dust off with his hand and put them in place. Then, job finished, he sat down, dug out a cigarette, lit it and leaned back, just as if he were in his living room. Then, releasing a long stream of smoke, he looked up, gazed around, and spotted Mary and me. He raised his hand and smiled, he may have mouthed a word or two but I can’t be sure. I could hear faint music from somewhere, his garage I suppose, but it was too soft to make out, big band music, maybe jazz, not the messy, squeaky kind, the kind with a tune you can hum.

‘OK then, cup of tea.’ This time I grabbed Mary and pulled her inside.

‘You should have seen it, Joan,’ she said, blowing on her tea, ‘he was struggling for ages getting that thing out of his house, he took the door off, and then he must’ve taken the feet off the sofa, ‘cause he was putting them back o when I walked over. I wouldn’t have thought you could do that on your own. He must be crazy. Why’d he do such a thing? Crazy.’

When Mary left the man had gone, but the sofa had been joined by a television on what appeared to be a coffee table, and on the other side of the lawn was a set of drawers.

‘Extreme spring cleaning do you think, Mary?’ I asked.

‘Installation art maybe?’ she said; another evening class we’d shared. ‘Well, he’d better hope it doesn’t rain,’ she said, and we both looked up, not a cloud in sight. Then with a slight wave, she walked off down the street, gazing across at the strange spectacle.

I didn’t see him again until later that evening, but every time I passed a front window I’d take another look, I mean, how can you not? Each time there was something new, or else things had been moved around to fit some new artistic vision. It was like a stop-motion movie set, the Wallace and Gromit of Maple Crescent.

By the time I was ready to close the windows there was a regular furniture showroom out there. A kitchen table, a desk, a bed, properly set up on its frame, with headboard and side tables with lamps.