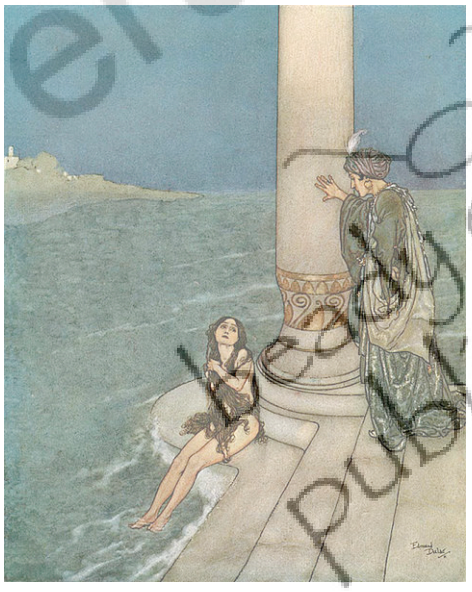
CAROL BARNETT

VOICES

for Mezzo-Soprano and Guitar

Text by Nancy Cox



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CAROL BARNETT

VOICES

for Mezzo-Soprano and Guitar

Text by Nancy Cox

For Nancy Cox and Tim Burris

Premiered October 9, 1983 by Nancy Cox, soprano, and Tim Burris, guitar
at Viterbo College Recital Hall, La Crosse, WI

c. 17 minutes

I. Identity Poem #1
II. Even Feminists Falter
III. Love Poem for Tim (à la Neruda)
IV. Identity Poem #4
V. The Mermaid's Meditation
VI. I Didn't Know

PROGRAM NOTE:

Voices was composed thanks to the Minnesota Composers Forum's Composers Commissioning Program, and first performed by the author of the poetry, Nancy Cox. On a whim, I picked these particular poems out of Nancy's ouvre because they all began with "I." Her blend of fantasy and reality appealed to me, and I made frequent use of word painting: "waves" of notes for water and wind, for example, and sharply plucked minor seconds for the mermaid's painful steps.

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IDENTITY POEM #1

I am the forest, full
of dark places,
keeping my secrets.
I am cool, tranquil, and known
for my silences.
A haven, and a place
where things rot.
My leaves whisper ancient words
and flash sun-reflections.
I smooth my jagged edges with moss
and open myself to the wind.
I hold moonlight.
I die and renew daily.
In dim unexpected hollows,
I grow exquisite
red blossoms.

EVEN FEMINISTS FALTER

I am waiting here
for my fairy godmother to arrive.
I know she hears me
and is just being stubborn
(or busy –
there must be a very long waiting list).

I need, fairy godmother, someone
to figure the income tax
build a fence
plant trees
scrape the garage
and advise me about auto mechanics.

It's true, fairy godmother,
that you don't have to
clean the cinders off me anymore,
and it's true that I hustled up
my own invitation to the ball,
but I'm sick and tired
of having to do everything.

If you won't arrive soon,
to make me beautiful
and lead me off to dance,
at least, fairy godmother,
the very least you could do
is send over the prince to cut the grass.

LOVE POEM FOR TIM
à la Neruda

I anchor myself in your body,
man of wood, fine-grained and dry.
The veins of forests
flow through your arms.
The buds of future springs
lie curled in your heart.
The words we plant in each other
sprout.

I drift in the light of your body,
man of sand-dune and ocean.
My boats moor at your side.
In sleep we sail together;
each night takes us farther
from shore.

I fall into your body,
man of music,
into the tight gold of its singing
vibrations,
into your hills of yellow grass,
your sky of eyes,
into your oceans of deep sound.
I fall into your body –
and do not drown.

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IDENTITY POEM #4

I am the mermaid
who saved the prince.
He thinks it was that other woman.

I am not alone:
at night my sisters
rise to the surface of the waves.
They sing to me
of knives and blood.

I love and I wait
without knowing
of anything else to do.

I walk with the prince
in the garden
and cannot speak.
The slicing pain
in my strange new feet
never stops,
but I dance.

I grieve for the days
of water,
the days when I did not know
the game of excuses,
betrayal,
the burden of walking,
the sweat of unexplained hope.

To be foam on the sea
will be just as good
as loving and waiting
and dancing and grieving
and having no home
and no tongue.

I DIDN'T KNOW

I didn't know
it would be so easy
to cough up the apple.

Ever since I decided
to stop waiting
for the prince to come,
to stop lying here so
sweetly composed,

ever since I threw oopen
that silly glass lid
and got up by muself,
(putting to flight
a flock of sympathetic birds
who sat and peered at me
daily),

ever since I figured
I can make it
to the neighboring kingdom
without a horse
or a prince,

I've been stomping around
in this forest
trying to find my way out.

It's all right –
my castle is around here
somewhere.

poems by Nancy Cox
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For Nancy Cox and Tim Burris.

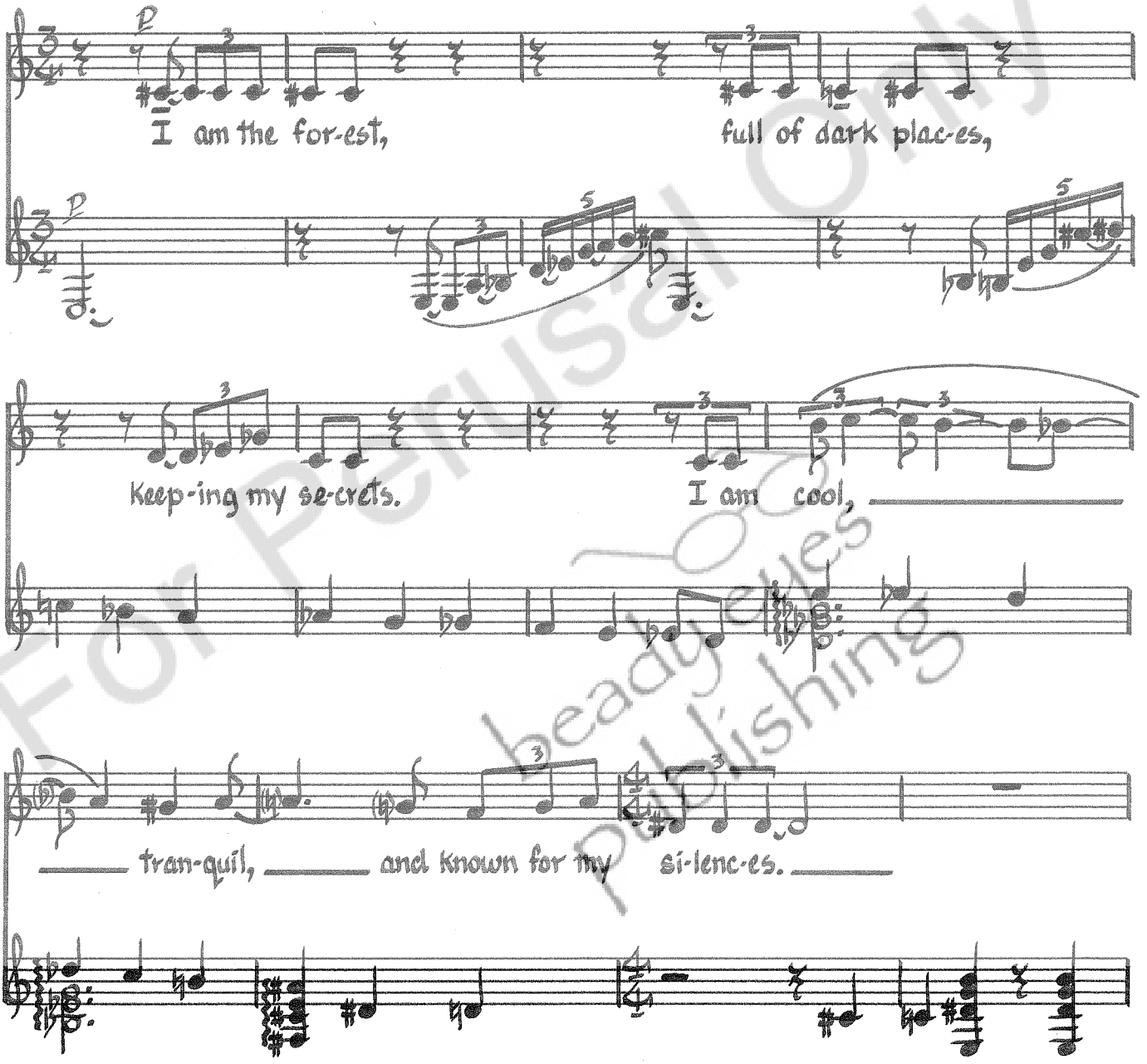
VOICES

NANCY COX

CAROL BARNETT

IDENTITY POEM # 1

(d=c.52)



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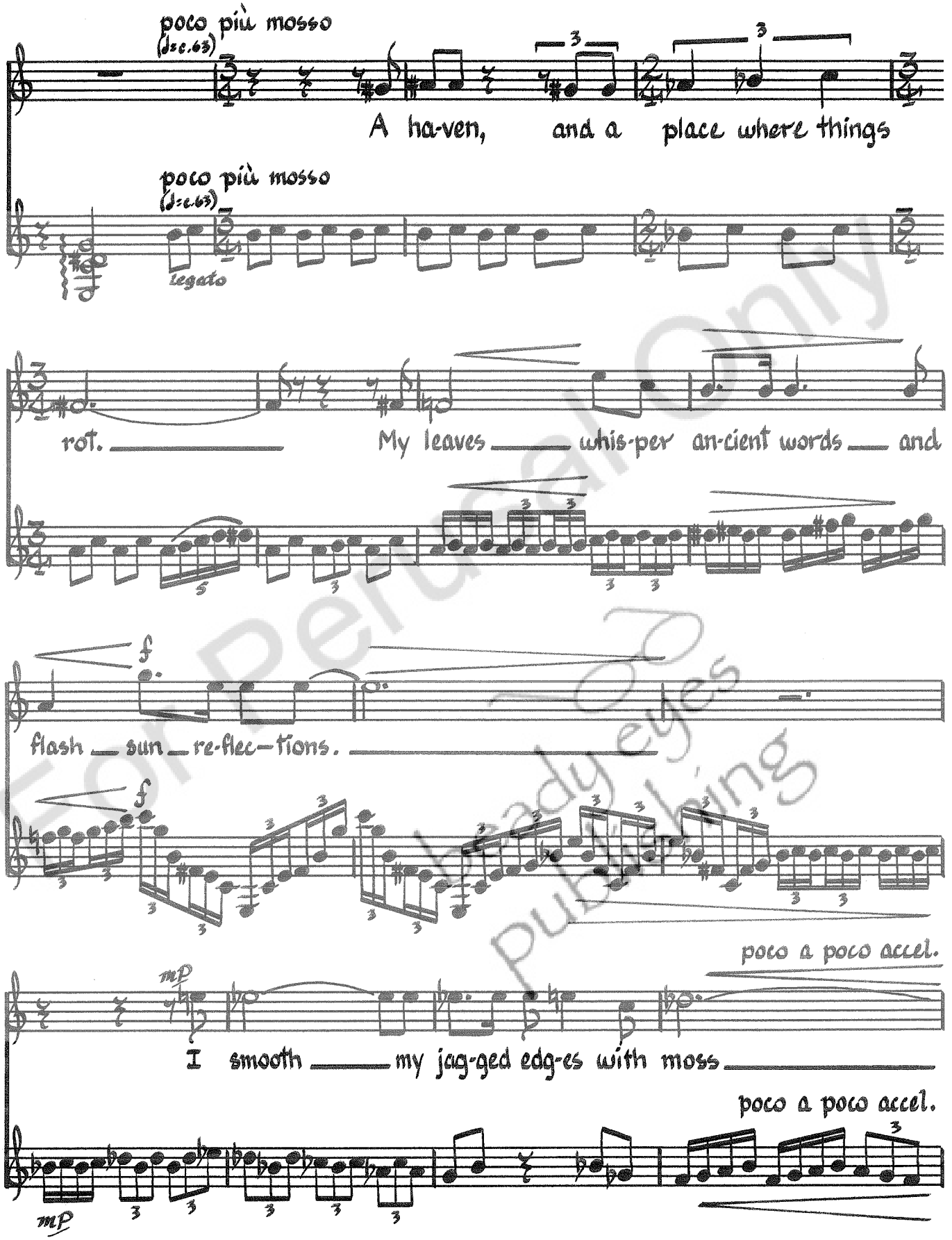

