Involuntary Love Songs

Bass Baritone and Piano
(P4th down from original key)

text by Alan Ashton
music by Jocelyn Morlock

Commissioned by
the Eckhardt-Gramatté National Music Competition
with the generous assistance of the Canada Council for the Arts

Involuntary Love Songs

Program Note

These three new songs – each in a different way – speak to the connections, the disconnections and the spaces between internal and external worlds. There are moments when something wild and unexpressed struggles to break though into the world. There are secrets in plain view, glimpses of hidden spaces, and obscured erratic truths that undermine the tidy illusion of control. – Alan Ashton

During "Thaw" the protagonist is quite disconnected from his own feelings. There are occasional "thaws" in his demeanour, but much of the time he is an observer and seems to be feeling very little. Even when he says he misses the other person, he prefaces it with the distancing phrase "I was about to say something". When writing the music for “Thaw” I attempted to mirror the coolness and restraint of the protagonist, and also to point out the occasions of strong emotional attachment, without letting the music ever get too free.

"Matches" uses imagery of fire to portray a person who is in a wild and desperate state. The tighter and tighter circles that the protagonist is running in suggest a sort of imploding introversion, where incredible energy, fear and denial have nowhere to go. The music here is also very energetic – the vocal part is full of short, almost breathless phrases. The piano part is very dense with chords; indeed, the piano threatens to overwhelm the singer at times.

In "Script" the protagonist is more definite about what he is feeling - the connection between the body and writing is made in a more clear and visceral sense. The suddenness of the summer storm at the end of the poem suggests that the protagonist is caught off-guard by his own powerful feelings, and that there is an element of danger in it. When writing the music for “Script” I attempted to create more emotional, ecstatic music, almost a siren song in which the performers could freely admit to powerful feelings that were denied earlier. The vocalise at the end may evoke a sense of transcendence, perhaps a place beyond words. - Jocelyn Morlock

Performance Notes:

Accidentals last for the measure in which they are written unless cancelled later, and are only for the octave in which they are written. Cautionary accidentals have been added for ambiguous spots. Total duration of the three songs is approximately eleven minutes.

Tempo markings are approximate, and the performers should feel free to play and sing very expressively and with rubato in both *Thaw* and *Script*. Please avoid too much rubato in *Matches*. For *Script, g*race notes in particular are to be played with rhythmic freedom. The pianist should use more pedal than usual to produce a blurry, hazy sound. There are several ossias in the score of *Script* – at m. 17 and 18 the triplets may move up a tone rather than down (see small notes in brackets) and at m. 47 an ossia bar is added. P.S. Don't worry too much about making a real "oo" vowel on the melisma ("truth") in m. 46 – 47. The word truth has already been sung several times - feel free to use a more open vowel.

Involuntary Love Songs texts

Thaw

Where was I?

There was, I think, a graffiti cloud on a rusted gate.
A guide dog narrowed his eyes,
plaintive, patient in the sun.
A young woman glowed like a bride,
glowed like a peach.

Weathered knuckles wrapped around a handkerchief,
slipped around a chrome bar.
Commuters danced a tarantella to the pitch and sway of traffic,
and steam curled skyward from the street.

Now, I read secret cursive scripts under my skin.
I was about to say something,
how I miss you from the inside out.

Now, where was I?

While you were away,
the thaw made dark rivulets under the ice
and the fog retreated from the shore.

Alan Ashton
October 2004

Matches

Oh I remember I recall
I tell myself I keep telling me
That I'm not I am not but
I keep telling myself I'm not
And the more I do
The more I tell myself I'm not
The more that part of my self
The part that I deny
I deny my self
The part that I tell myself that I am not
That part there
The more I deny the more that part runs
free and wild like a spreading fire
the fire that I deny
For I am not no not on fire
And I run free and I'm trailing smoke
And I run and run and I run
trailing smoke and flame in the dark
In the darkest night I've never seen
In tighter circles sending signals to a sky
That I can not see
I deny the sky the fire
with an eye to the part that I deny
the inner part
I circle a child cold and shy
lighting matches
Oh I recall
the inner dark that I deny
the tighter circles cold and shy
I am not no I tell myself I'm not
I tell myself
I deny
I'm trailing smoke
But I am not
no not on fire

Alan Ashton
October 2007

Script

Hold out your palms
I will fill them with licks
and nibbles and kisses.
I will spell out cryptic riddles
with the tip of my tongue.

Let your skin be a canvas,
a journal to fill with schemes,
with words that your ears are not ready to hear
and my voice fails to form.
Shivers and tremors.
Soundless syllables.

With less than a whisper,
let me reveal
that I have been cracked open by truth.
Truth strong like hunger.
Severe as a sudden summer storm,
ferocious and sweet.

Alan Ashton
September 2007

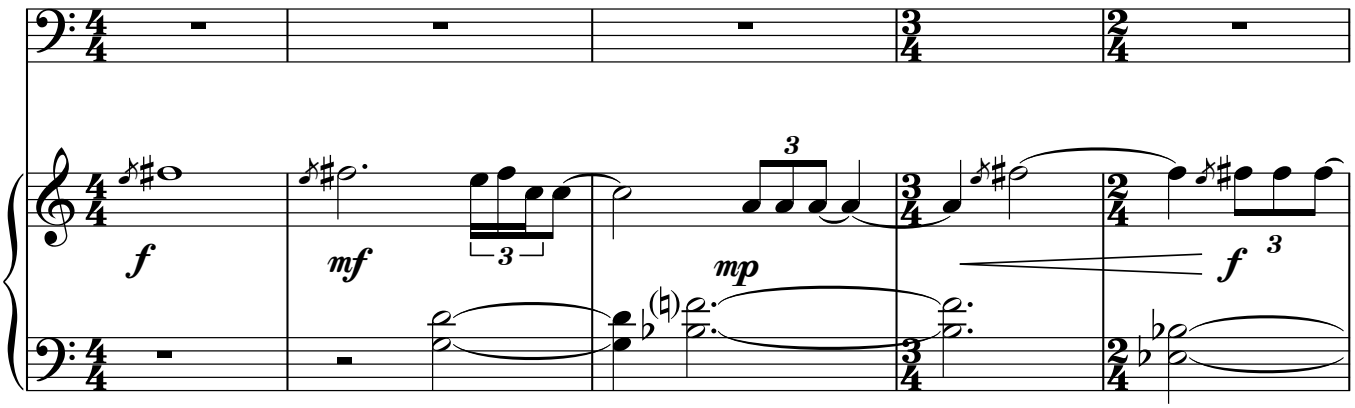
Thaw

Alan Ashton

Jocelyn Morlock

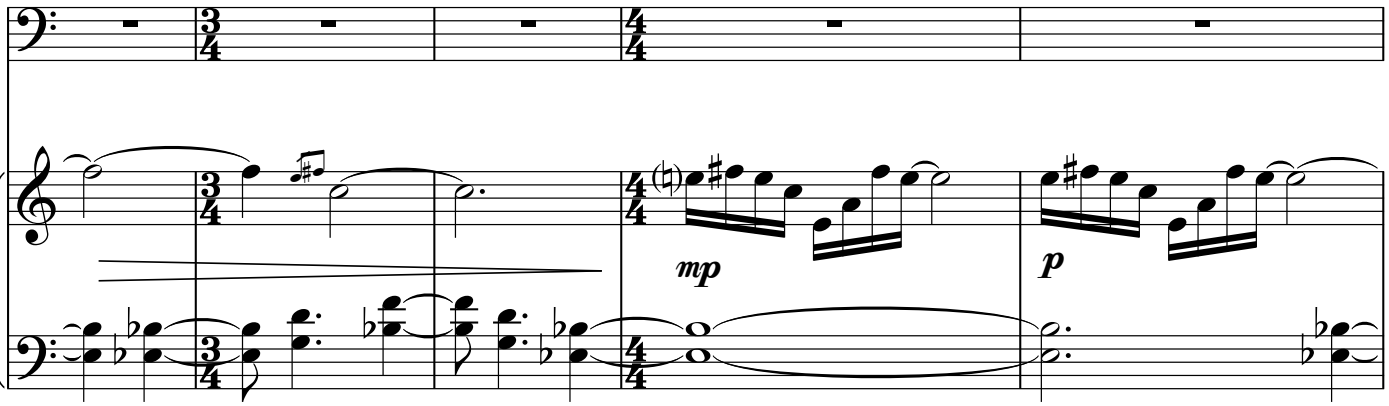
Otherworldy, mysterious, birdlike

♩ = 100



(con molto Pedale)

