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## CHAPTER 17 Nightingales, waterlands and droves – the heart of the Low Weald:

West Grinstead to Twineham; Cowfold to Shermanbury

**T**ender indeed is the night, I under the darkening sky, in peace, in silence, save for the Nightingale. These brooks, these thickets, these unregarded ancient hedges, broken willows, and tangled corners are now their heartland, their redoubt, in their relentless retreat.

### Nightingale2

Day's warmth, with cool of dusk...and liquid, bubbling music.

I half sit, half lie in this small grassy glade. Big thickets of bramble, blackthorn-topped, enclose me, bounded by scrub oak and birch. By my elbows stand a company of bugle – blue-mauve candles shining in the fading light. There's noise of planes, though happily far off. A distant cuckoo that has circled me all evening calls, now faint. A wakened magpie family squeak and re-settle. A cock pheasant coughs. Whitethroats jingle.

The sky is dove-grey and cream, shot by sinking sun; The trees and bushes are freshest, spring leaf-green; The half moon takes the old sun's light, And, like an old bar heater, it begins to glow...

...Whilst, filling all this place, you weave the loveliest sounds...  
Refined by golden evening light and gently sighing trees. Full, even when soft; clear-voiced in every note; Buzzing, zitting, making melody...  
...Fluting wet-throated lyrics, Slip slap trills and arabesque warblings, Rattling...reflective...bold...  
Teasing, wheezing out long tip-toe riffs...  
Then staccato calls that cannot be ignored...

The music of night silence, dawn's loud chorus, evening peace.

Distant thrush and blackbird harmonise with your song, pause, then cease, And leave the world to you.

Few things in wild nature have so moved me as this hour, And my mind, seeking analogy, turns insistent back to human love. I sense this moment as intensely, with all my heart and body, As when I lie beside my love, in each other's arms.

I am all, every bit of me, here with you, little brown bird, As you pour forth your passion.

It is not me you call for, But your music breaks the wall between your failing world and mine.



Nightingale Country: Cowfold Stream's brooks