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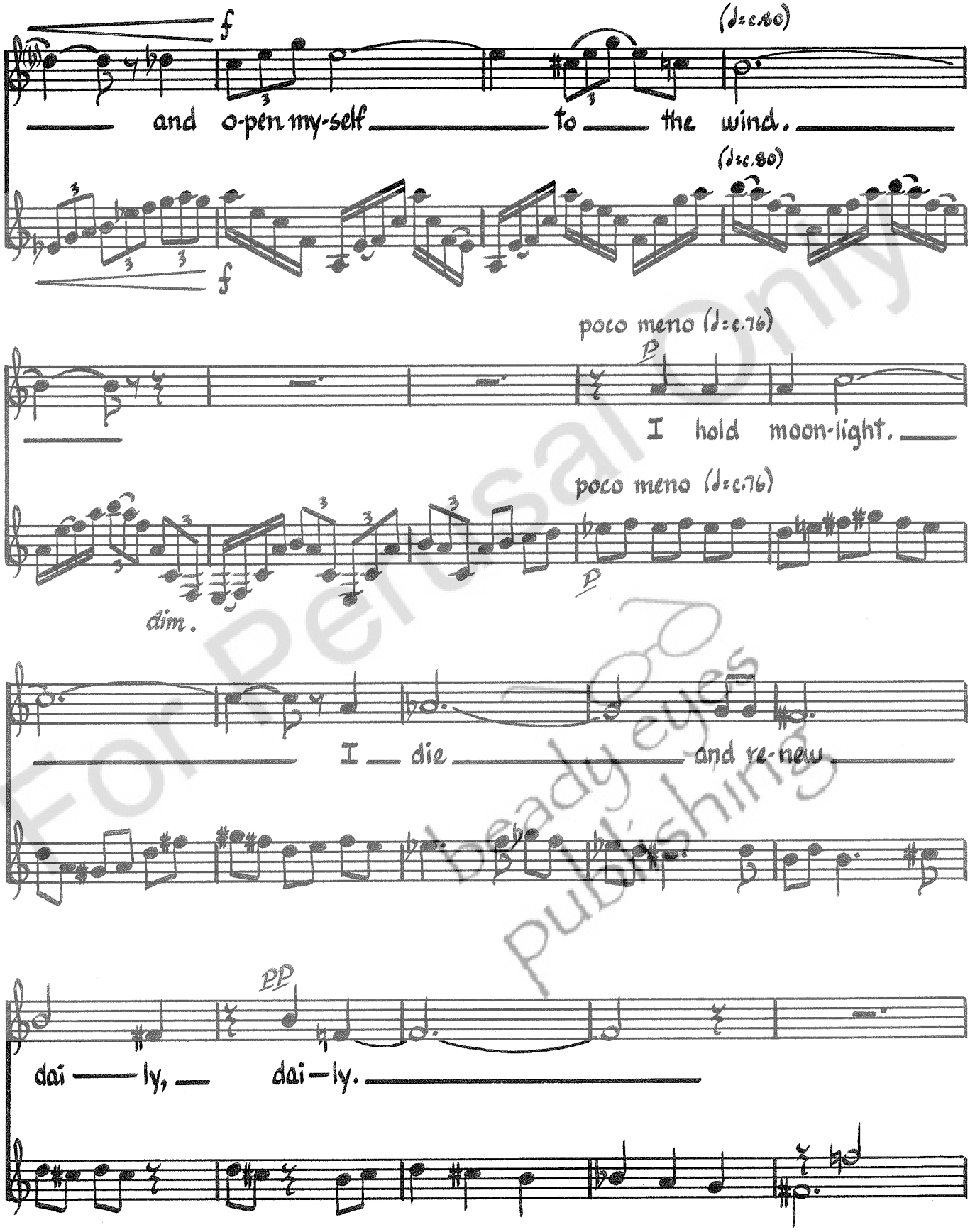

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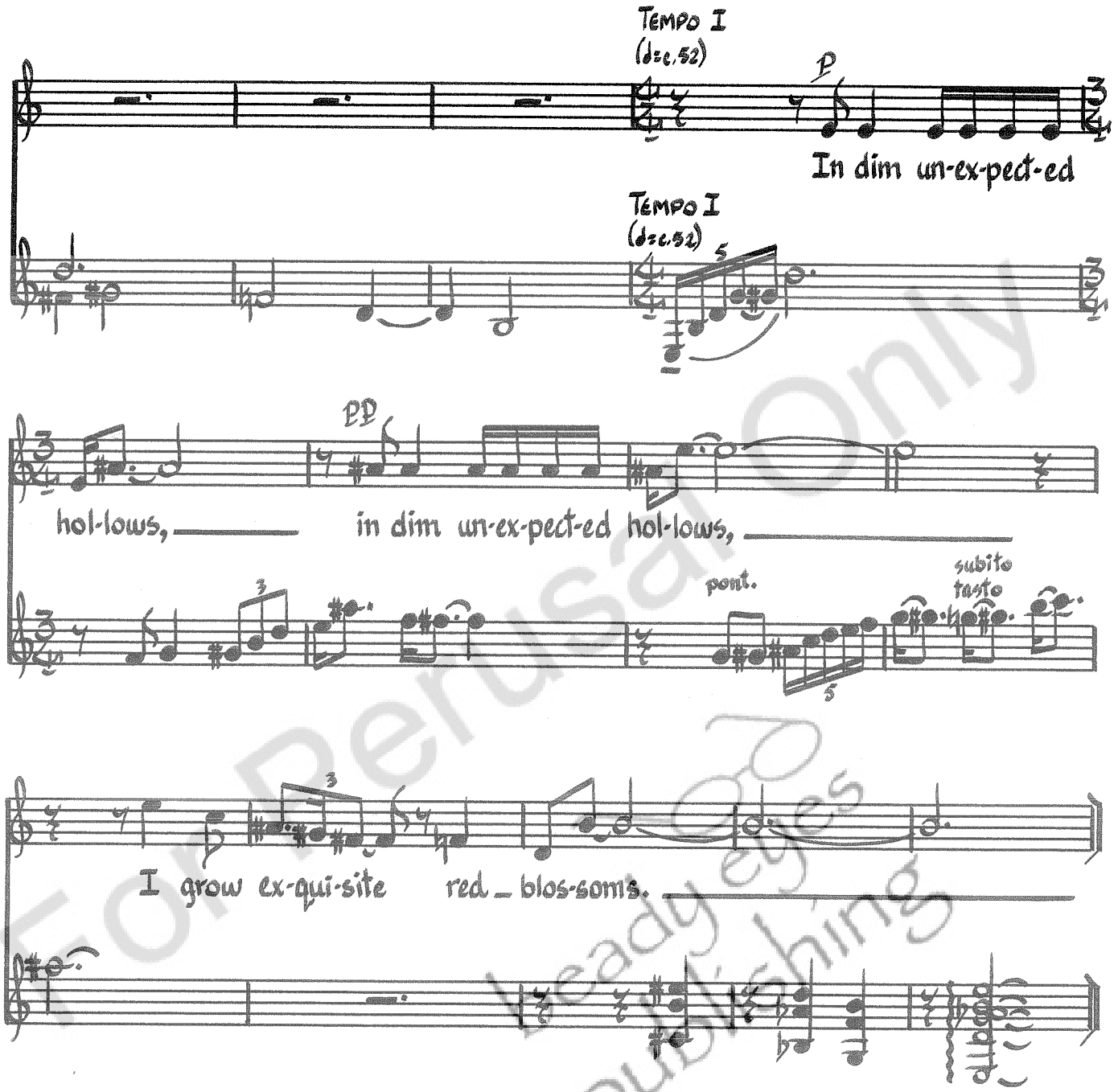