6

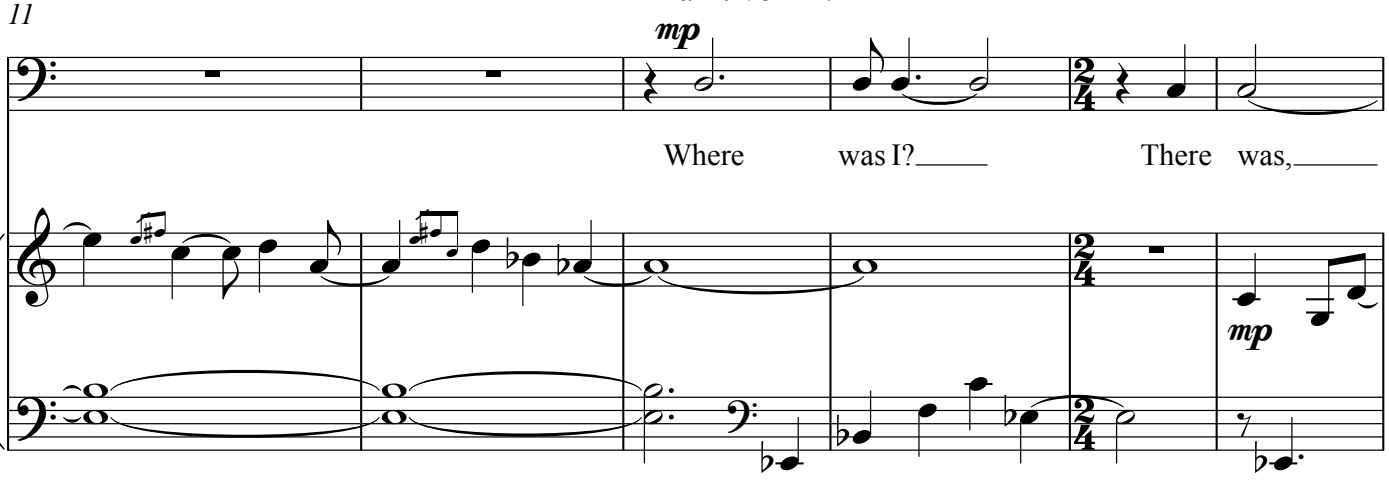


rit. - - - -

Plaintive ♩ = 72

♩ = 100

11



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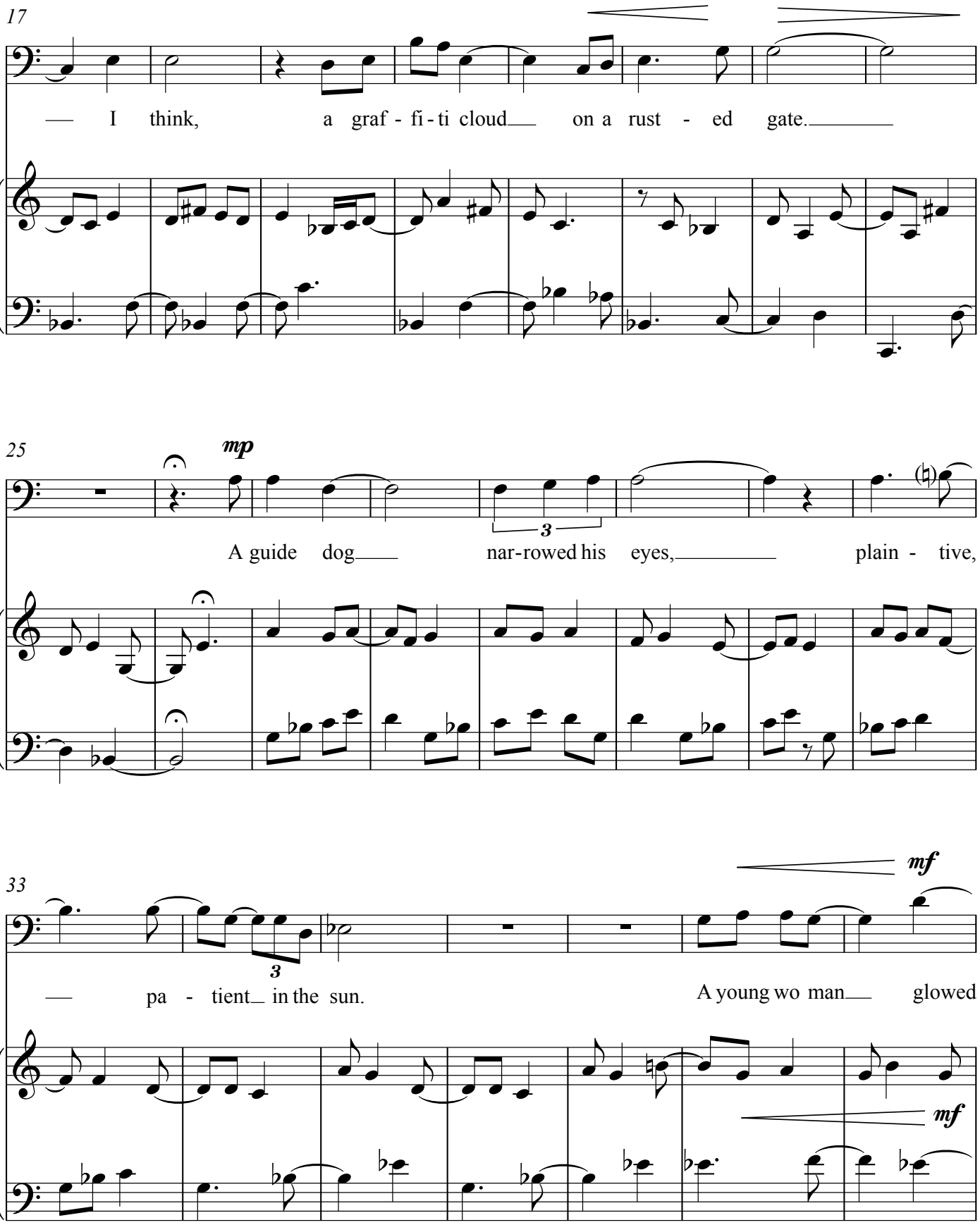
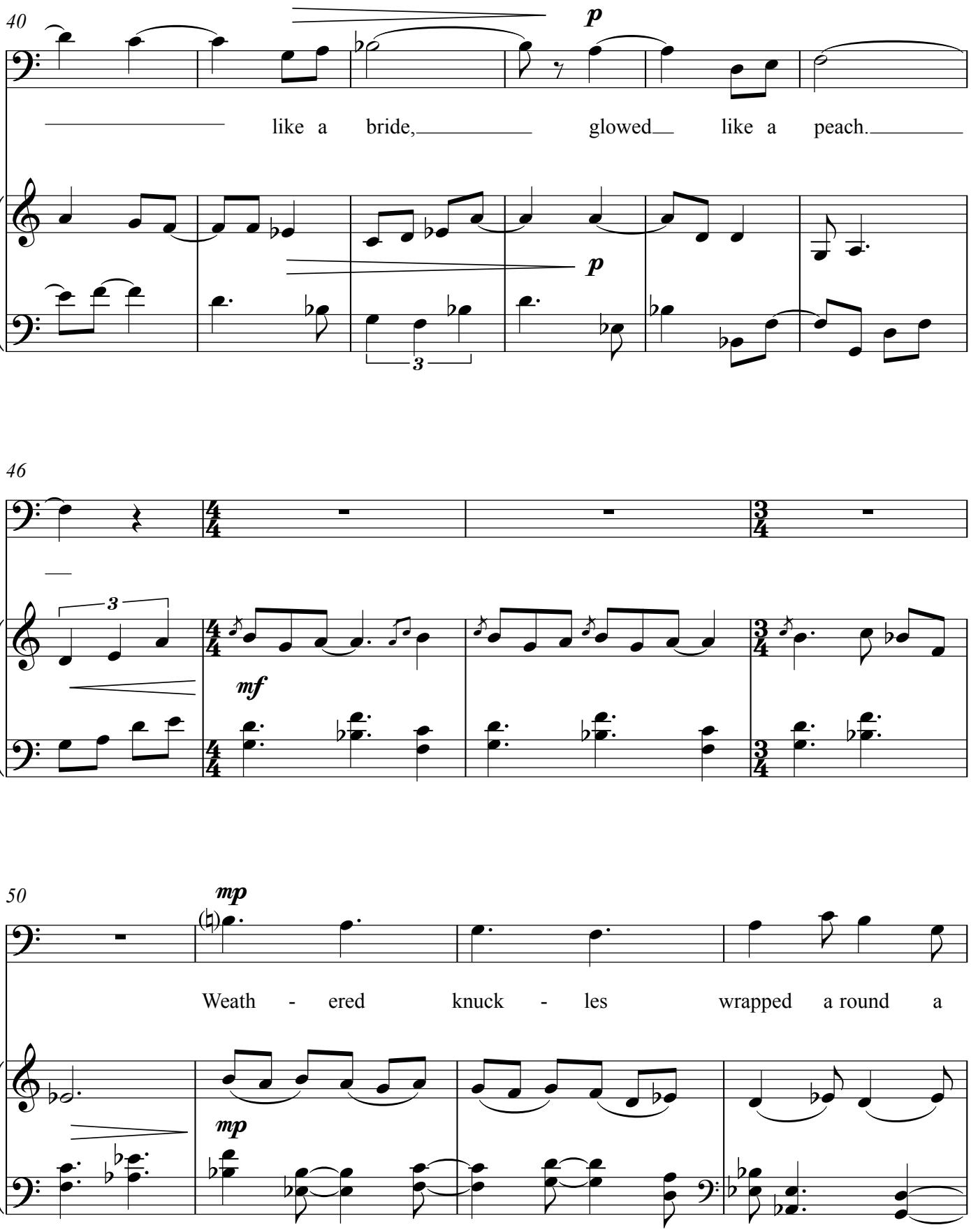
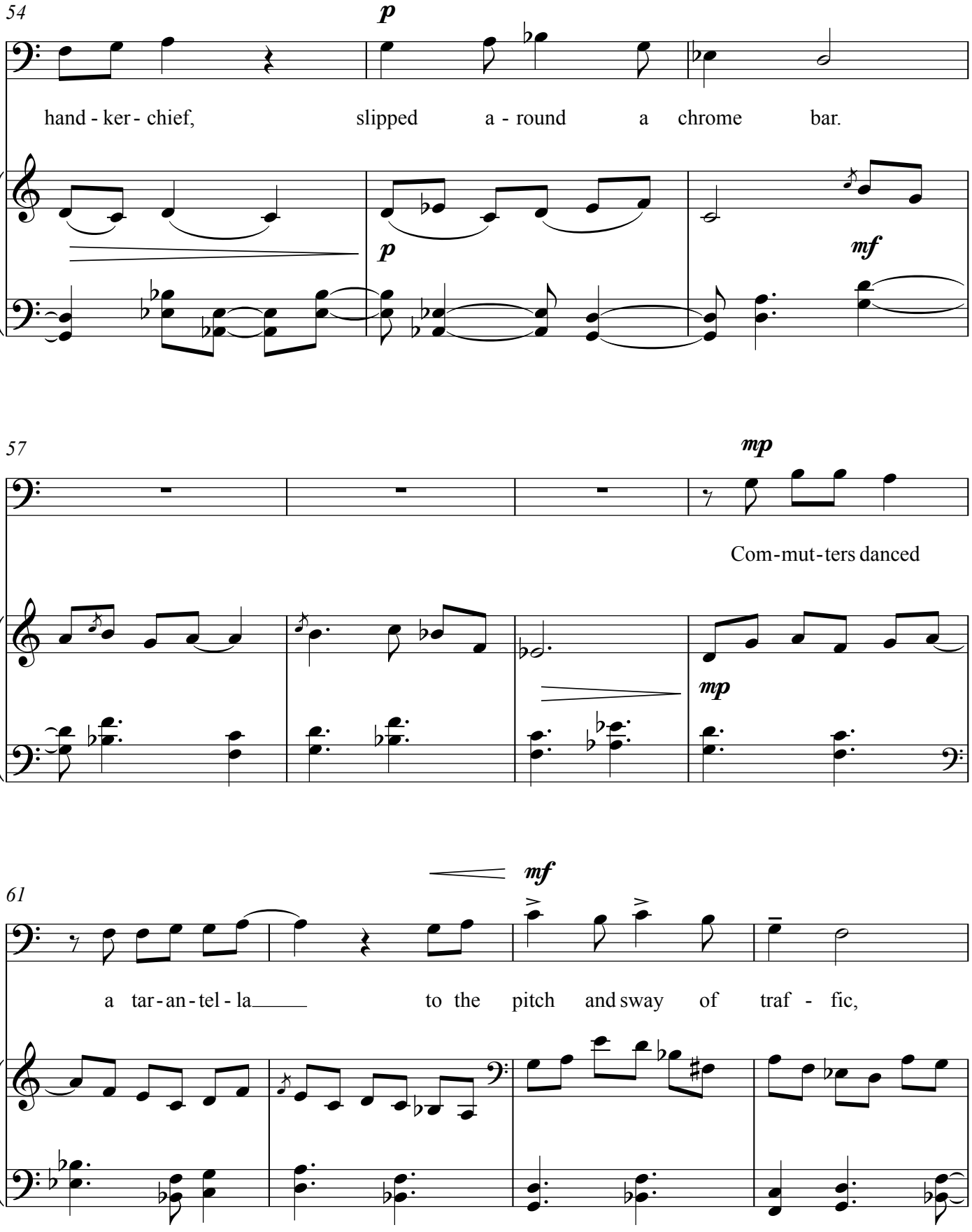
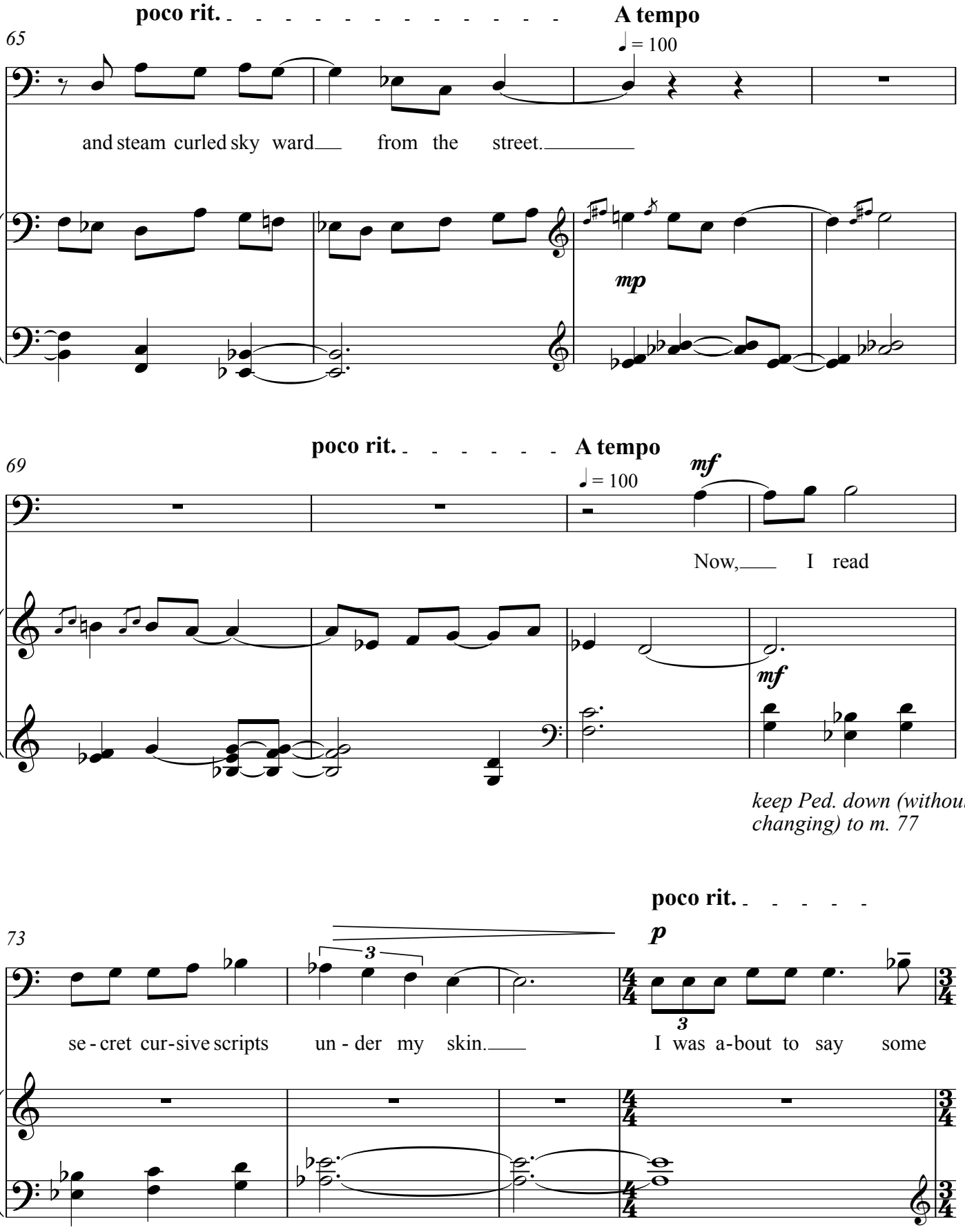
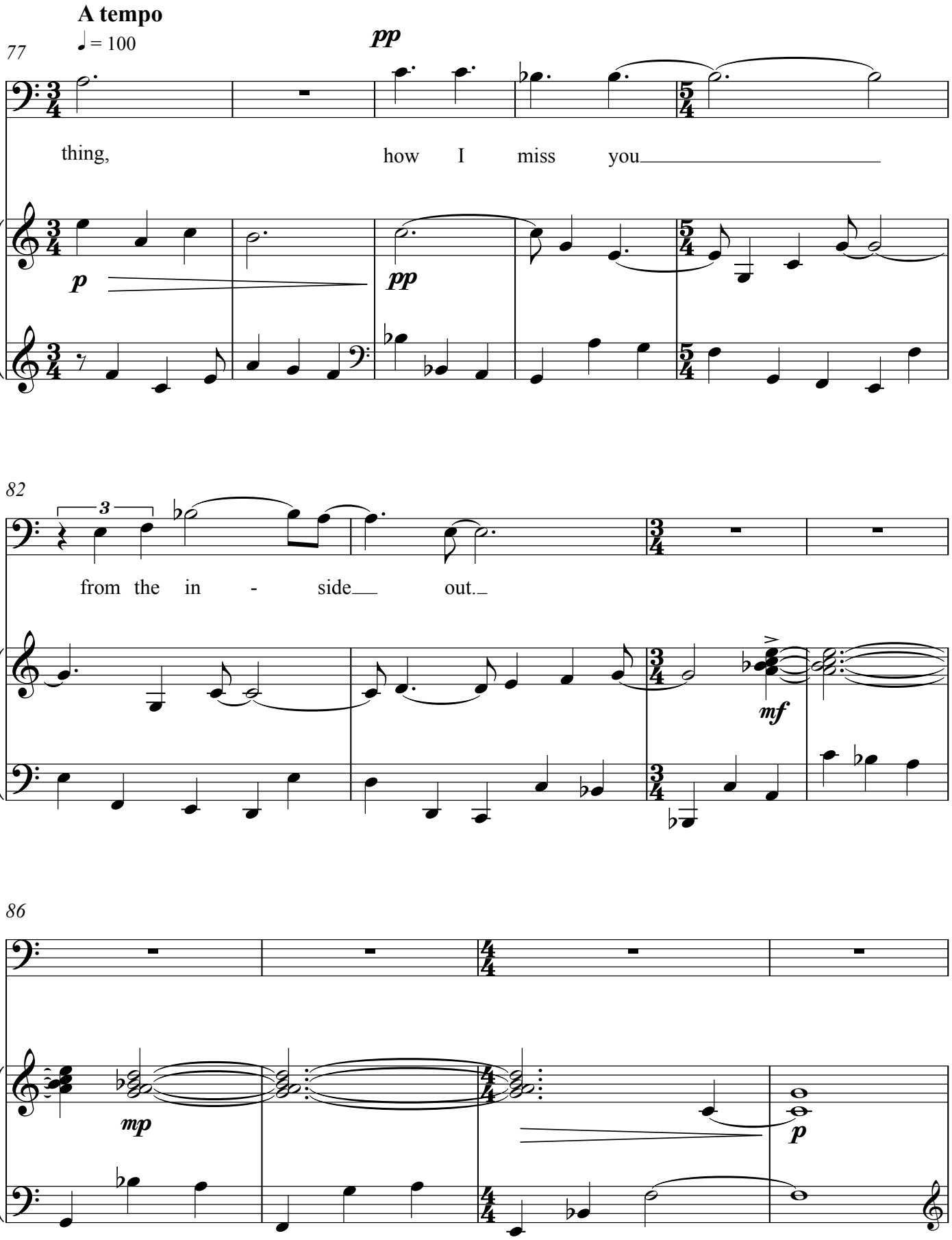
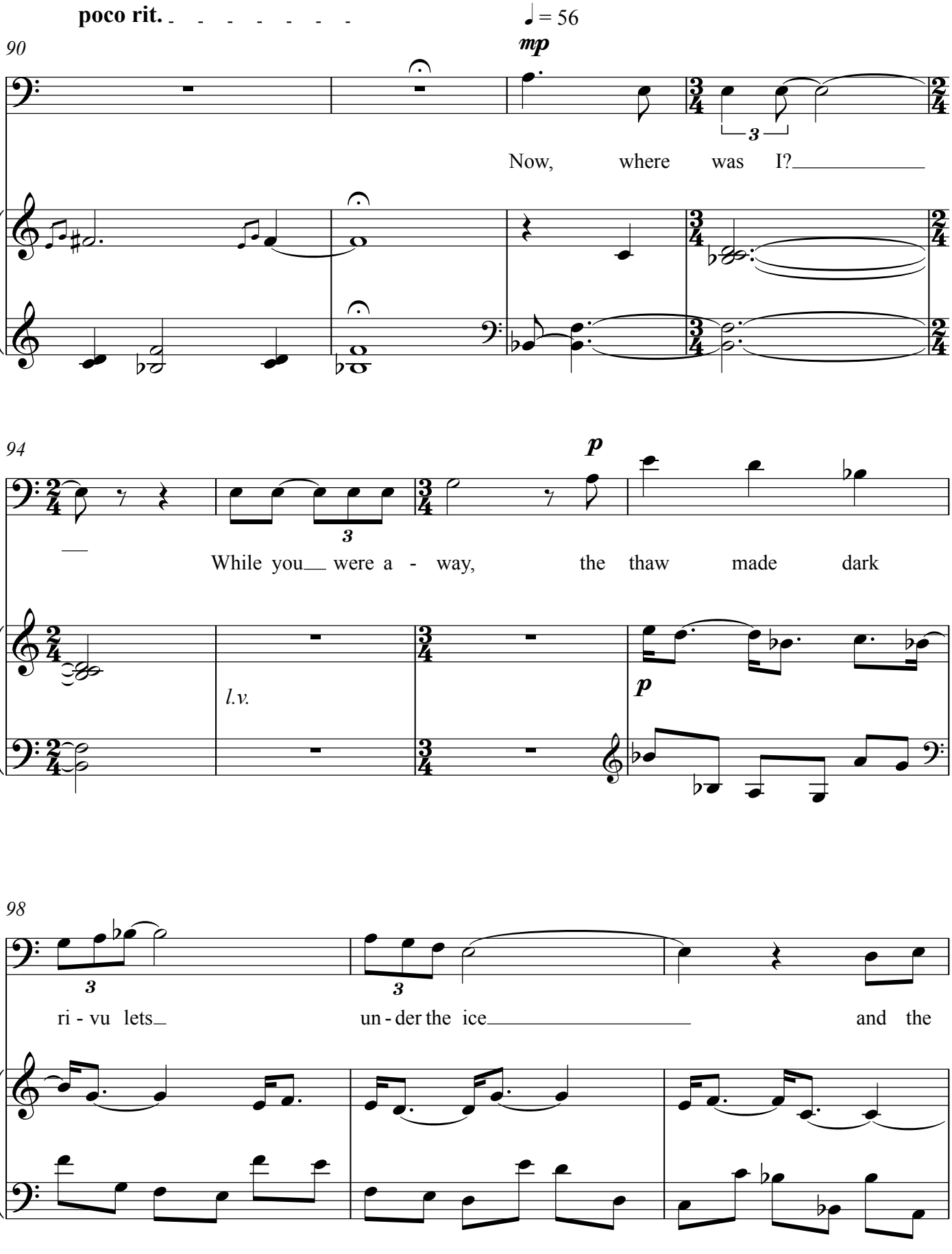

