

Brock, Edwin. *Song of the Battery Hen: Selected Poems, 1959-1975*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1977. Copyright.



## Song of the battery hen



We can't grumble about accommodation:  
we have a new concrete floor that's  
always dry, four walls that are  
painted white, and a sheet-iron roof  
the rain drops on. A fan blows warm air  
beneath our feet to disperse the smell  
of chickenshit and, on dull days,  
fluorescent lighting sees us.

You can tell me: if you come by  
the north door, I am in the twelfth pen  
on the left-hand side of the third row  
from the floor; and in that pen  
I am usually the middle one of three.  
But, even without directions, you'd  
discover me. I have the same orange-  
red comb, yellow beak and auburn  
feathers, but as the door opens and you  
hear above the electric fan a kind of  
one-word wail, I am the one  
who sounds loudest in my head.

Listen. Outside this house there's an  
orchard with small moss-green apple  
trees; beyond that, two fields of  
cabbages; then, on the far side of  
the road, a broiler house. Listen:  
one cockerel grows out of there, as  
tall and proud as the first hour of sun.  
Sometimes I stop calling with the others  
to listen, and wonder if he hears me.

The next time you come here, look for me.  
Notice the way I sound inside my head.  
God made us all quite differently,  
and blessed us with this expensive home.