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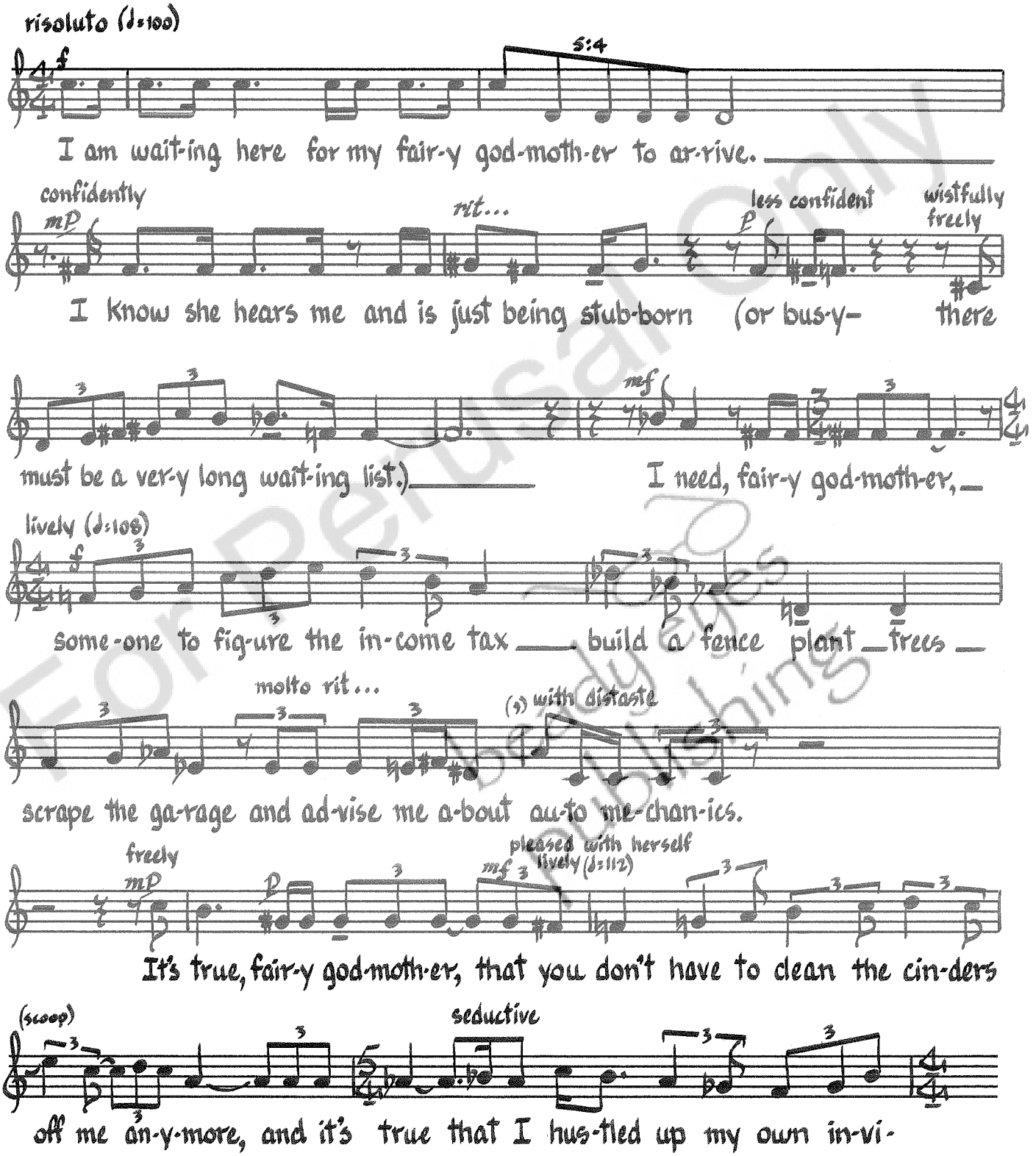
Even Feminists Falter



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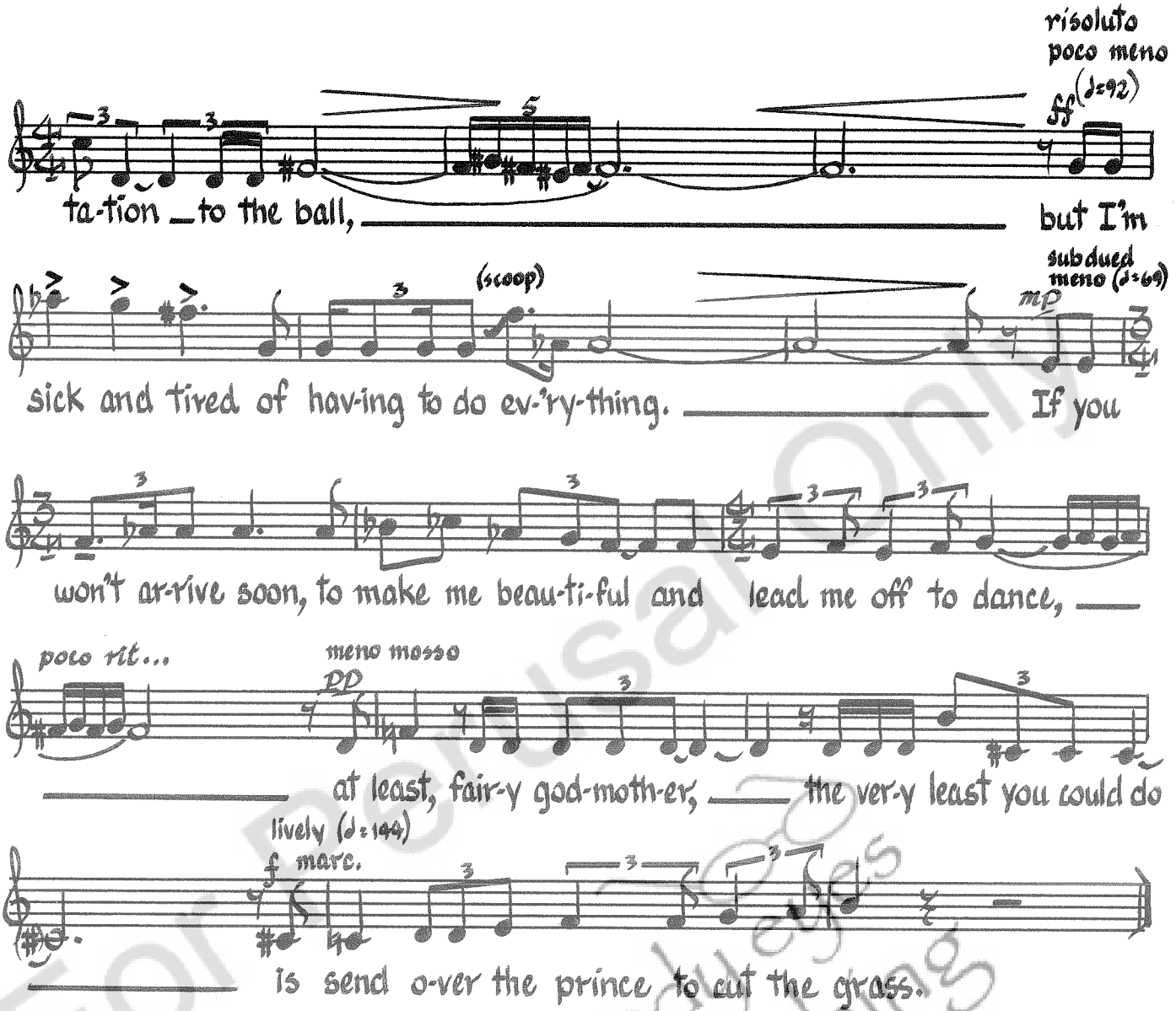

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Love Poem for Tim
à la Neruda

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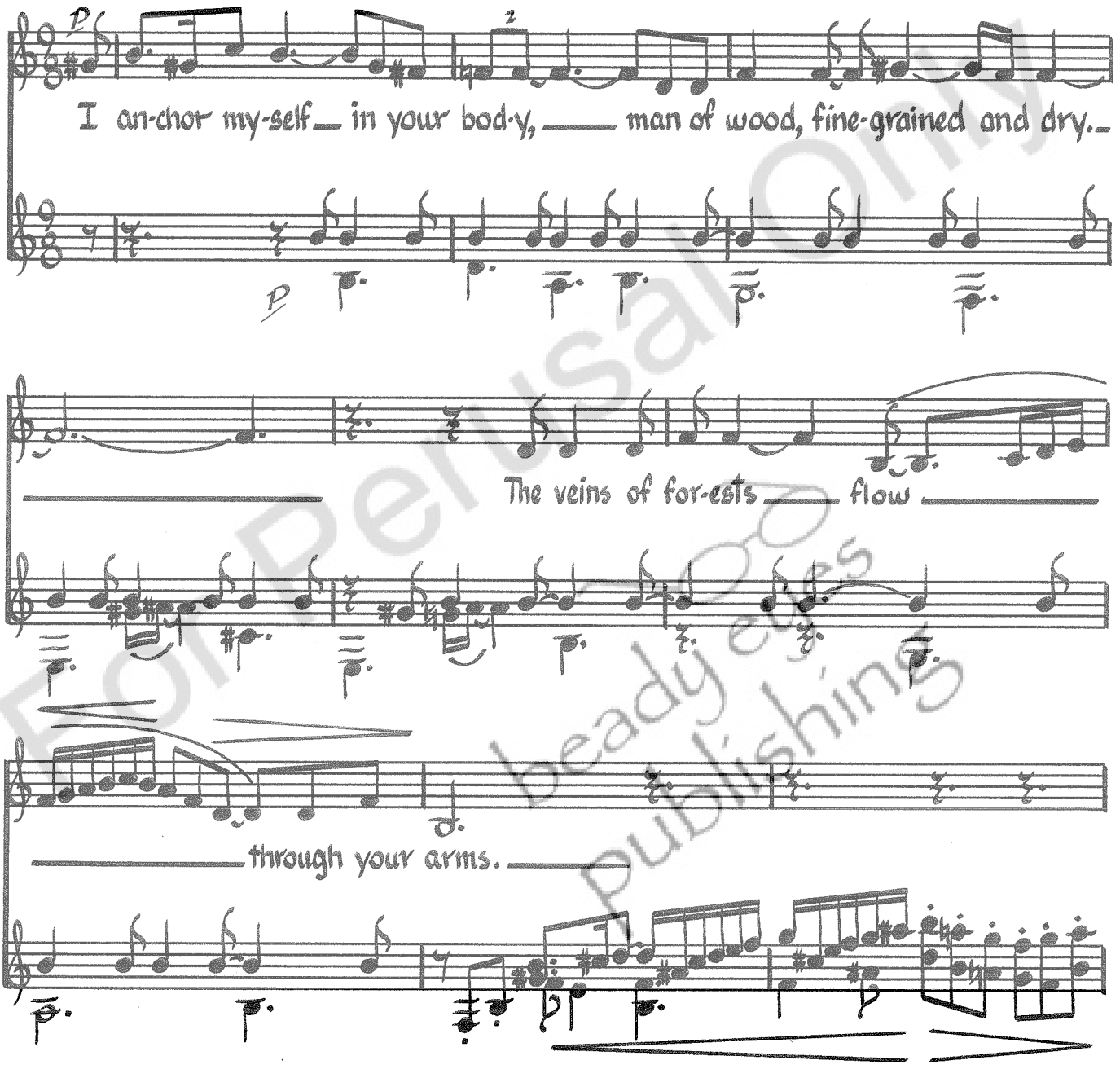