17
— I think, a graf - fi - ti cloud— on a rust - ed gate.—
25
mp
A guide dog— nar-rowed his eyes,— plain - tive,
33
mf
— pa - tient— in the sun.
A young wo man— glowed
mf

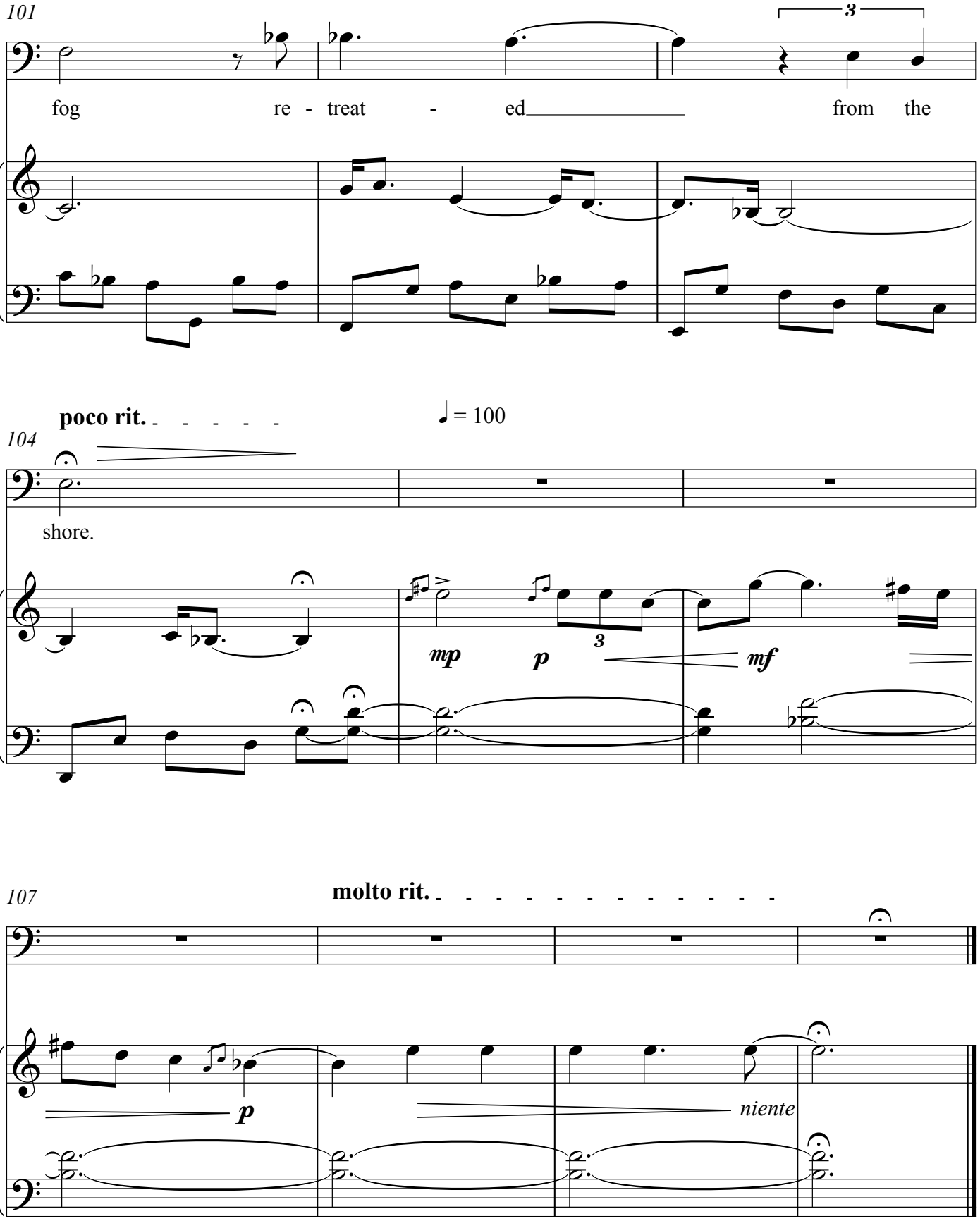

40
p
like a bride, glowed like a peach.
p
3
46
3
mf
50
mp
Weath - ered knuck - les wrapped a round a
mp


54
p
hand - ker - chief,
slipped
a - round
a
chrome
bar.
p
mf
57
mp
Com-mut-ters danced
mp
61
mf
a tar - an - tel - la
to the
pitch
and sway
of
traf - fic,


poco rit.
A tempo
65
♩ = 100
and steam curled sky ward from the street.
mp
poco rit.
A tempo
69
♩ = 100
mf
Now, I read
mf
keep Ped. down (without changing) to m. 77
poco rit.
73
p
3
3
se - cret cur-sive scripts un - der my skin.
I was a-bout to say some


A tempo
♩ = 100
77
pp
thing, how I miss you
p
pp
82
3
from the in - side out.
mf
86
mp
p


poco rit.
♩ = 56
90
mp
Now, where was I?
94
p
While you were a - way, the thaw made dark
l.v.
p
98
ri - vu lets un - der the ice and the


101
3
fog re - treat - ed from the
poco rit.
♩ = 100
104
shore.
mp
p
3
mf
107
molto rit.
p
niente

