

Sheet-Rockers

*They're a different breed,
those rockers
everyone tells me
most rolling their eyes,
I wouldn't want to make my living
that way
and when they came
in their red van
with their stilts
and plaster-caked boom-box
I was taken
by the rhythm of the cordless drills
zipping a reckless syncopation*

Far above me
they press their heads
like powdered wigs
against a 4 X 12 drywall sheet
*Line her up,
Get her in line, dammit!*
and zip zip zip
the screws sink into
hidden studs
on 24 inch centers

The Oldies station croons
from the hallway then rocks
with a Motown standard
as they accelerate
the screwing the cussing
zip zip dammit zip
damn zip-a damn damn

But today while I was in the basement all
hell broke loose on the main floor:
 the secret rituals
 of their brotherhood

Everything stopped
when the voice of Elvis
came crackling through the
plastered speakers
*Don't be cruel
to a heart that's true*
and suddenly a dance of stilts

in perfect rhythm thundered
over the floor above
and a zipping of drills
joined, keeping time
while five crusty baritone voices
commandeered the chorus
Don't be cruel
to a heart that's true in
five different keys

The magic of balance the
mystery of screws
zipping into hidden studs
like well-placed notes
and they were serenading wives
girlfriends
pledging fidelity
love in a lurching choreography as
graceful as rockers could be

I wanted to race up the stairs
to stand among giants
but what I saw in my mind
felt pounding through the 2 X 6 walls
would be shattered if I
were to intrude

As they left
I muttered *See you!*
They said nothing
but folded themselves
and their tools back
into their red van
and drove away

but I tell you
I've heard them
felt the grind of every screw
into every stud
seen them, dusted and spent
return to houses, mobile homes,
apartments
wives, girlfriends, lovers

The handwriting's in the walls—
a blessing on my house
and the admonition of the rockers:

Don't be cruel
Don't be cruel Don't be cruel