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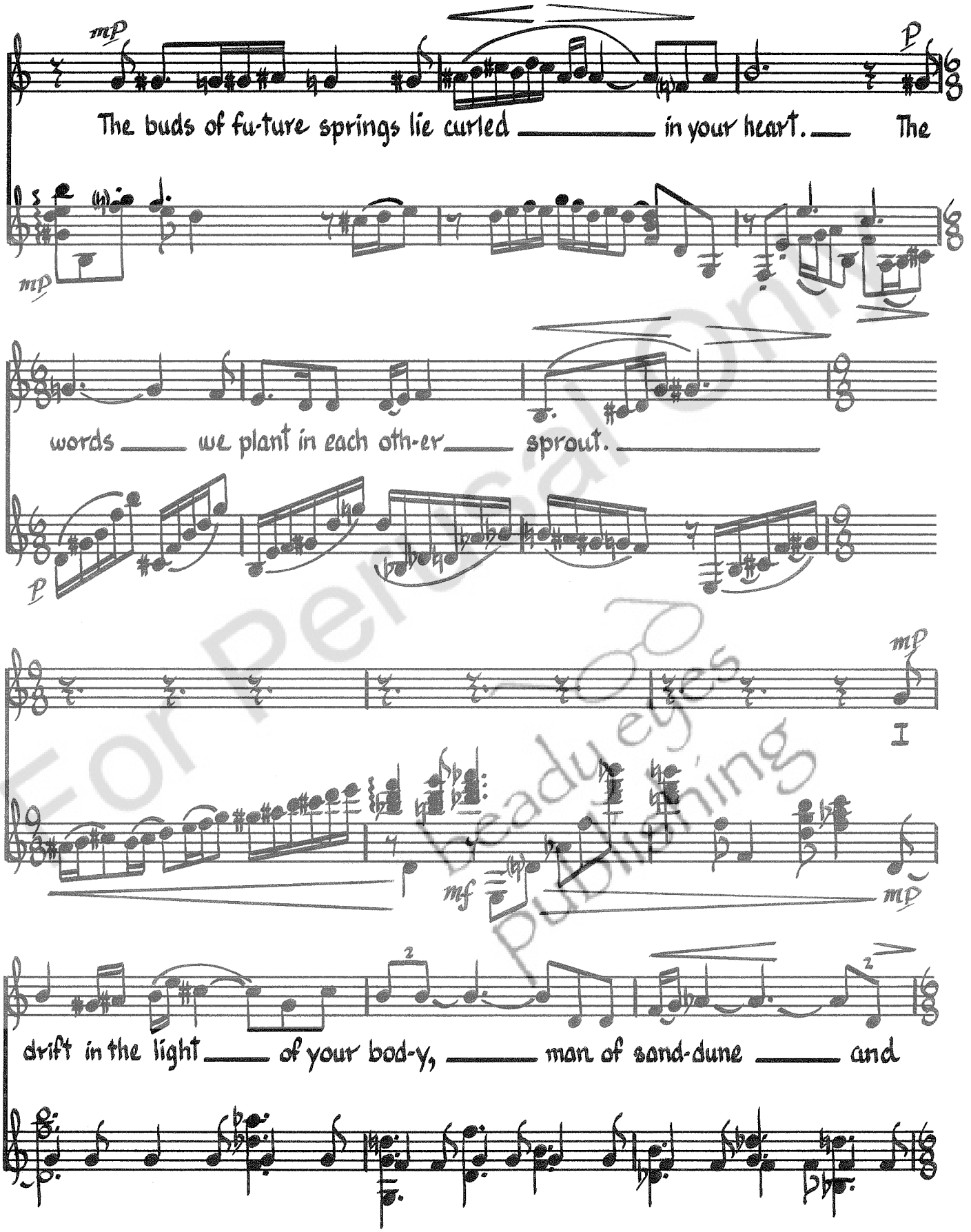

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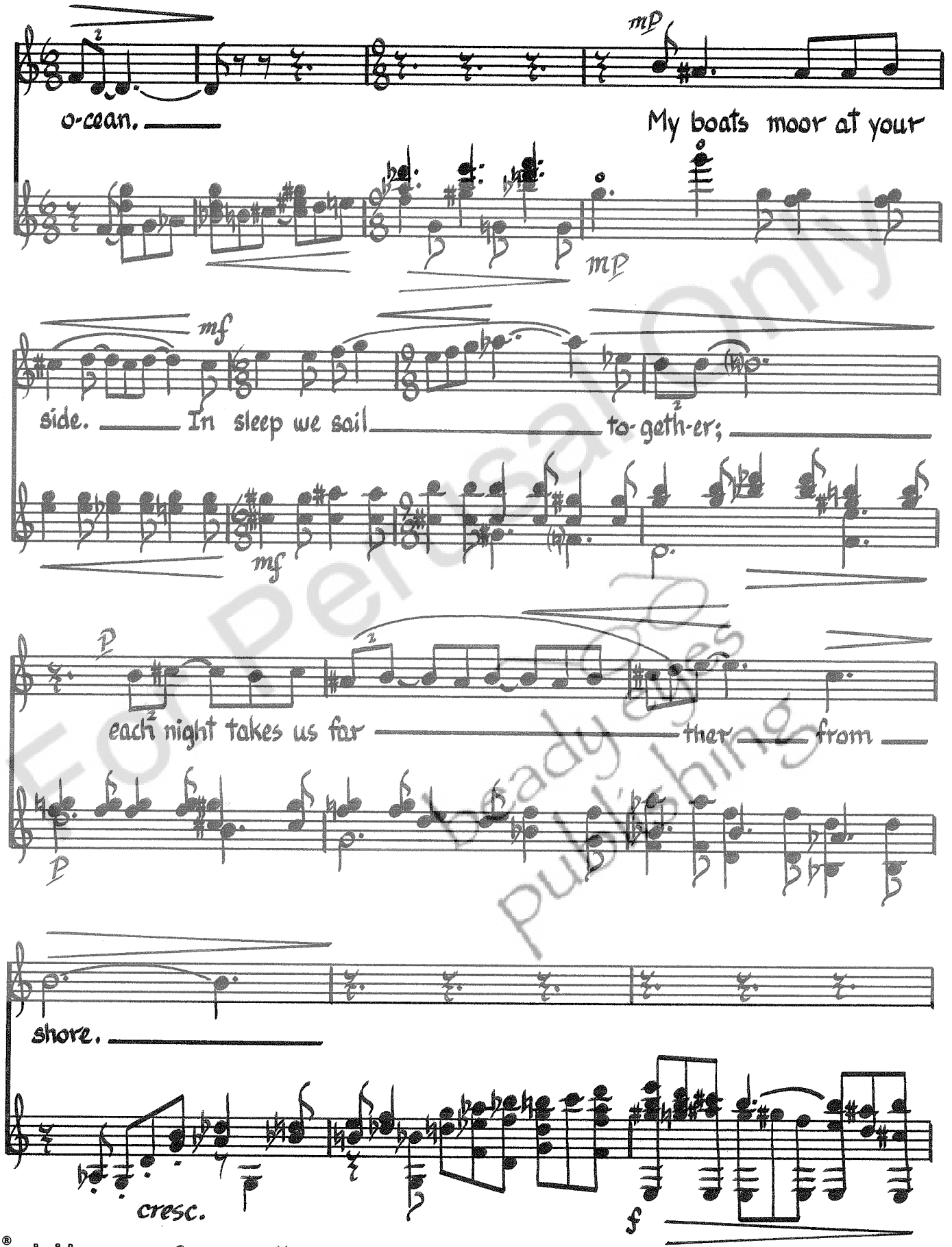

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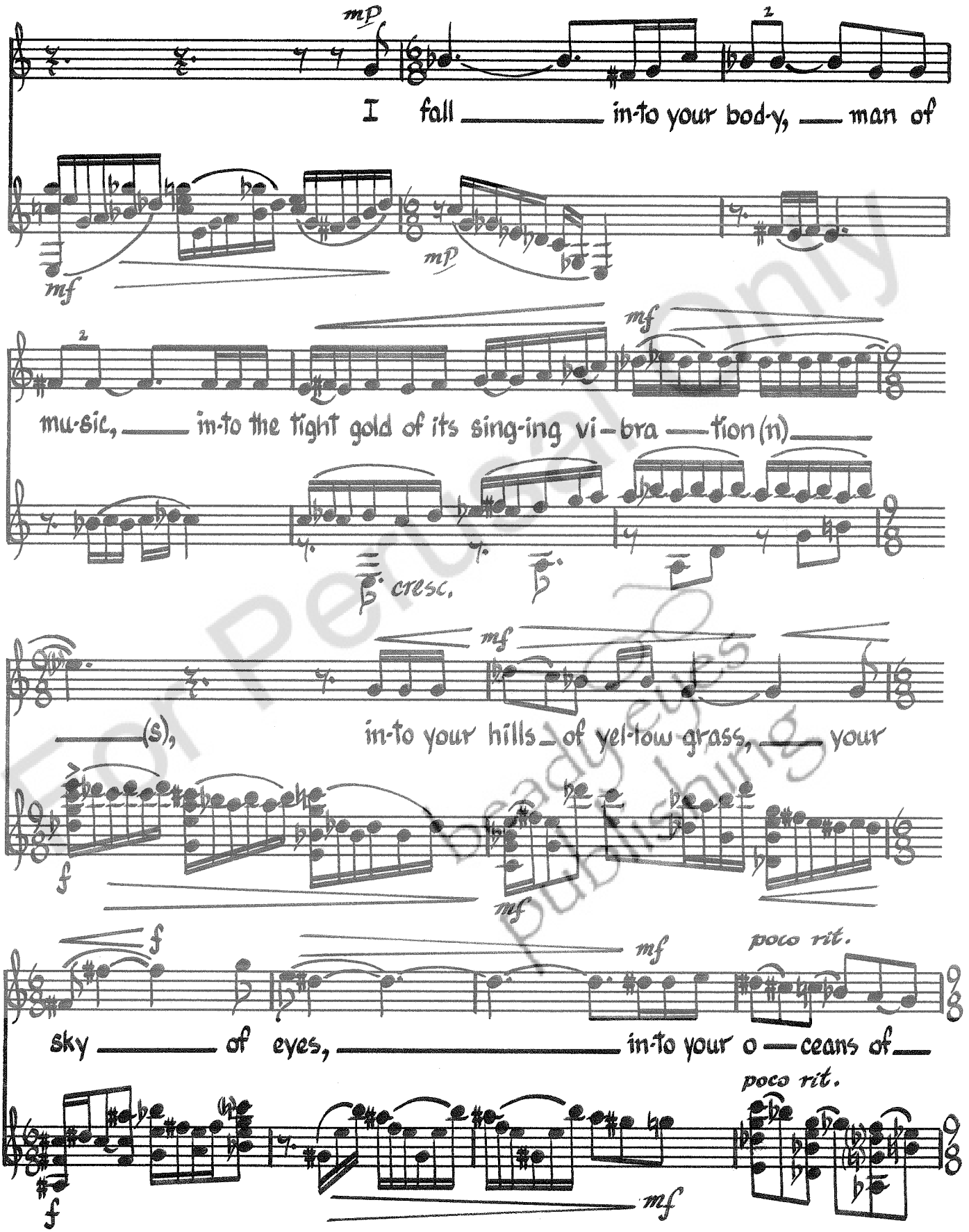