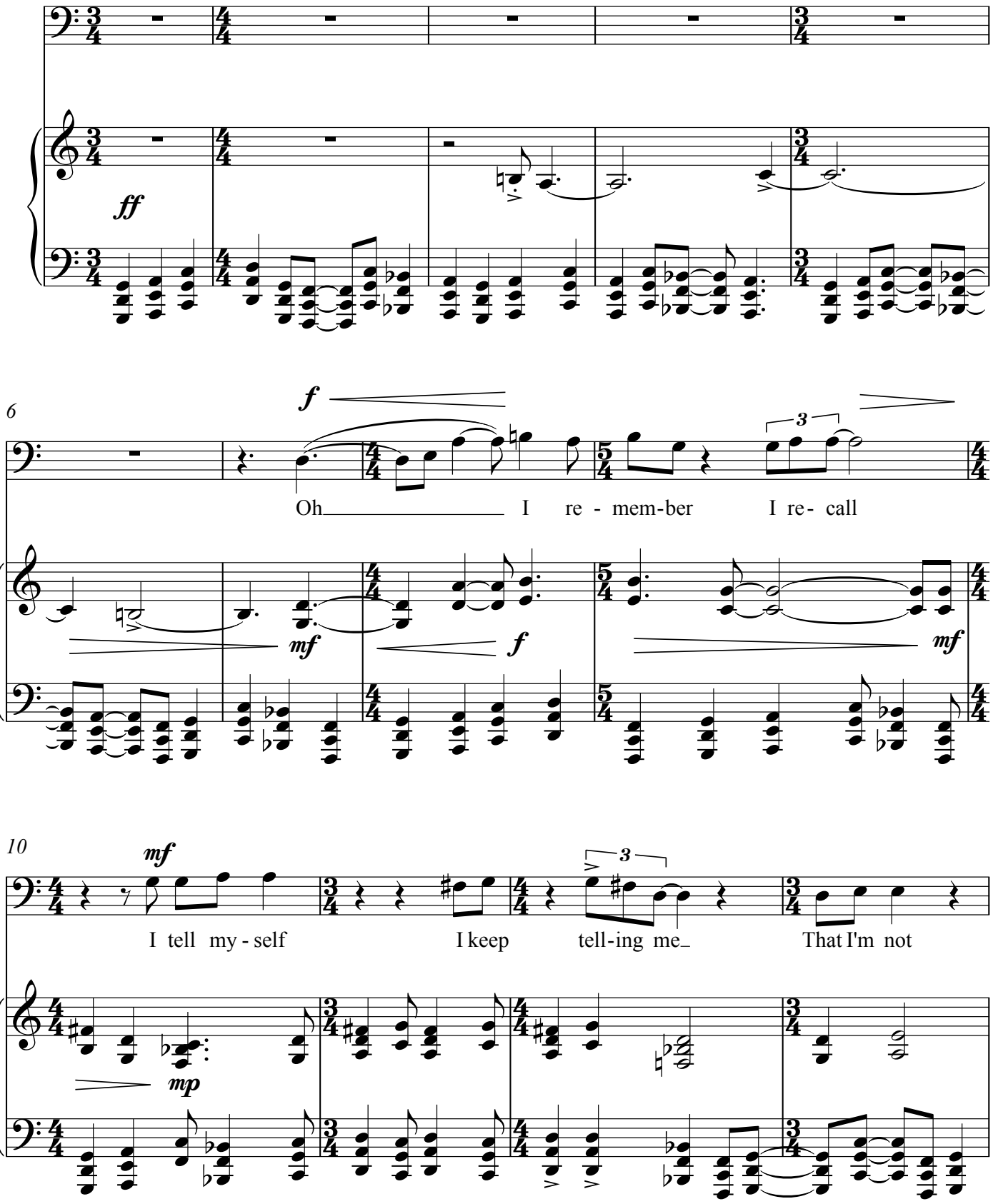
Matches

Alan Ashton

Jocelyn Morlock

Energetic, manic, desperate

♩ = ca 132



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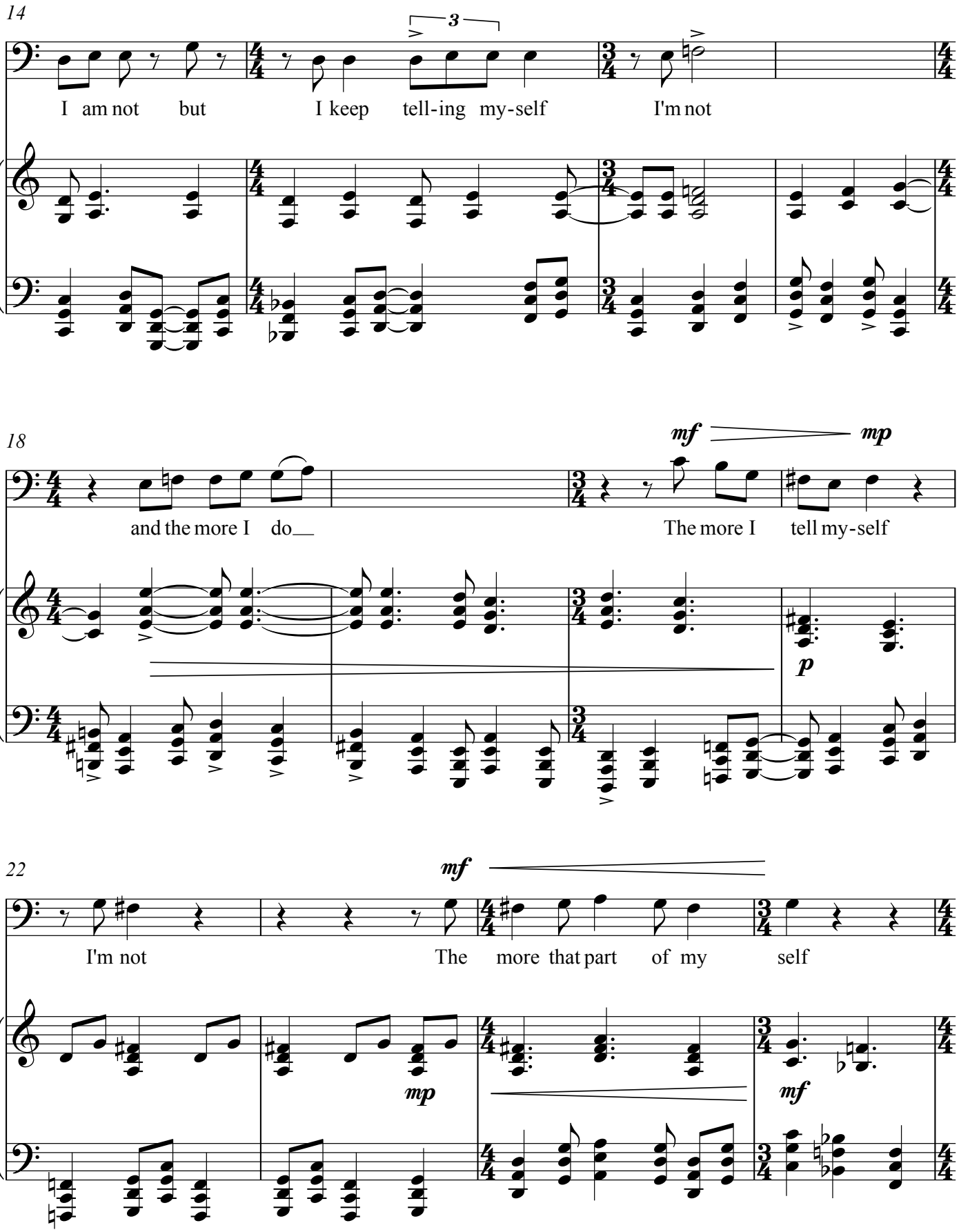
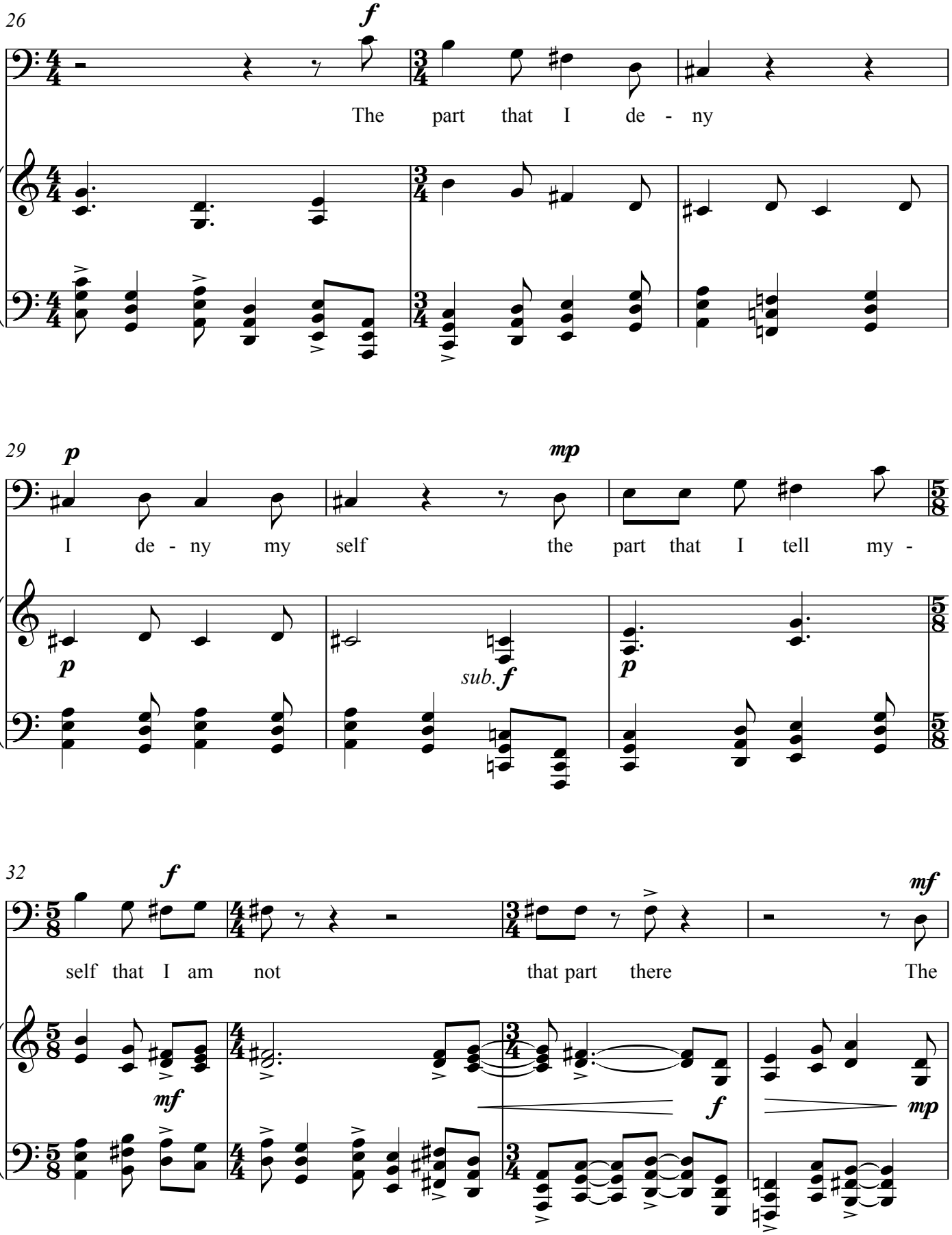
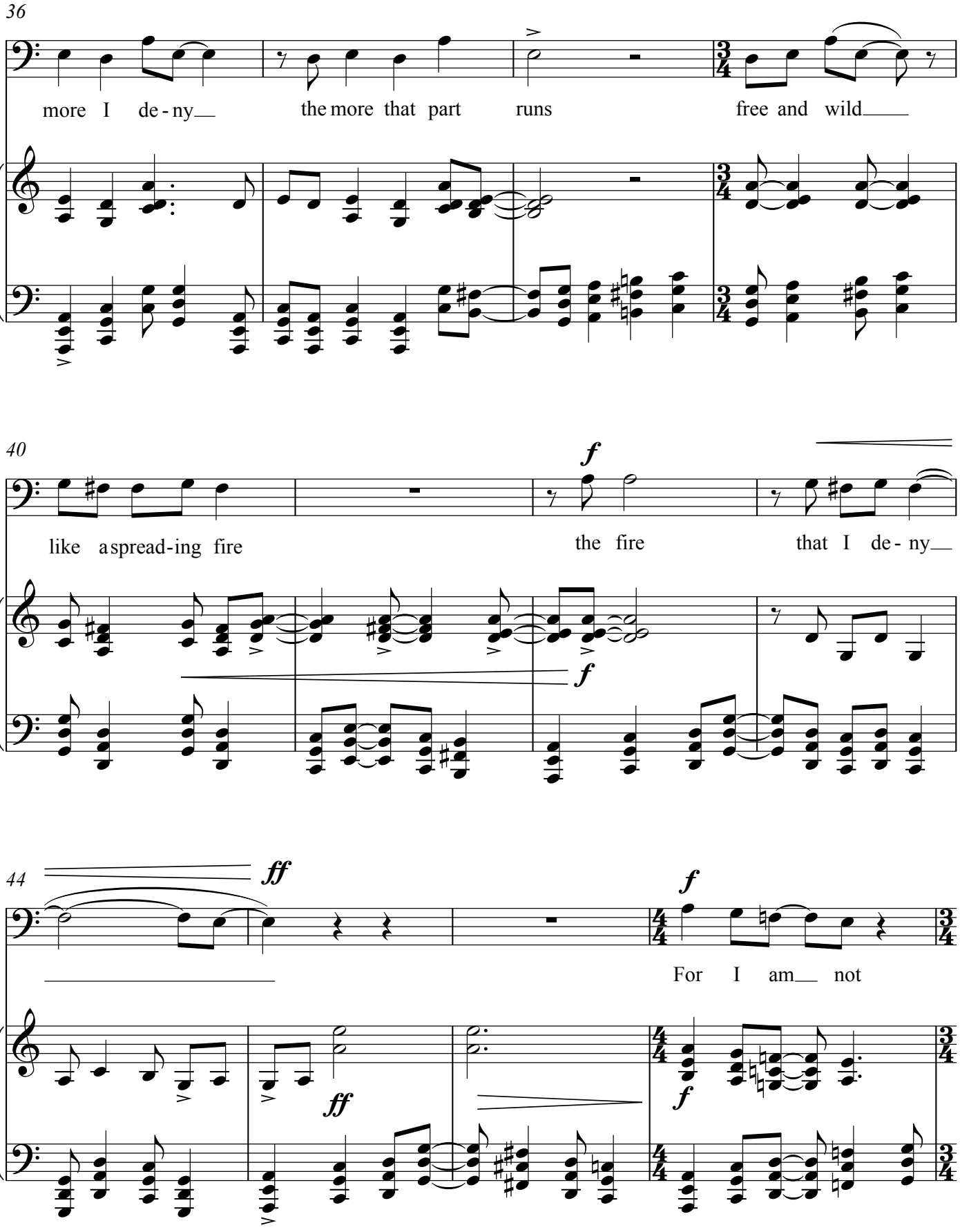
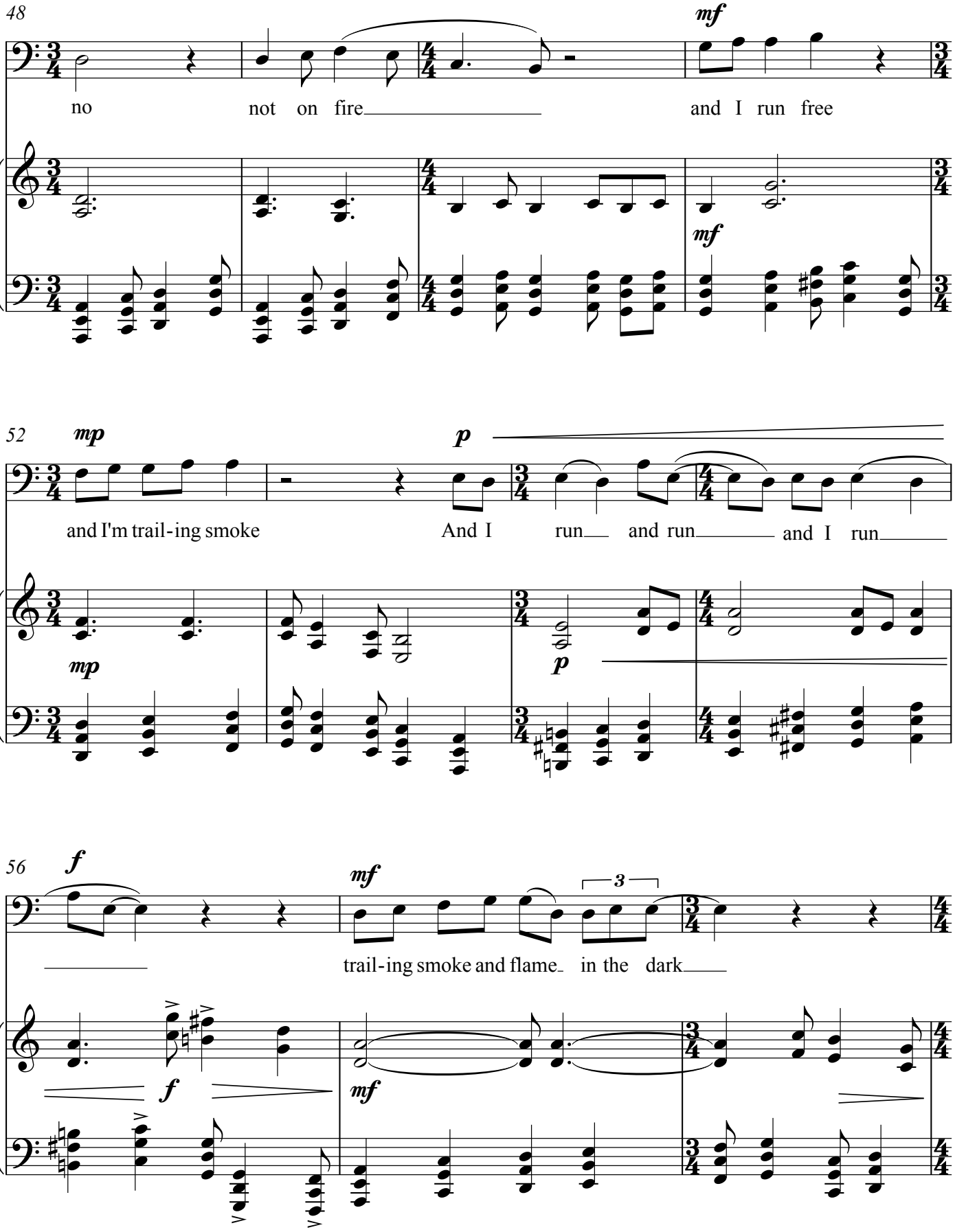
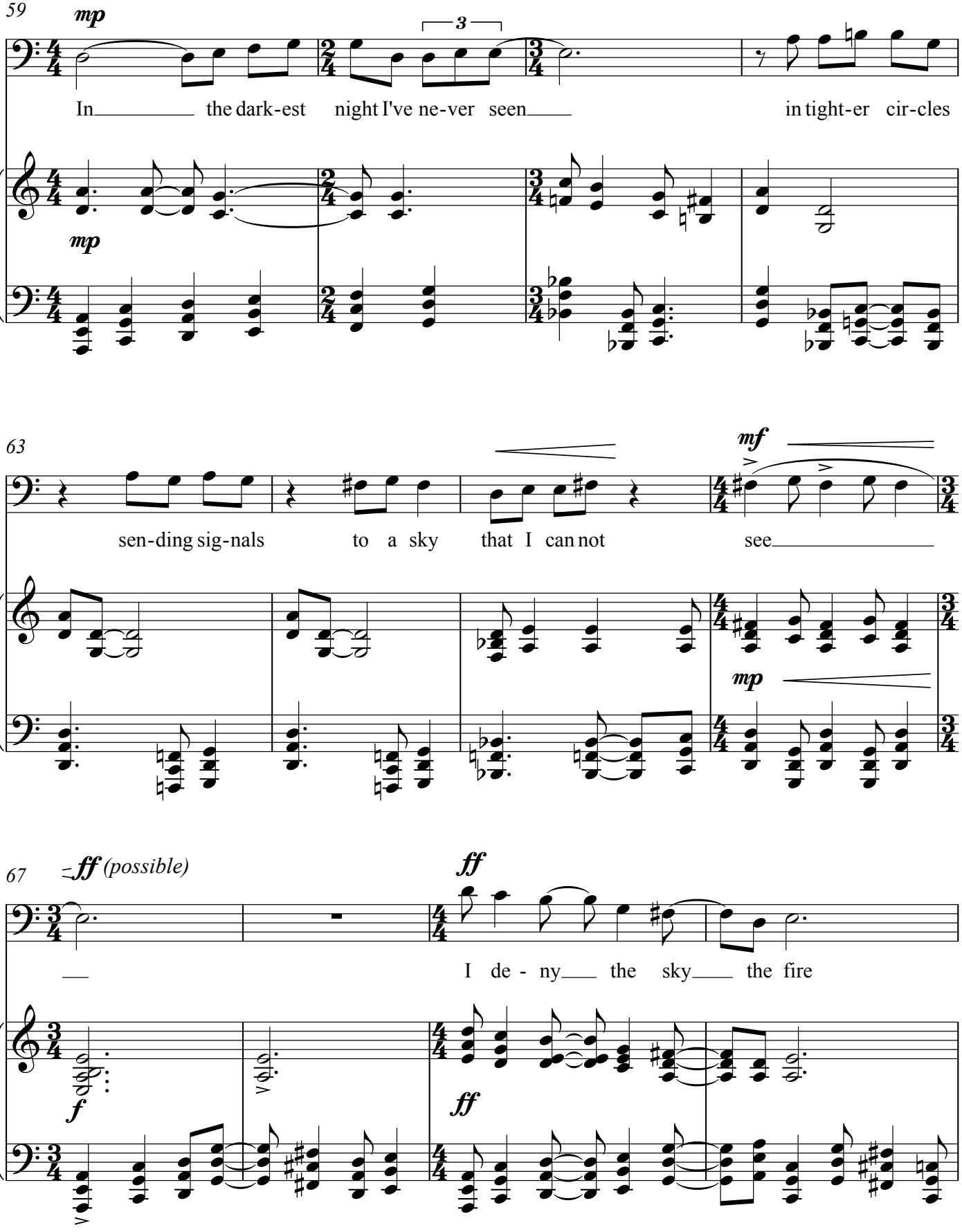
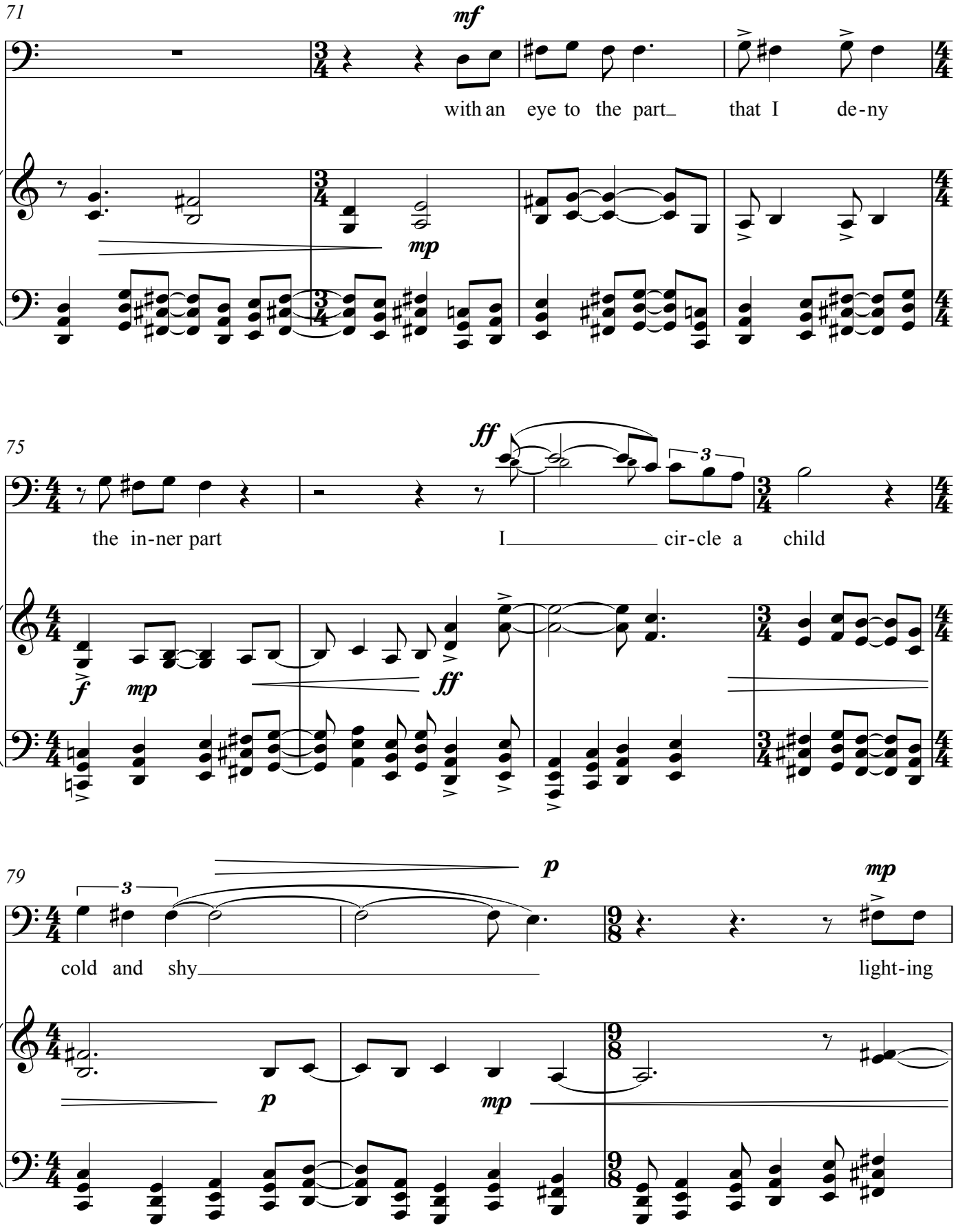

