Who is that Stranger?

six songs of personal exile for high voice and piano

based on traditional anonymous oral poetry
of women from Yemen and the West Bank

translated from the Judeo-Arabic
by Mishael Maswari Caspi

Program note:

Who Is That Stranger?'s six songs are based on the traditional anonymous oral poetry of Jewish women from Yemen and the West Bank, translated from the Judeo-Arabic by Mishael Maswari Caspi. In each song, the singer yearns for home, for Paradise, for deliverance, for the end of her personal exile - an exile even within a community itself in exile. The imagery is that of the ancient, ageless desert diaspora. Thirst is the overarching metaphor for longing, and each song is an invocation of the outcast's craving for an almost imaginary home.

Although several of the songs call on Middle Eastern rhythmic modes, scales and gestures, one, "I am Thirsty," also appears to be a modern spiritual, invoking another exiled people's *cri du coeur*.

Performance notes:

1. **Is to be sung as a lovesong**

2. **The narrator tells a story interspreced with personal laments and piano triplets have two roles as the stageset: the LH triplets are like a heart ominously pounding or hooves in the distance, fate. The RH high triplets are like the ululation of women in the middle east.**

3. **Like many women's lives, the official plea is interrupted by personal desperation: the melismatic lines about the mother and sister suggest wailing**

4. **Stark and empty as truth. The piano is like those little dots of object in the distant desert, faraway and meaningless visual punctuation of the vast emptiness. Deep disappontment,**

5. **Sung like a spiritual**

6. **Consider the piano to represent the bejeweled facets of Yemenite wedding headdress**

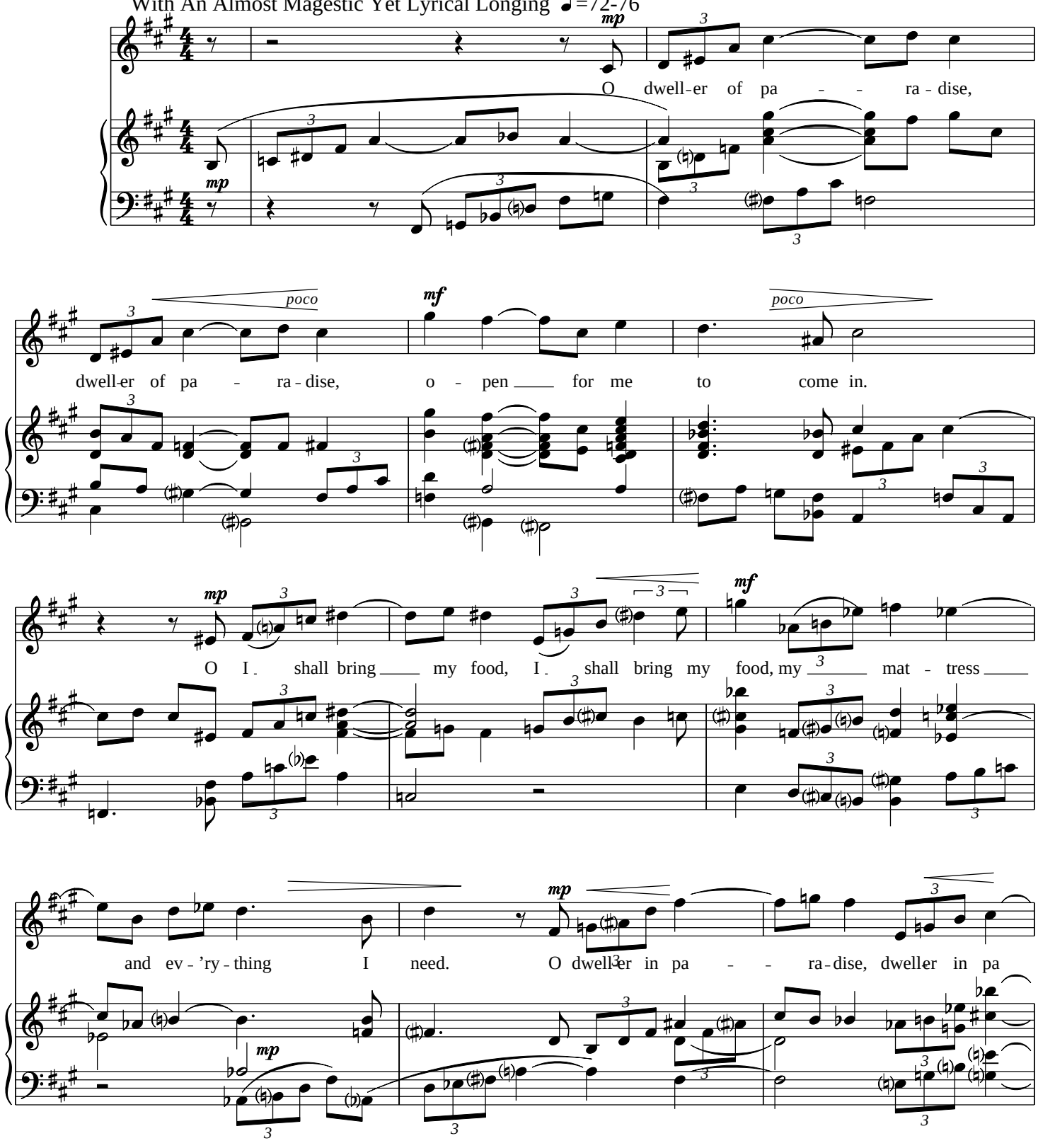
7. **See the singer as a glorious, transcendent bride**