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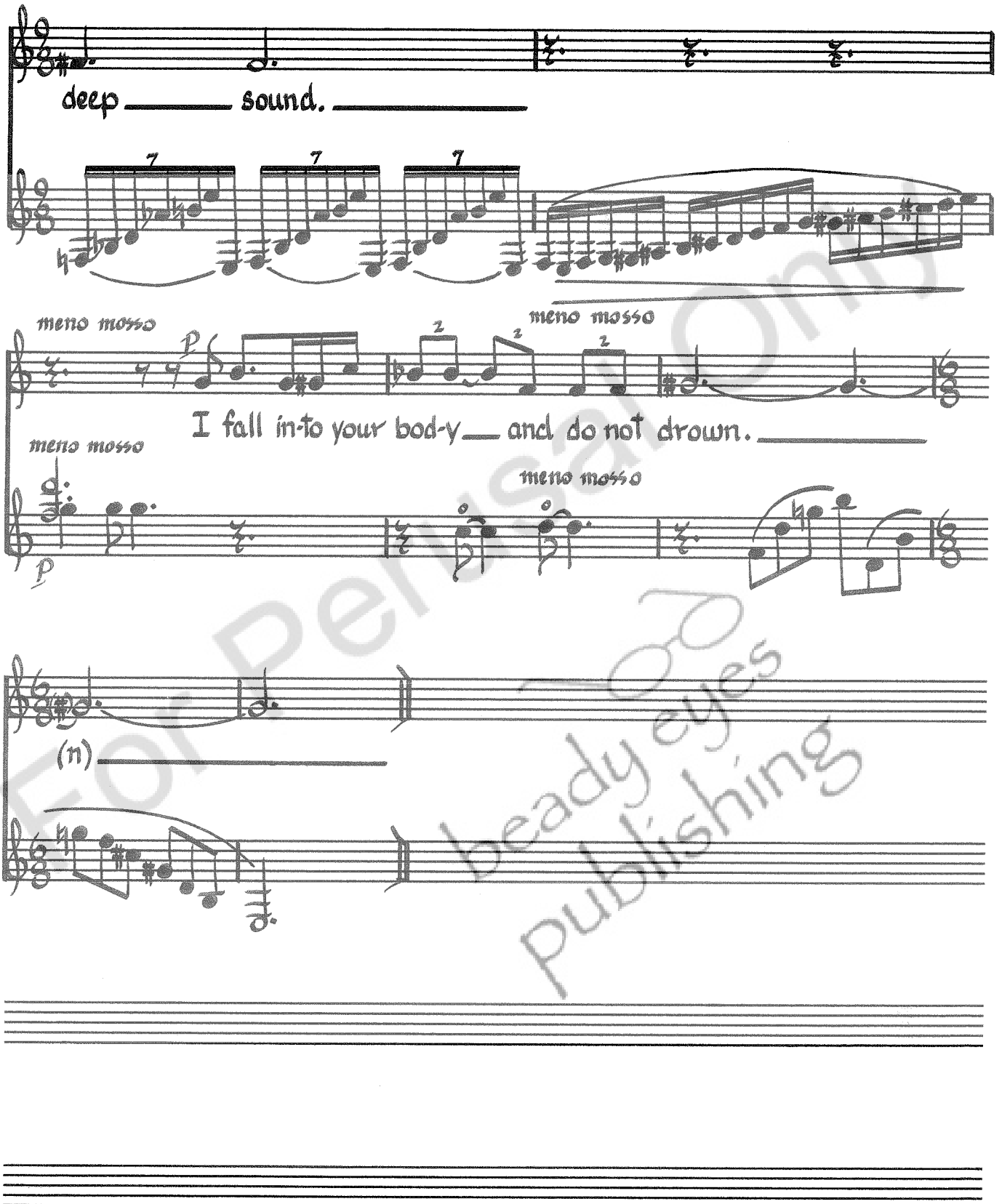

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Identity Poem # 4

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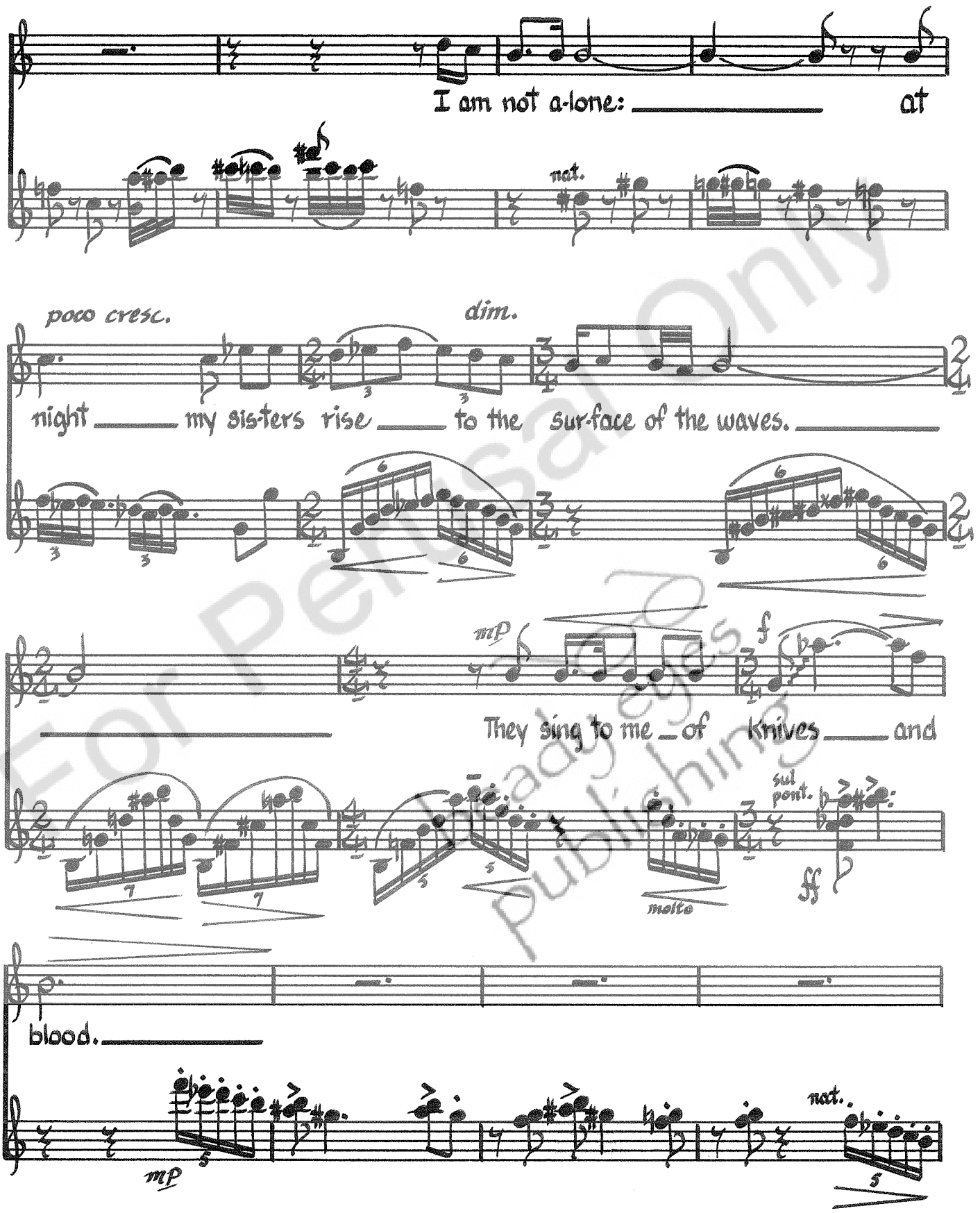

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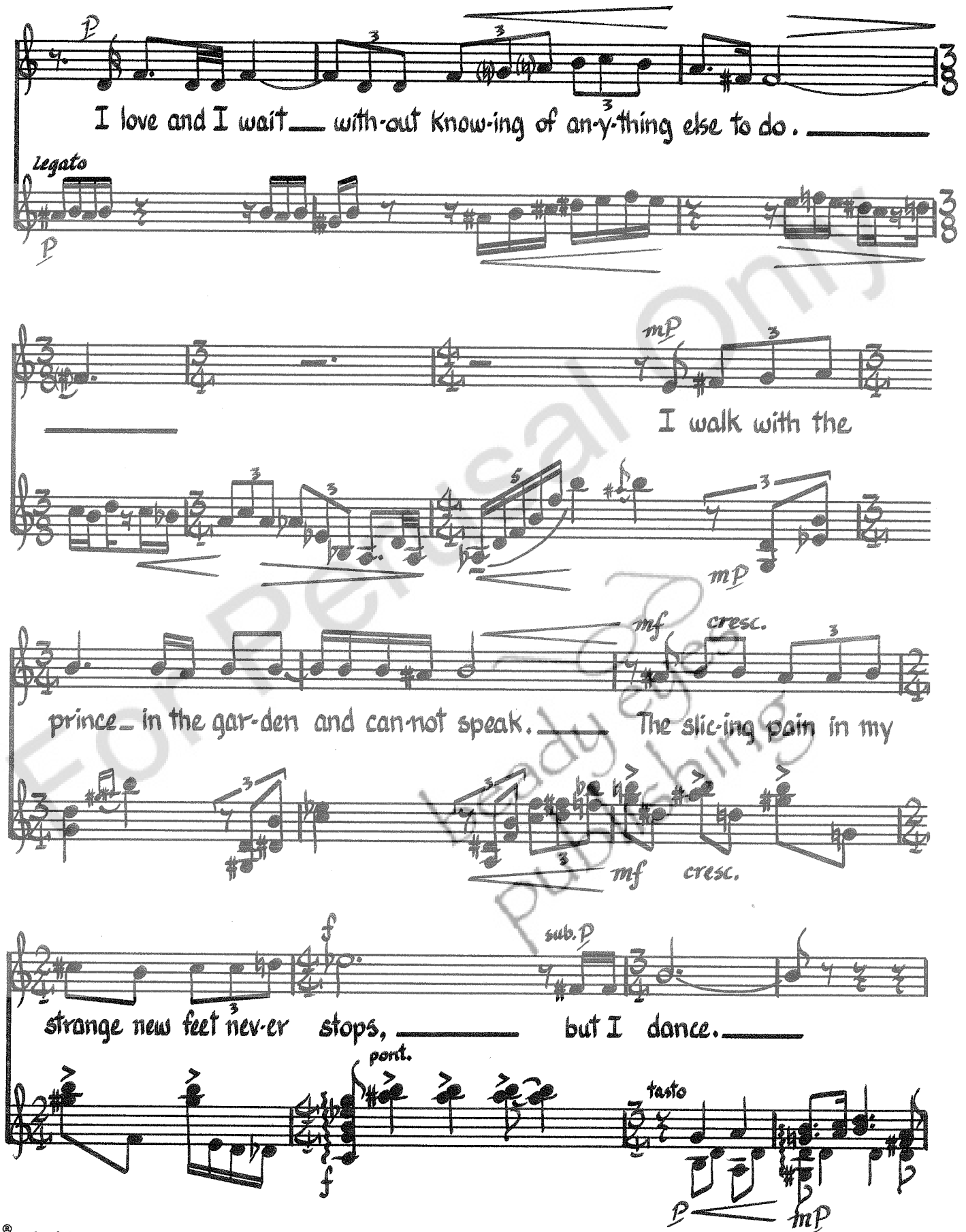