14
3
I am not but I keep tell-ing my-self I'm not
18
mf
mp
and the more I do
The more I tell my-self
p
22
mf
I'm not
The more that part of my self
mp
mf

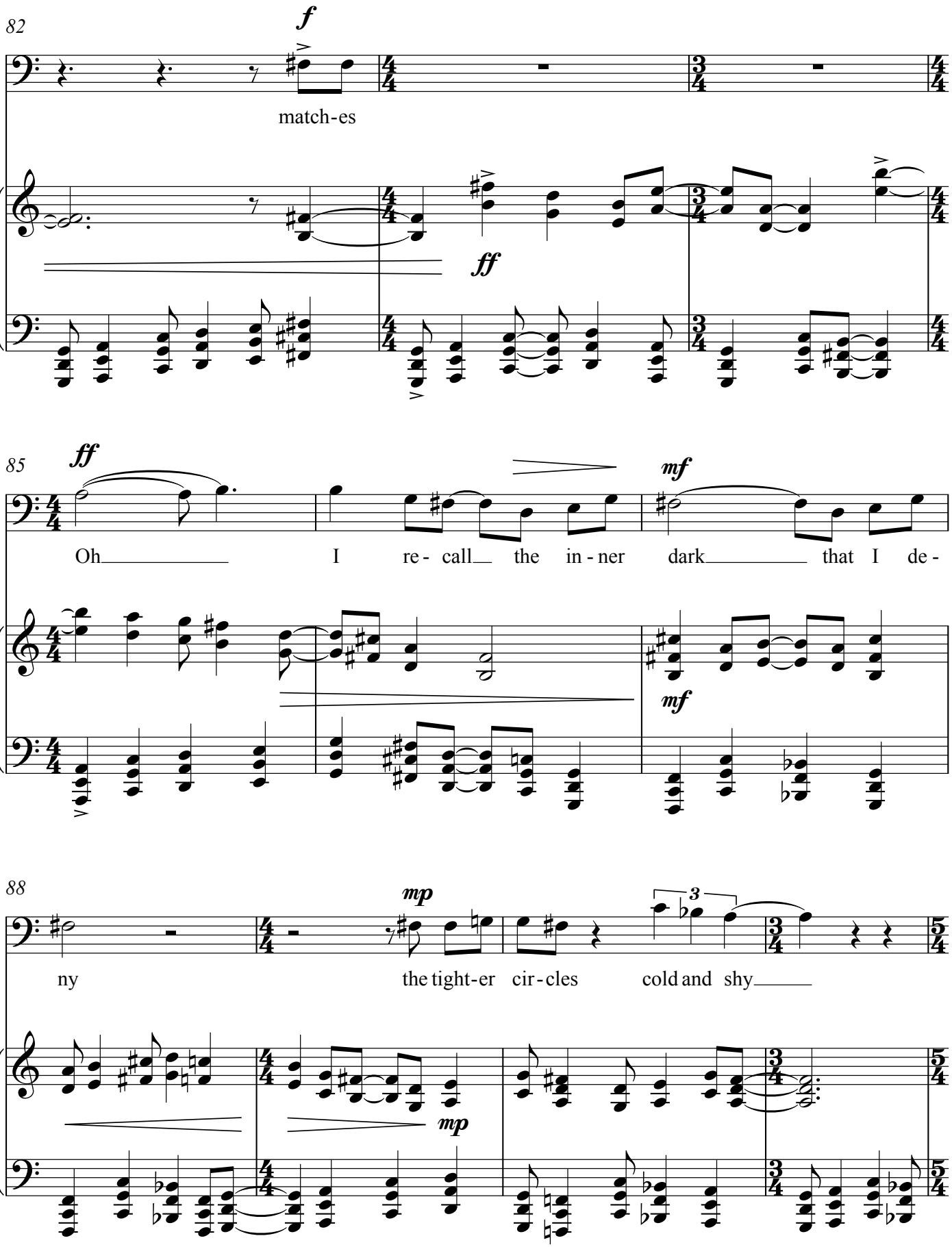

26
f
The part that I de - ny
29
p
mp
I de - ny my self the part that I tell my -
p
sub. f
p
32
f
mf
self that I am not that part there The
mf
f
mp