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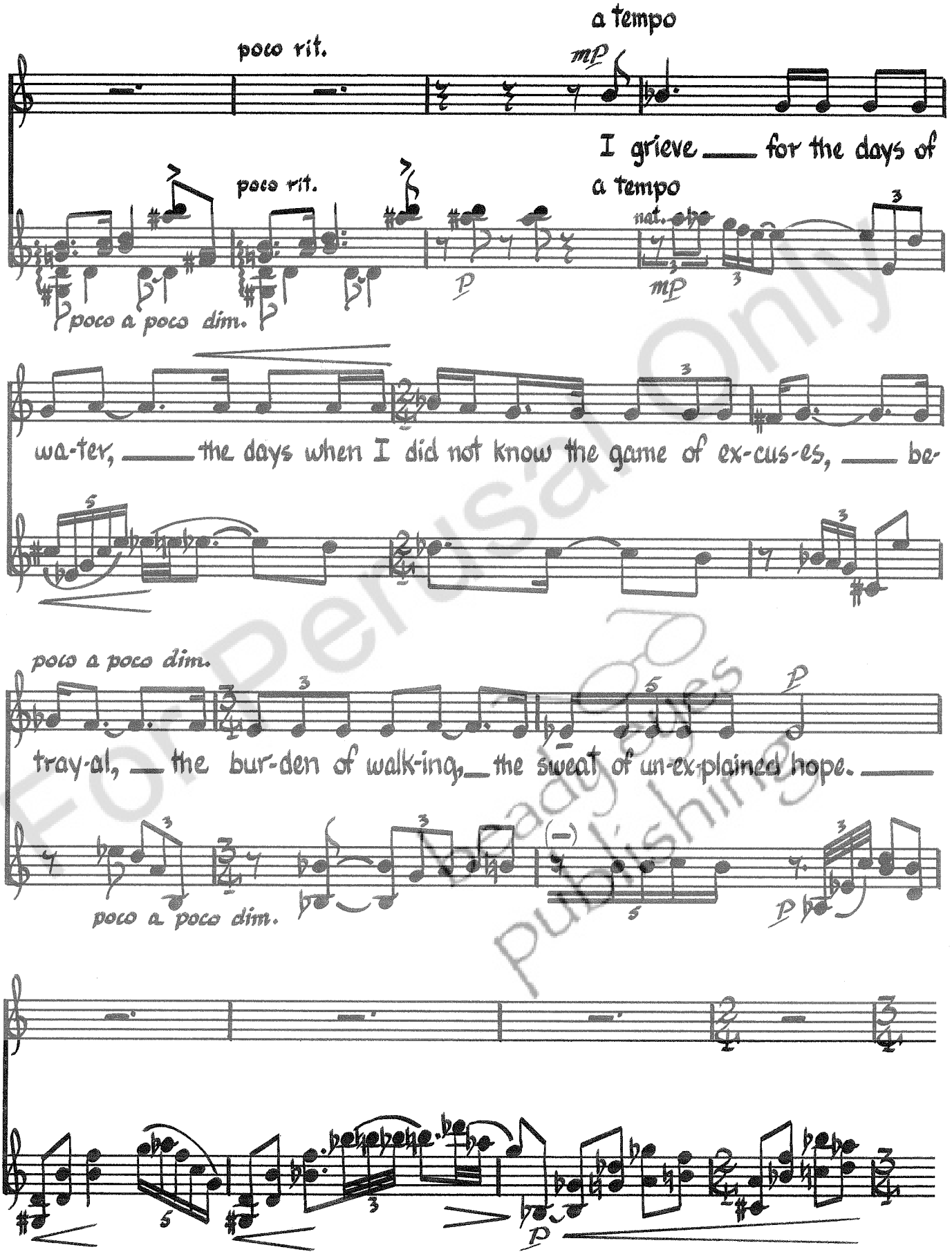

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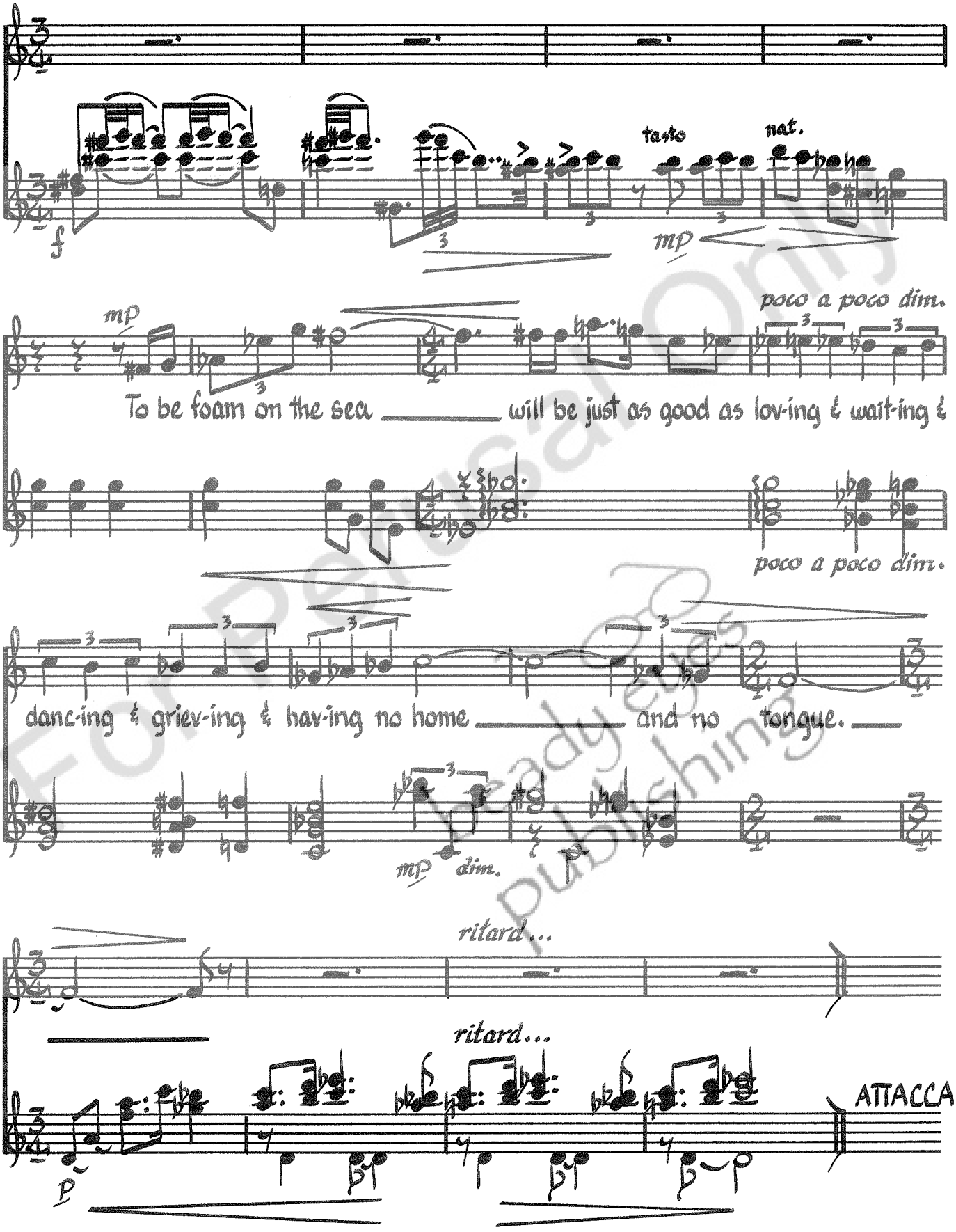

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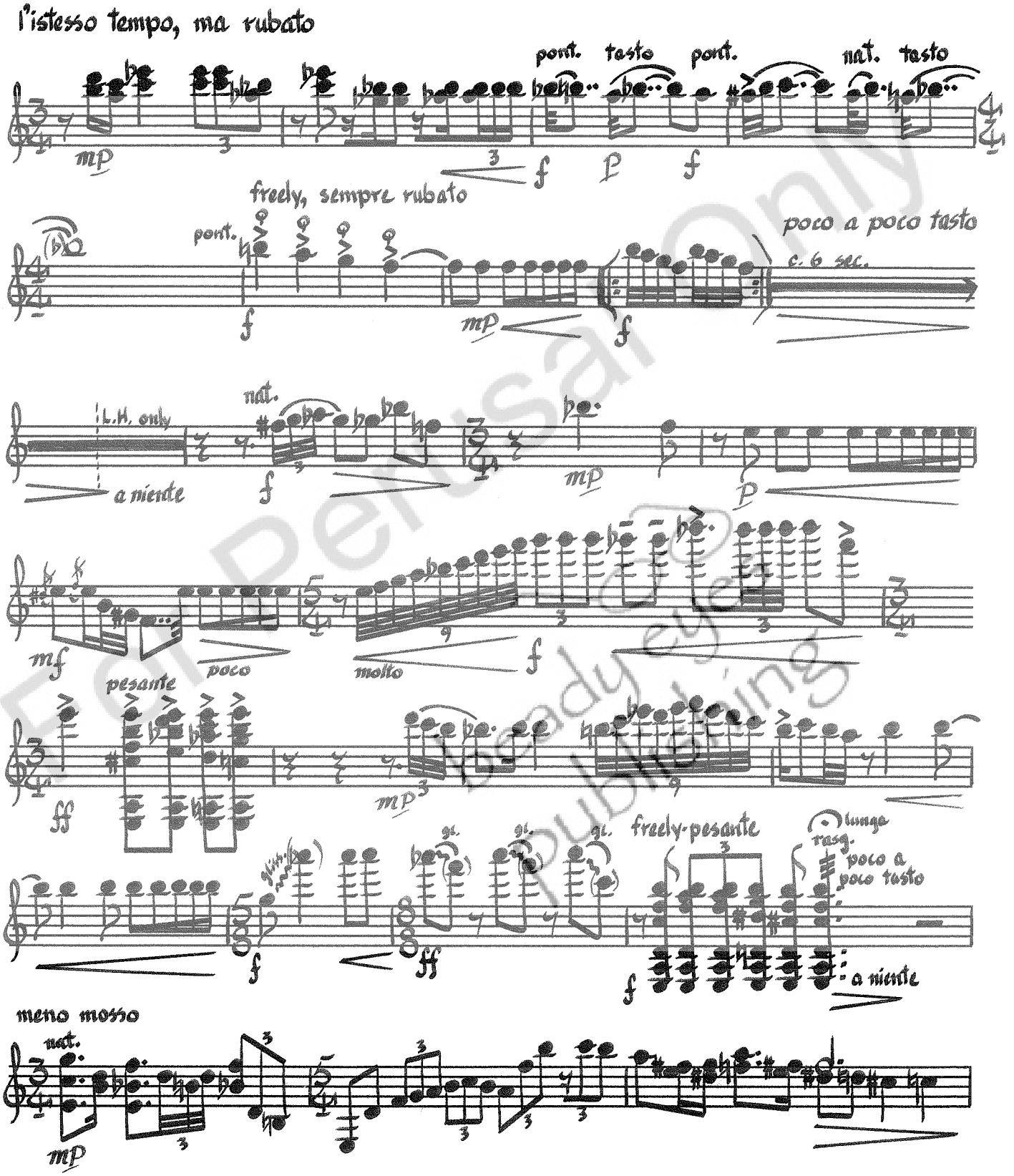
The Mermaid's Meditation



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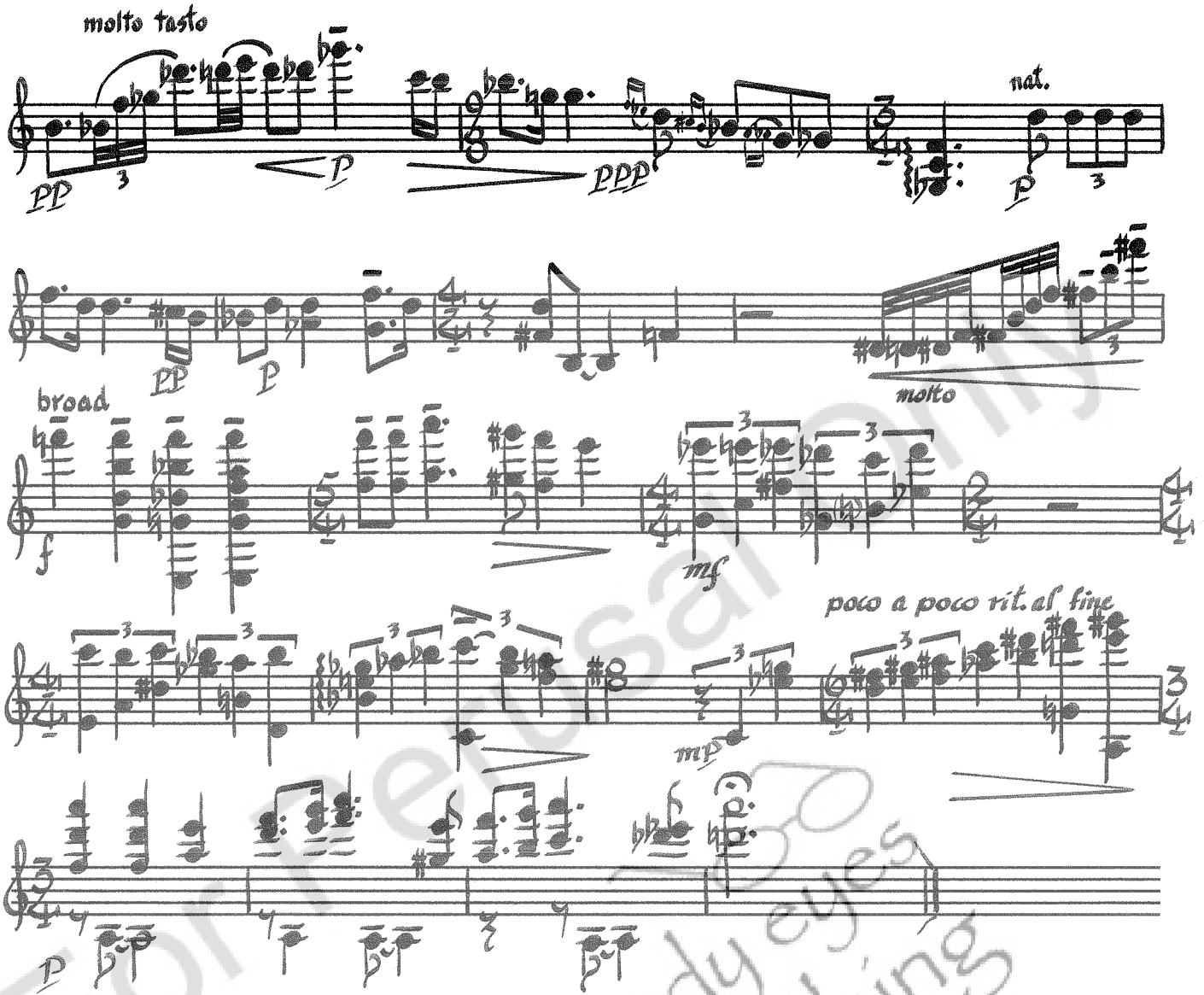

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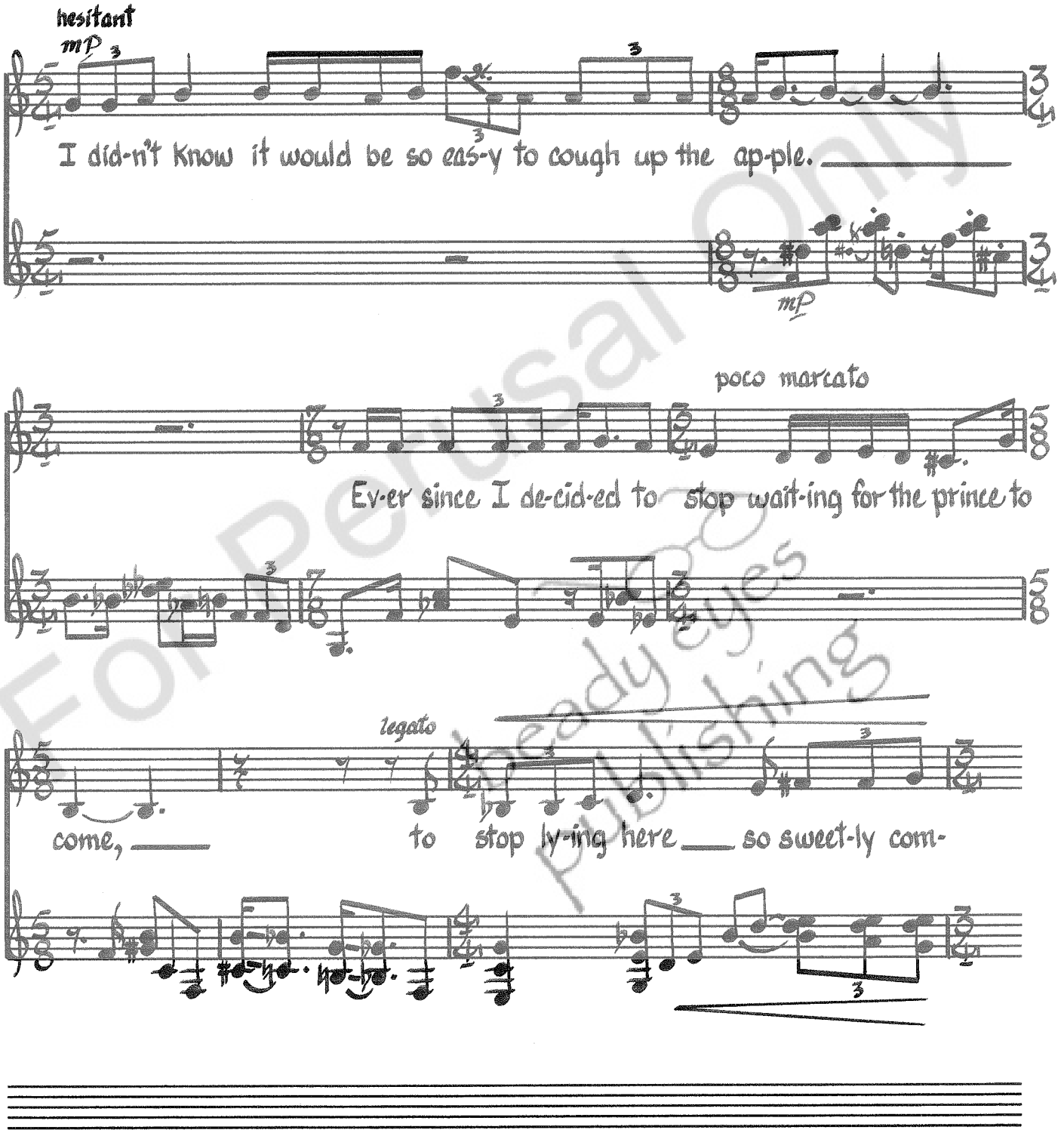
I Didn't Know