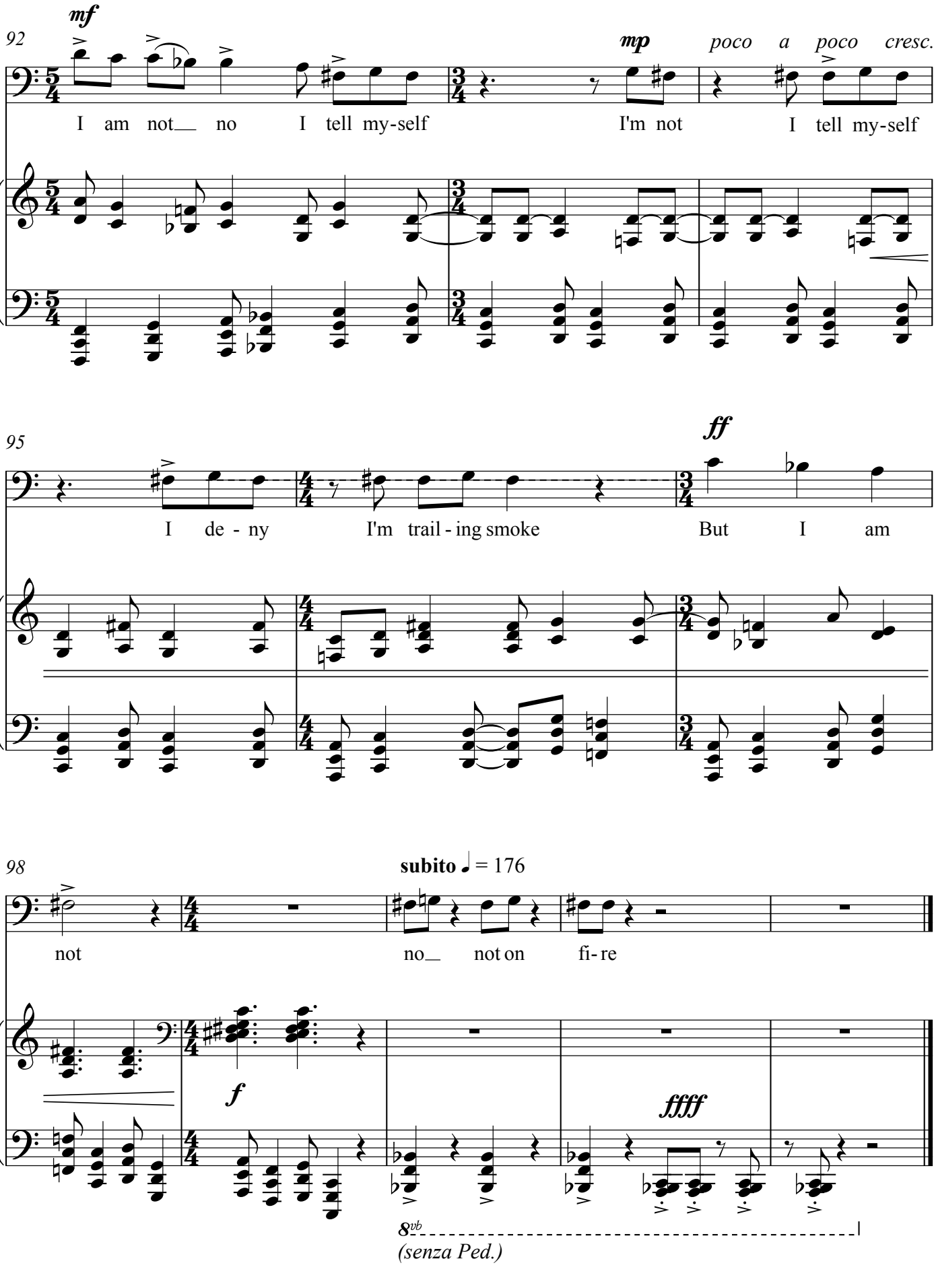

36
more I de - ny
the more that part
runs
free and wild
40
like a spread-ing fire
the fire
that I de - ny
44
For I am not


48
mf
no
not on fire
and I run free
mf
52
mp
p
and I'm trail-ing smoke
And I
run
and run
and I run
mp
p
56
f
mf
3
trail-ing smoke and flame
in the dark
f
mf


59
mp
3
In the dark-est night I've ne-ver seen in tight-er cir-cles
mp
63
mf
sen-ding sig-nals to a sky that I can not see
mp
67
ff (possible)
ff
I de - ny the sky the fire
f
ff
ff


71
mf
with an eye to the part that I de-ny
mp
75
ff
3
the in-ner part
I cir-cle a child
f
mp
ff
79
3
p
mp
cold and shy
light-ing
p
mp


82
f
match-es
ff
85
ff
Oh
I re- call the in- ner dark
that I de-
mf
mf
88
mp
ny
the tight-er cir- cles
3
cold and shy
mp


92
mf
mp
poco a poco cresc.
I am not no I tell my-self I'm not I tell my-self
95
ff
I de - ny I'm trail - ing smoke But I am
98
subito ♩ = 176
not no not on fi- re
f
ffff
8vb
(senza Ped.)

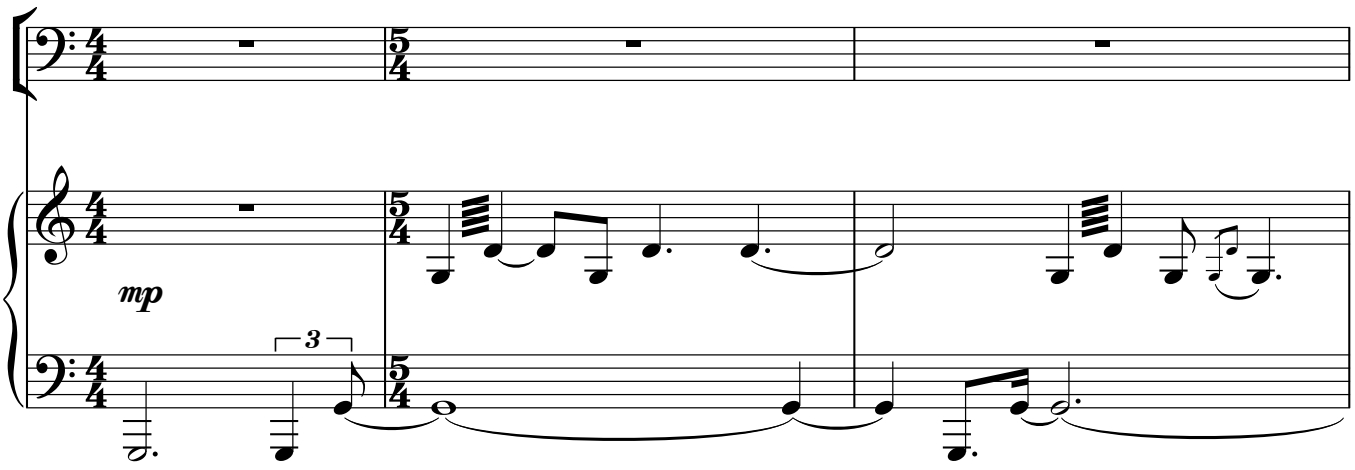
Bass-Baritone

Alan Ashton

Script

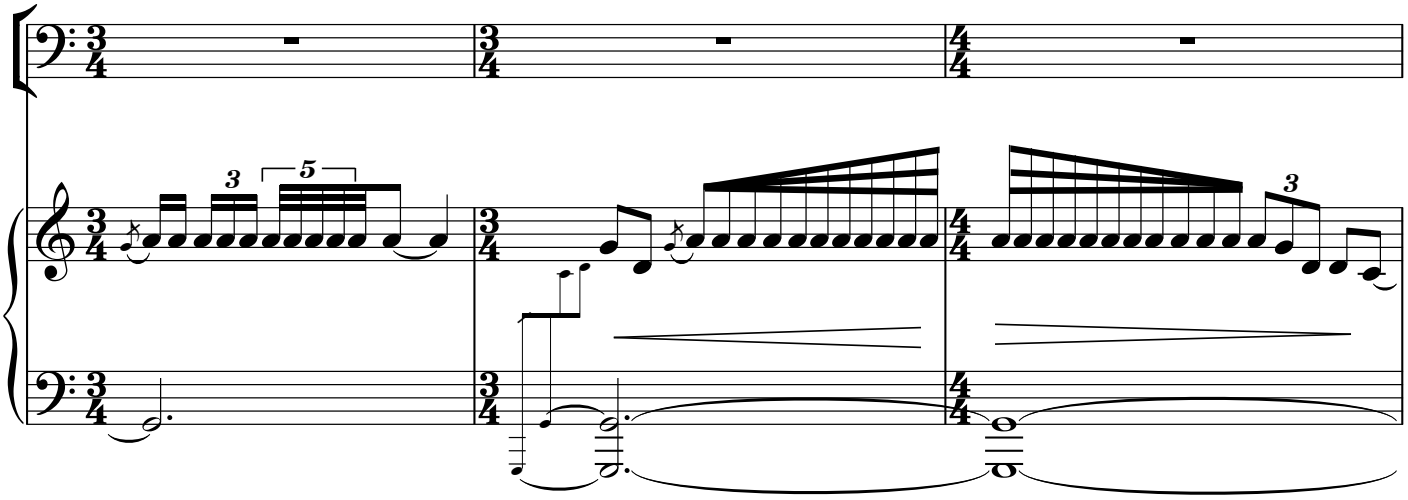
Jocelyn Morlock

calm; ecstatic ♩ = 66

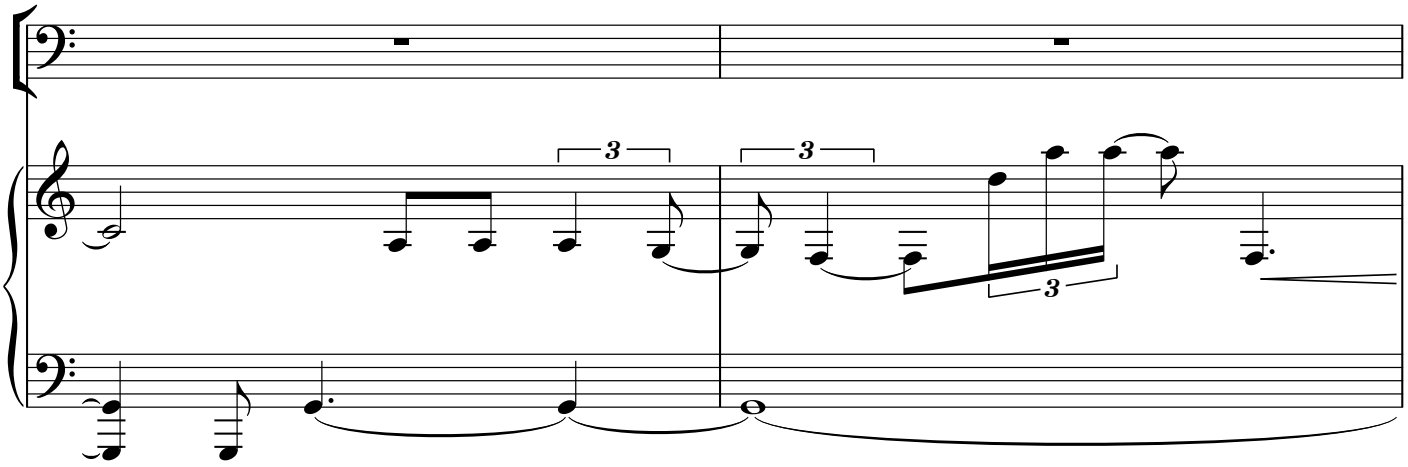


sempre molto pedale
piano part is very sustained, blurred, impressionistic throughout