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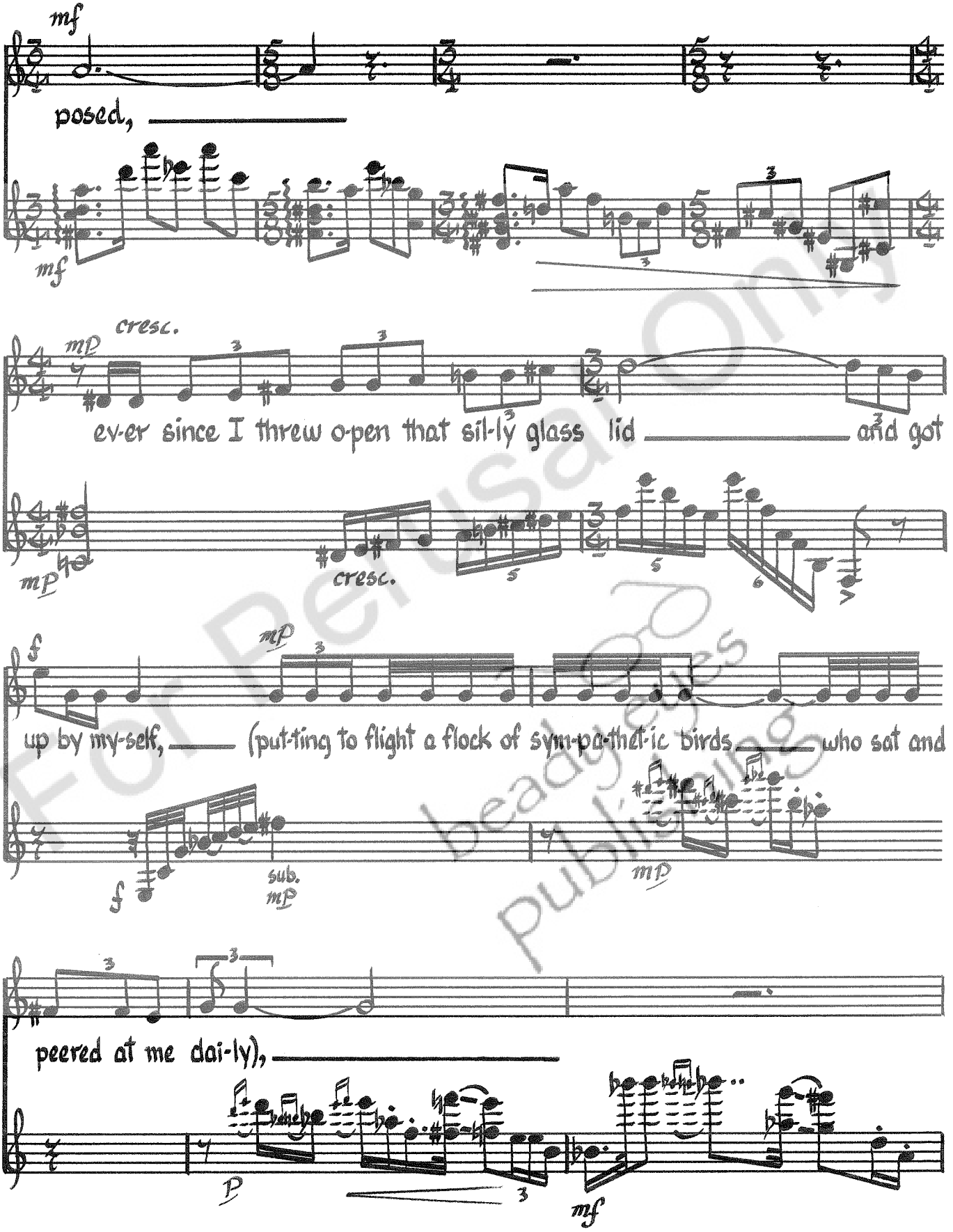

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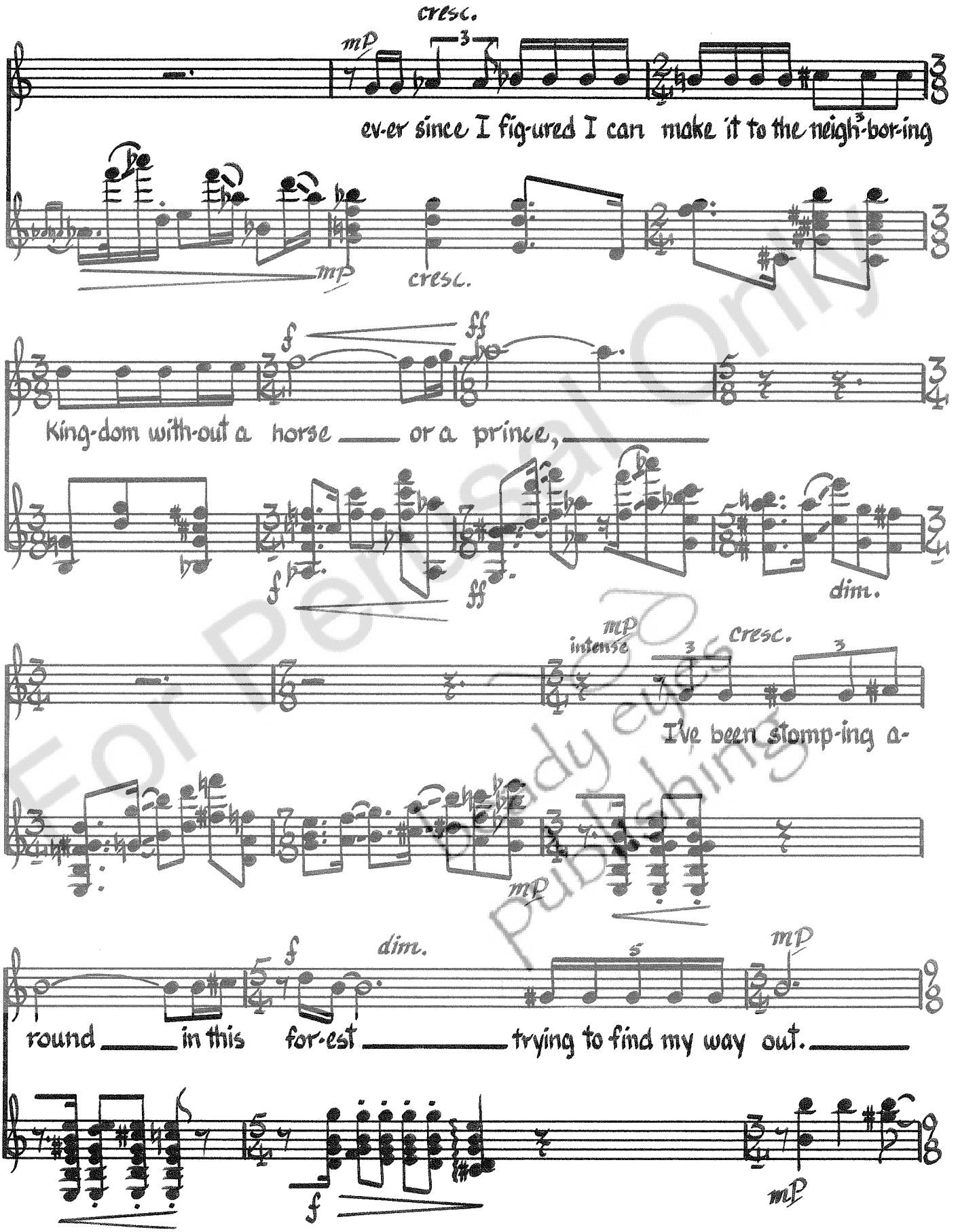

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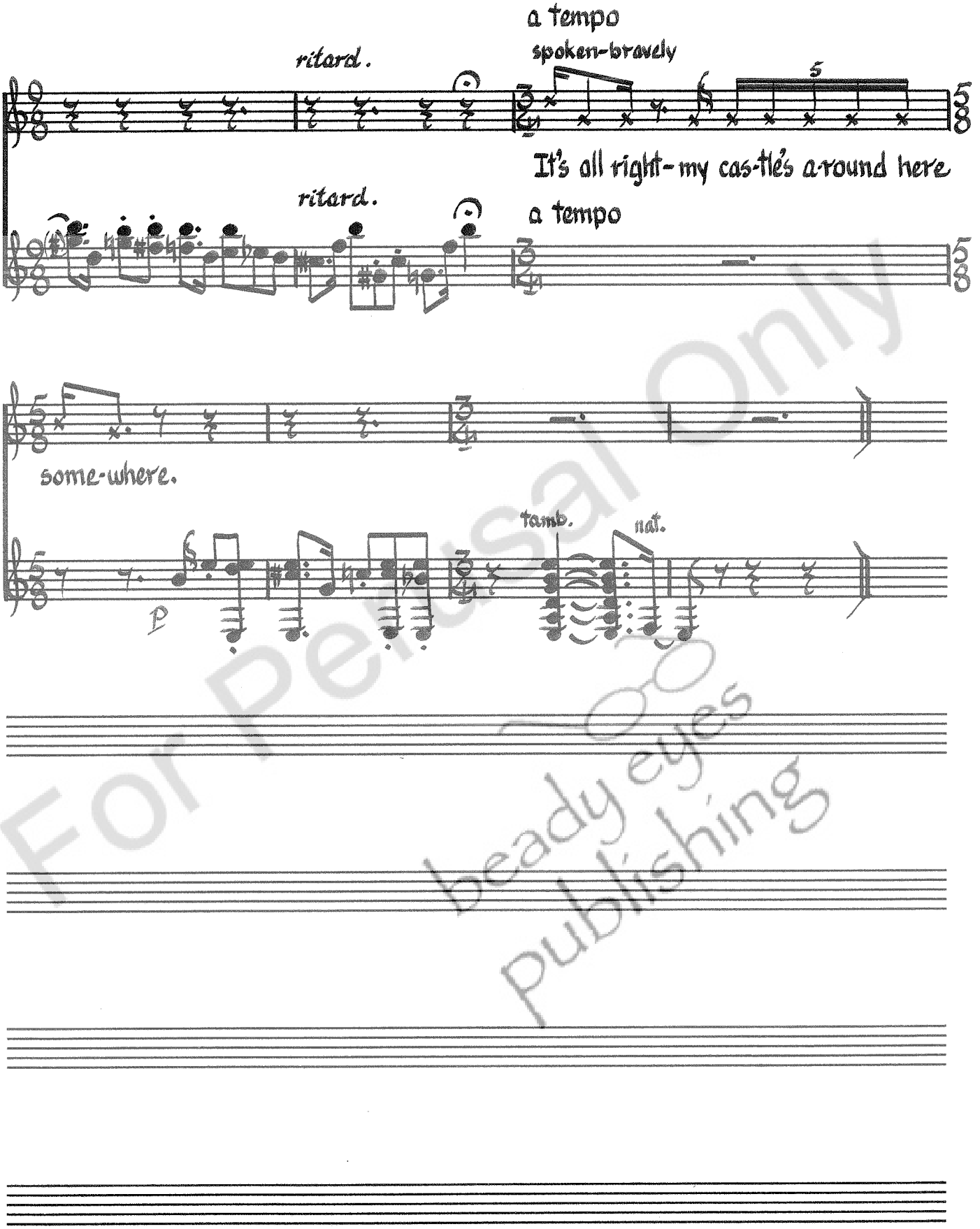

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