4



7



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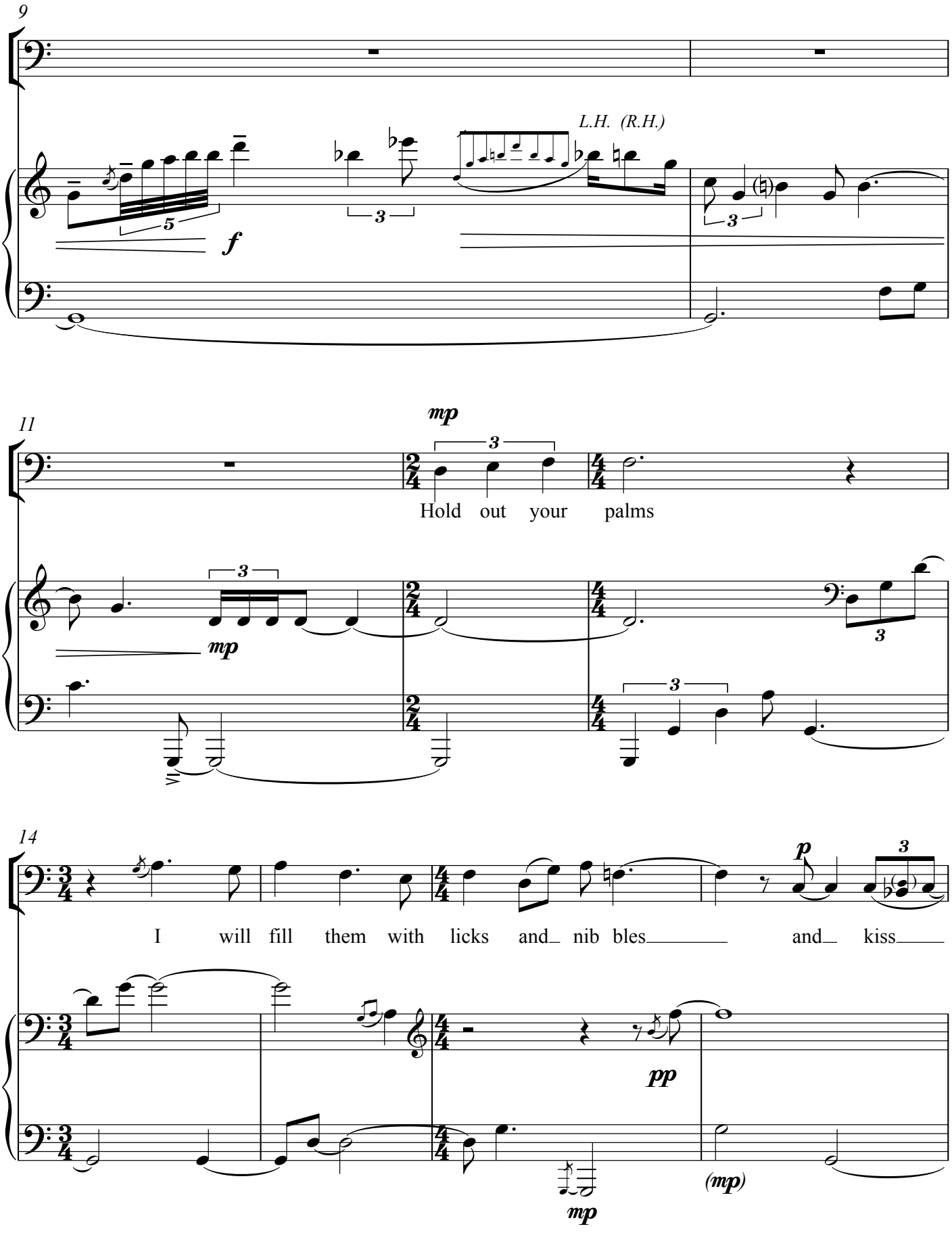
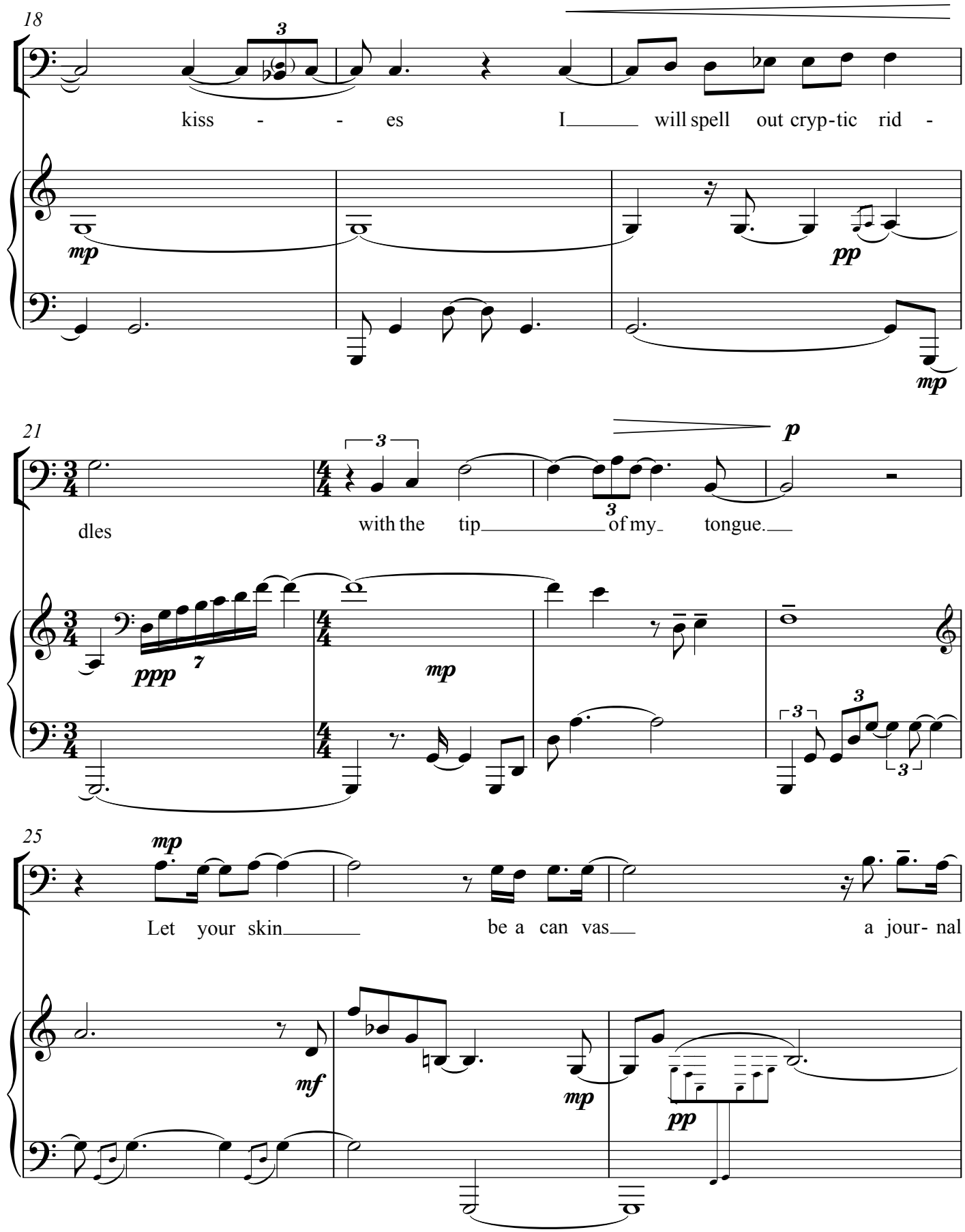
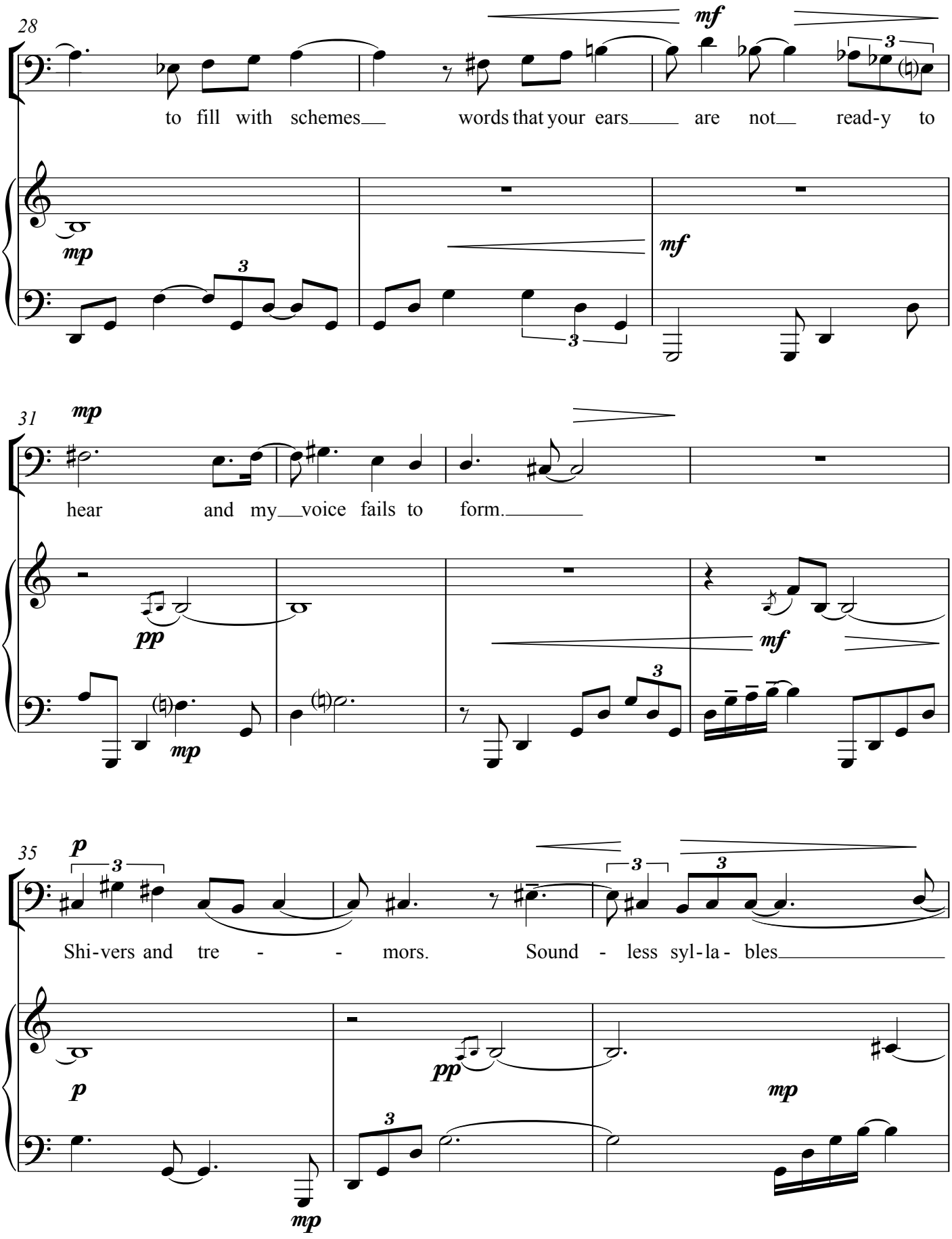
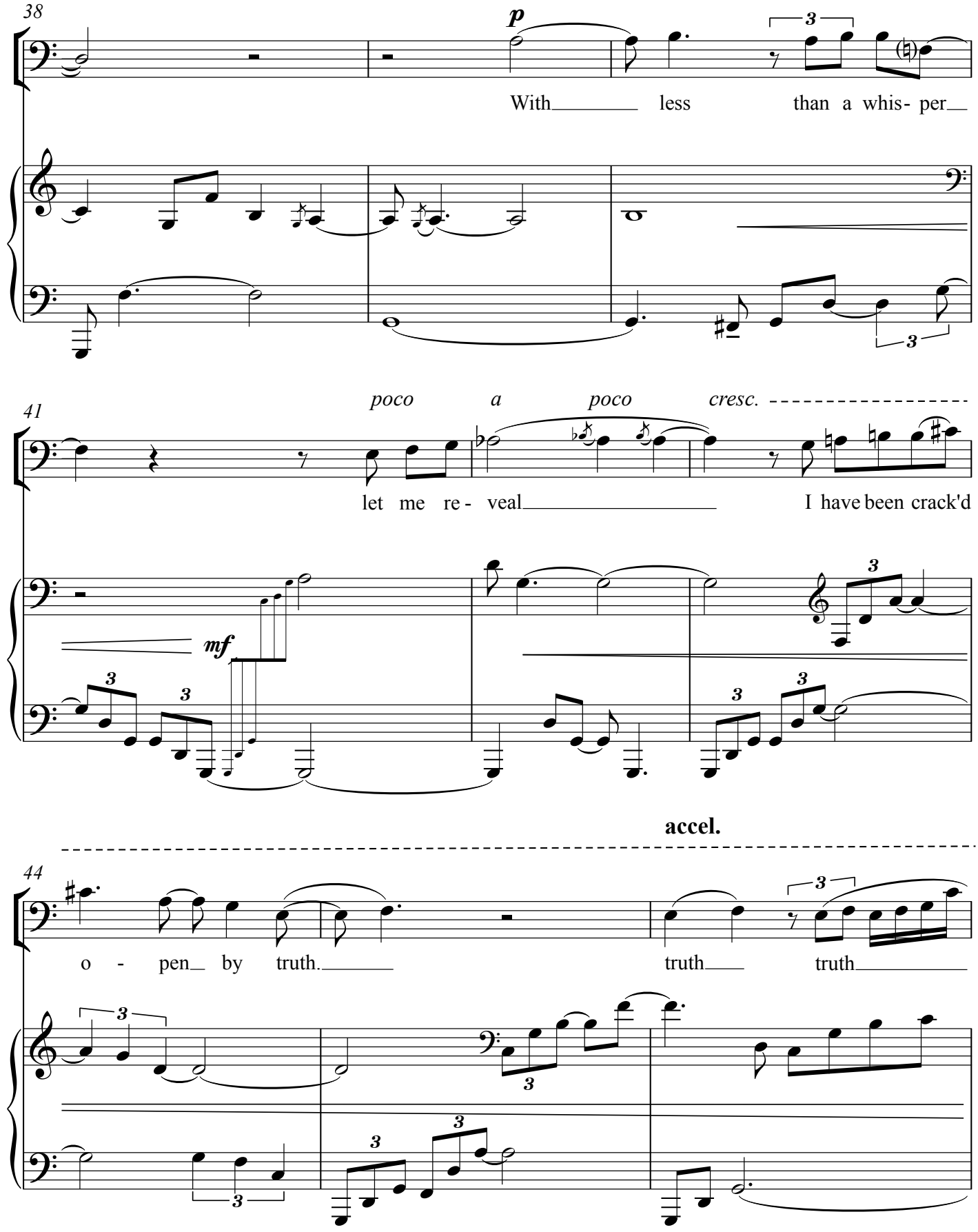
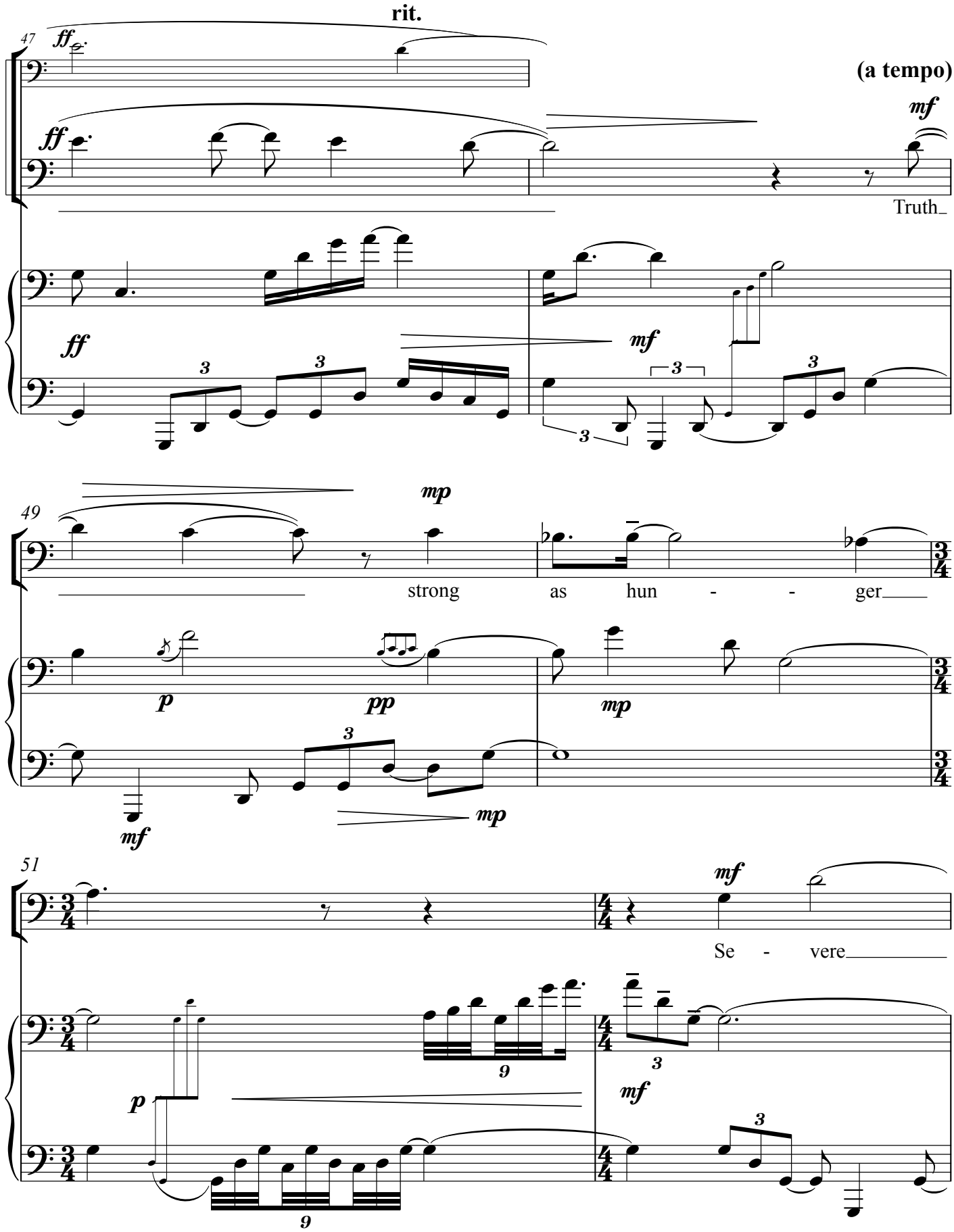
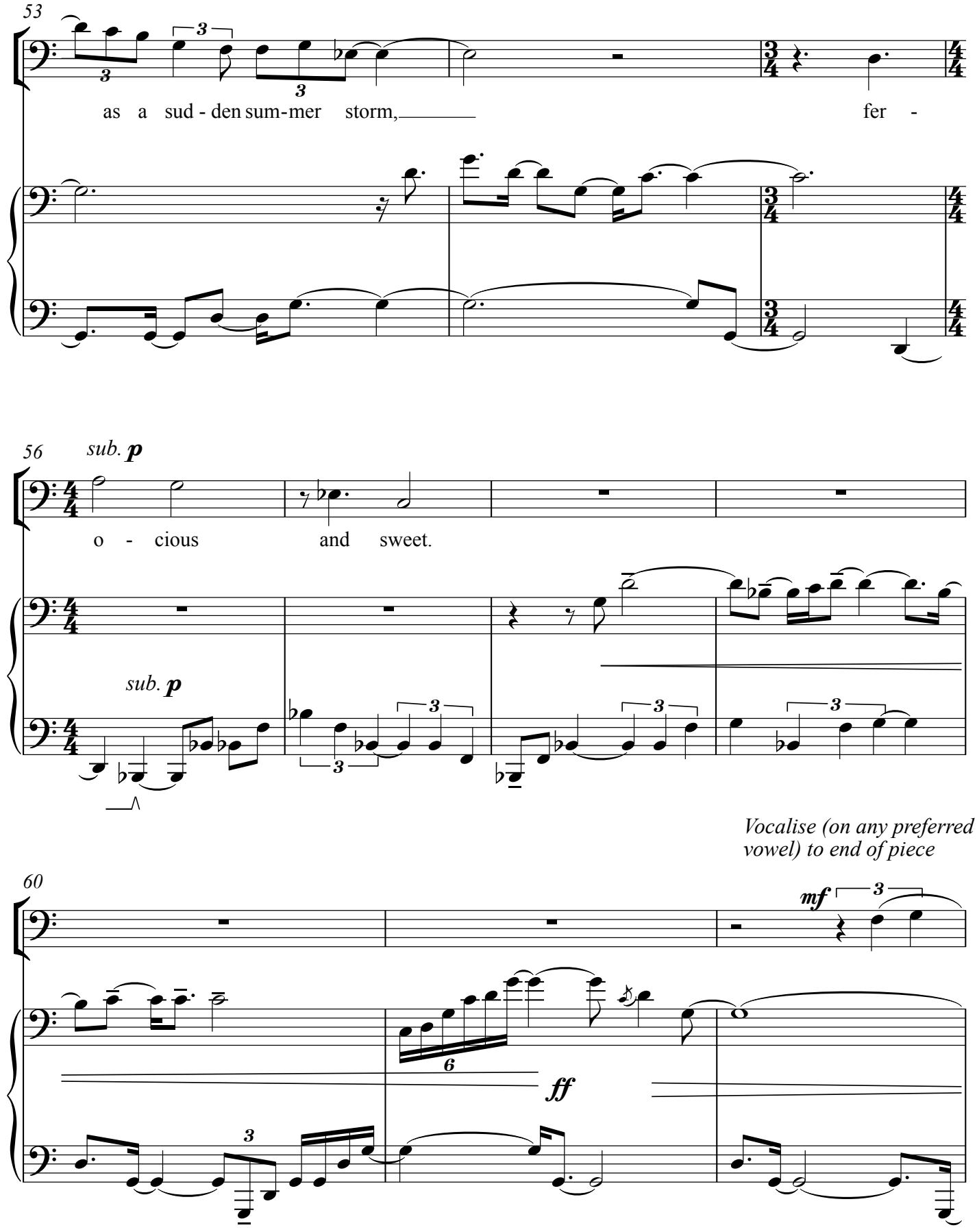

9
L.H. (R.H.)
f
11
mp
Hold out your palms
mp
14
I will fill them with licks and nib bles and kiss
p
pp
(mp)
mp

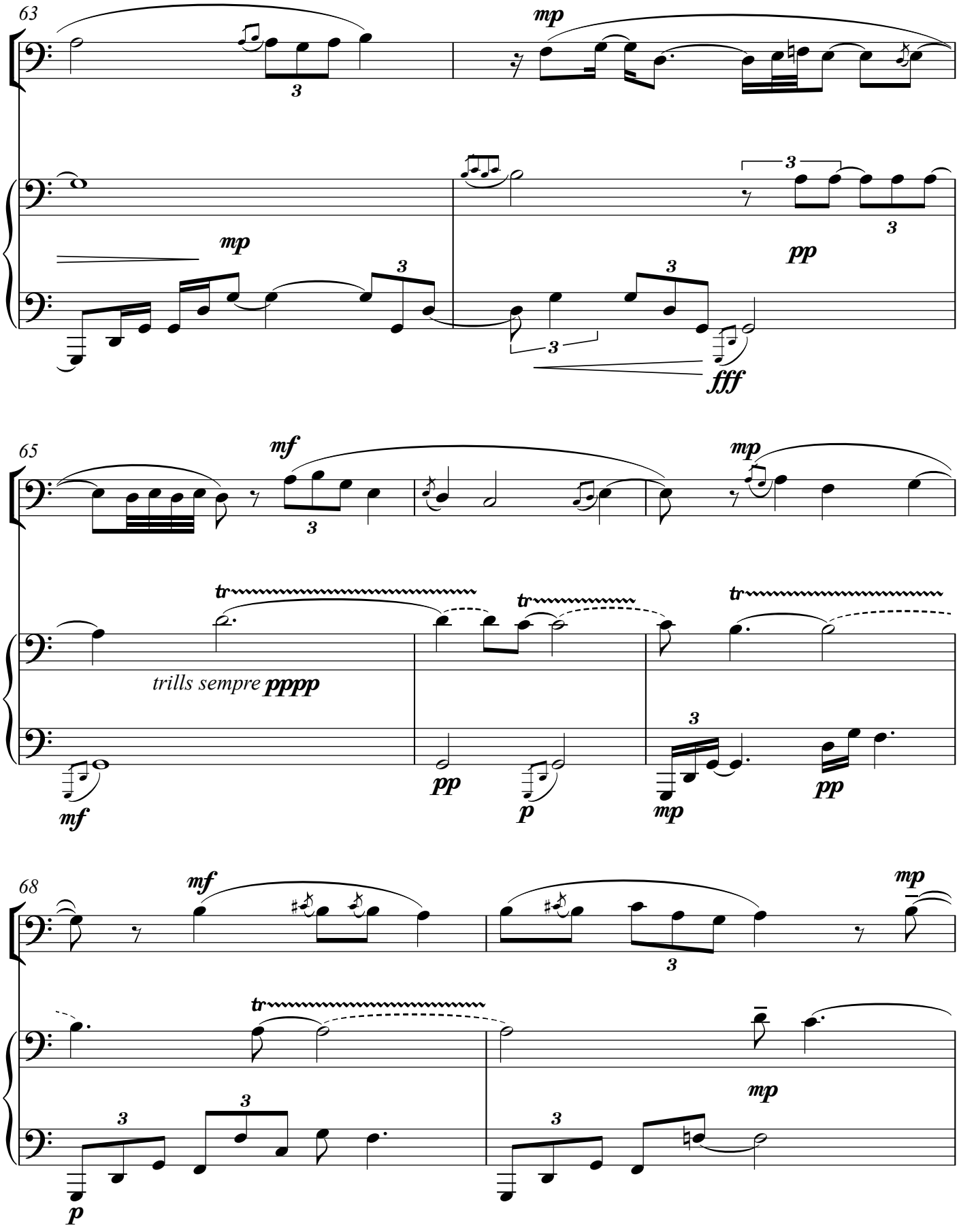

18
kiss - - es I will spell out cryp-tic rid -
mp
pp
mp
21
dles with the tip of my tongue.
p
ppp
mp
25
Let your skin be a can vas a jour- nal
mf
mp
pp

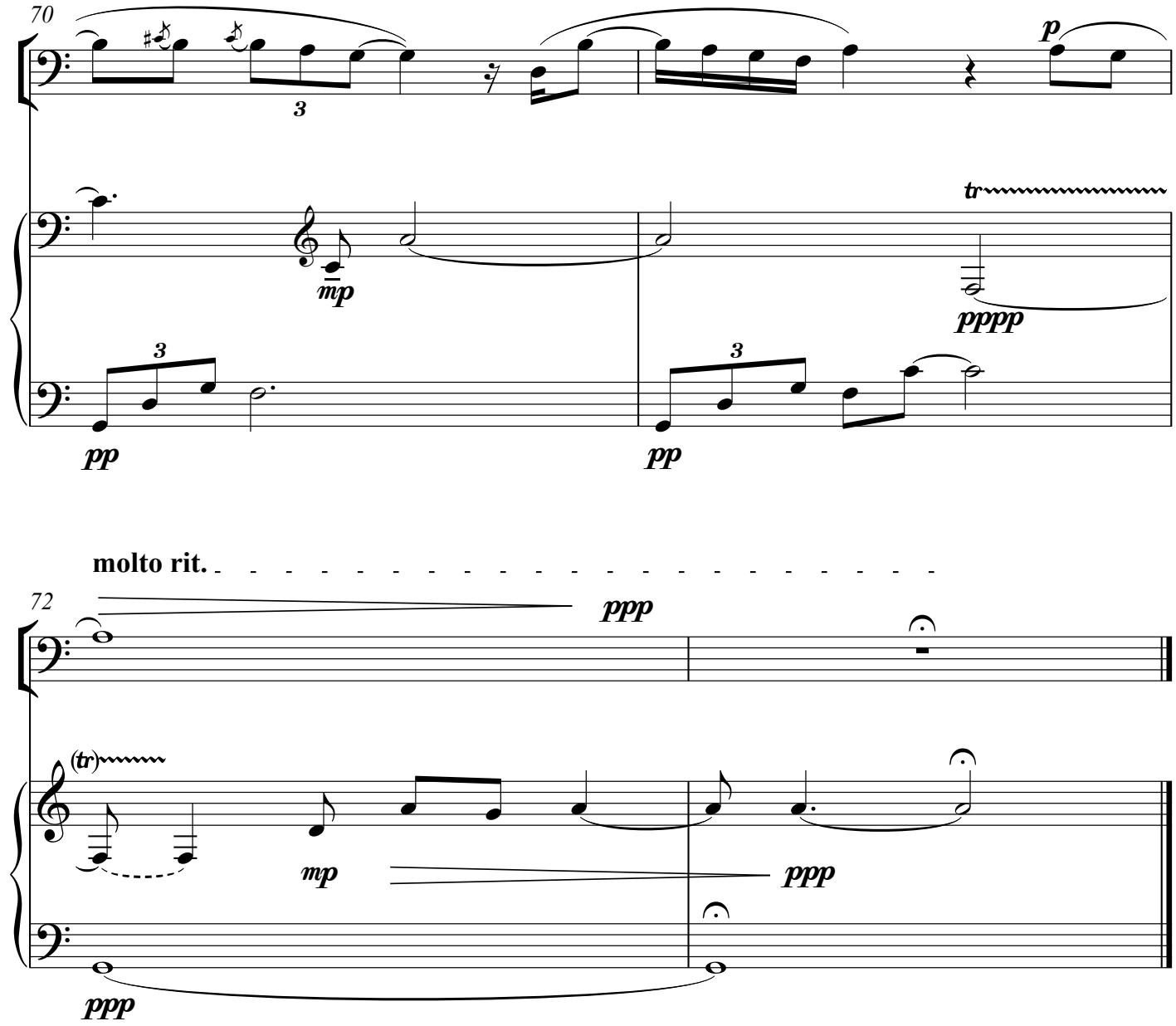

28
mf
to fill with schemes words that your ears are not read-y to
mp
mf
31
mp
hear and my voice fails to form.
pp
mf
mp
35
p
Shi-vers and tre - - mors. Sound - less syl-la- bles
p
pp
mp
mp


38
p
With less than a whis- per
41
poco a poco cresc.
let me re- veal I have been crack'd
mf
accel.
44
o - pen by truth. truth truth


rit.
47
ff
ff
(a tempo)
mf
Truth_
ff
mf
49
mp
strong as hun - - ger___
p
pp
mp
mf
mp
51
mf
Se - vere___
p
mf


53
as a sud - den sum-mer storm,
fer -
56
sub. p
o - cious and sweet.
sub. p
Vocalise (on any preferred vowel) to end of piece
60
mf
ff


63
mp
3
mp
3
3
pp
3
3
fff
65
mf
3
mp
tr
tr
tr
trills sempre pppp
mf
pp
p
3
mp
pp
68
mf
3
mp
tr
3
3
mp
p


70
p
mp
tr
pppp
pp
pp
molto rit.
72
ppp
(tr)
mp
ppp
ppp