8. **Let the audience decide whether the jewels are fake.**

Who Is That Stranger?

I
O Dweller of Paradise

With An Almost Magestic Yet Lyrical Longing ♩=72-76



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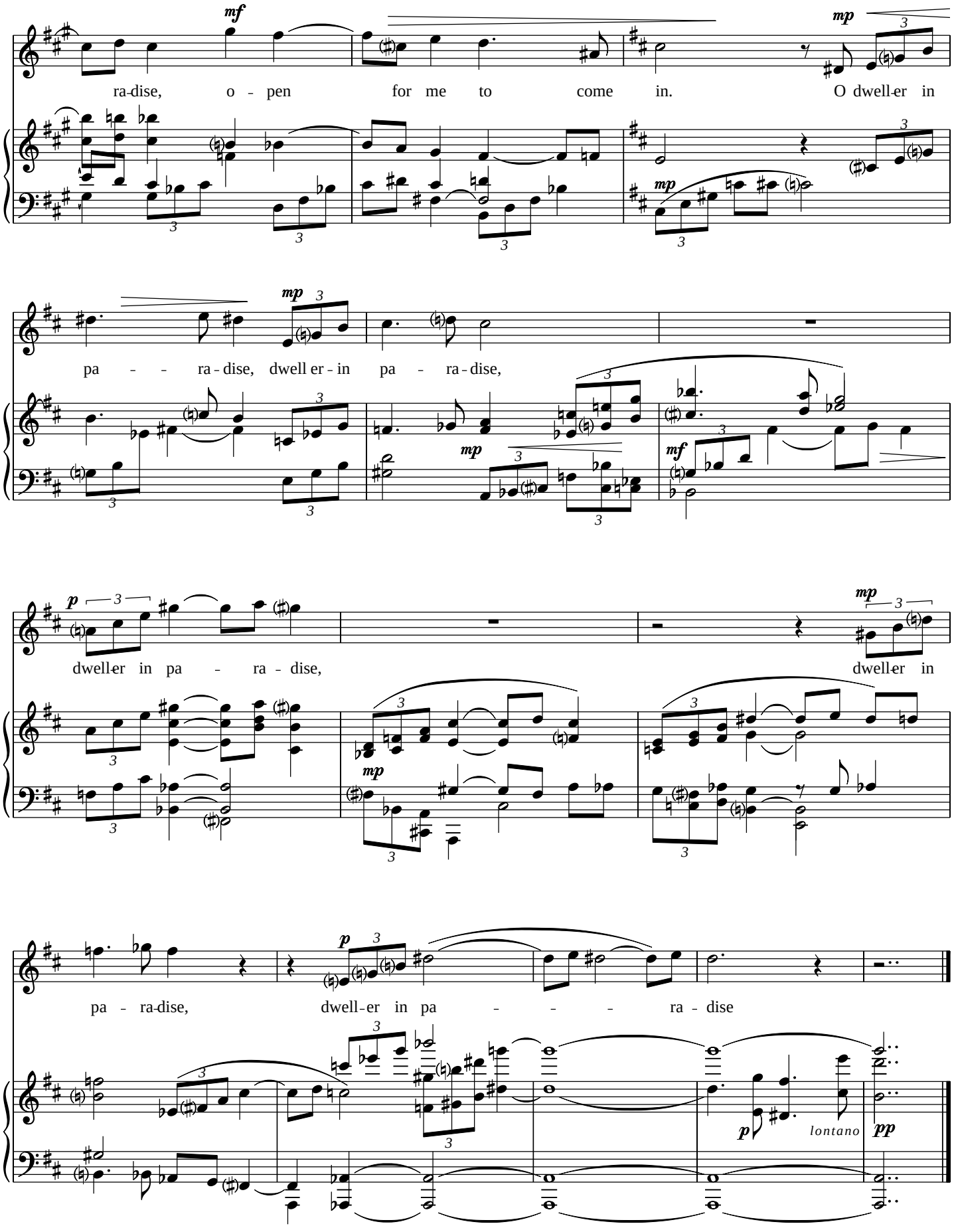
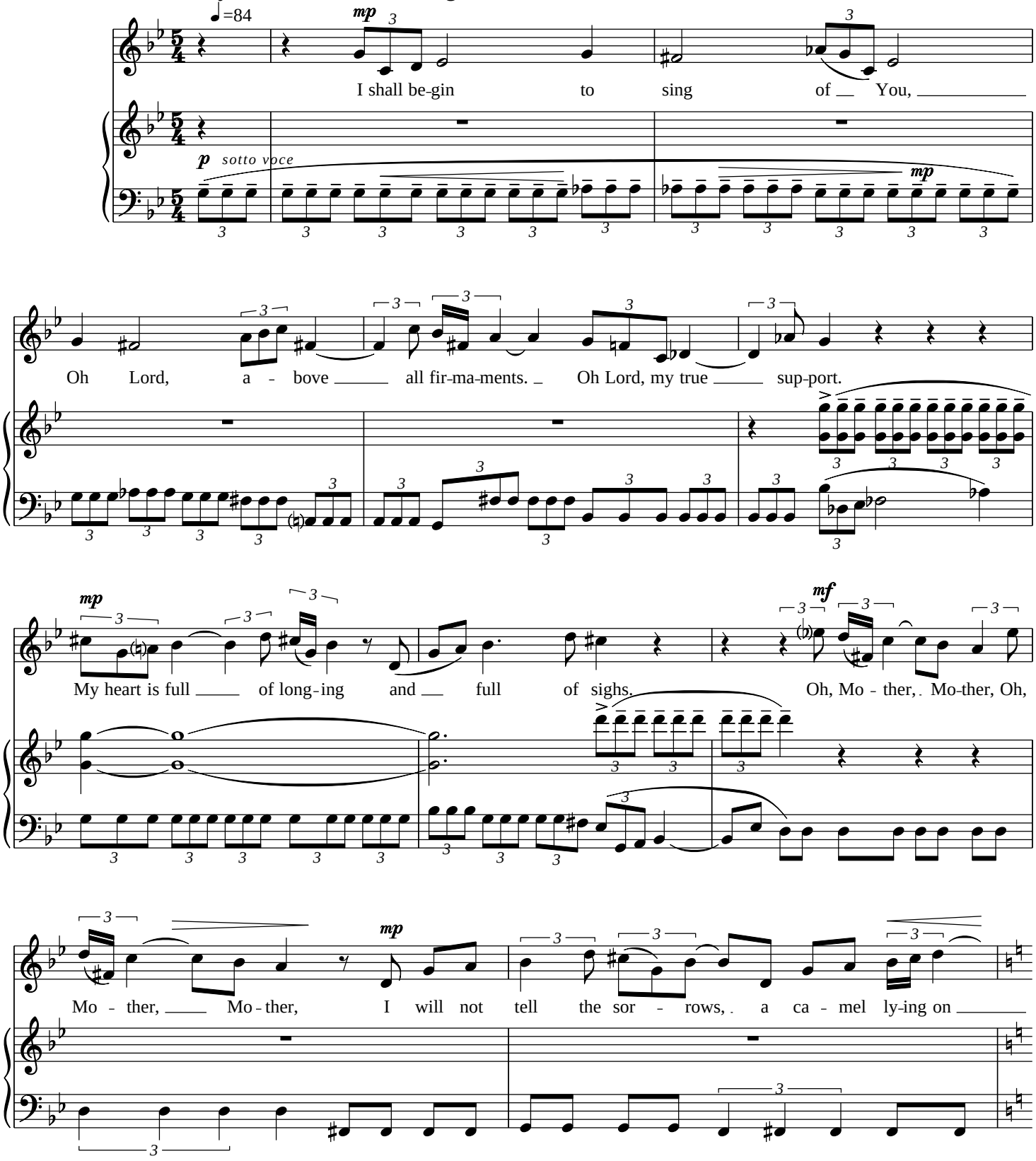
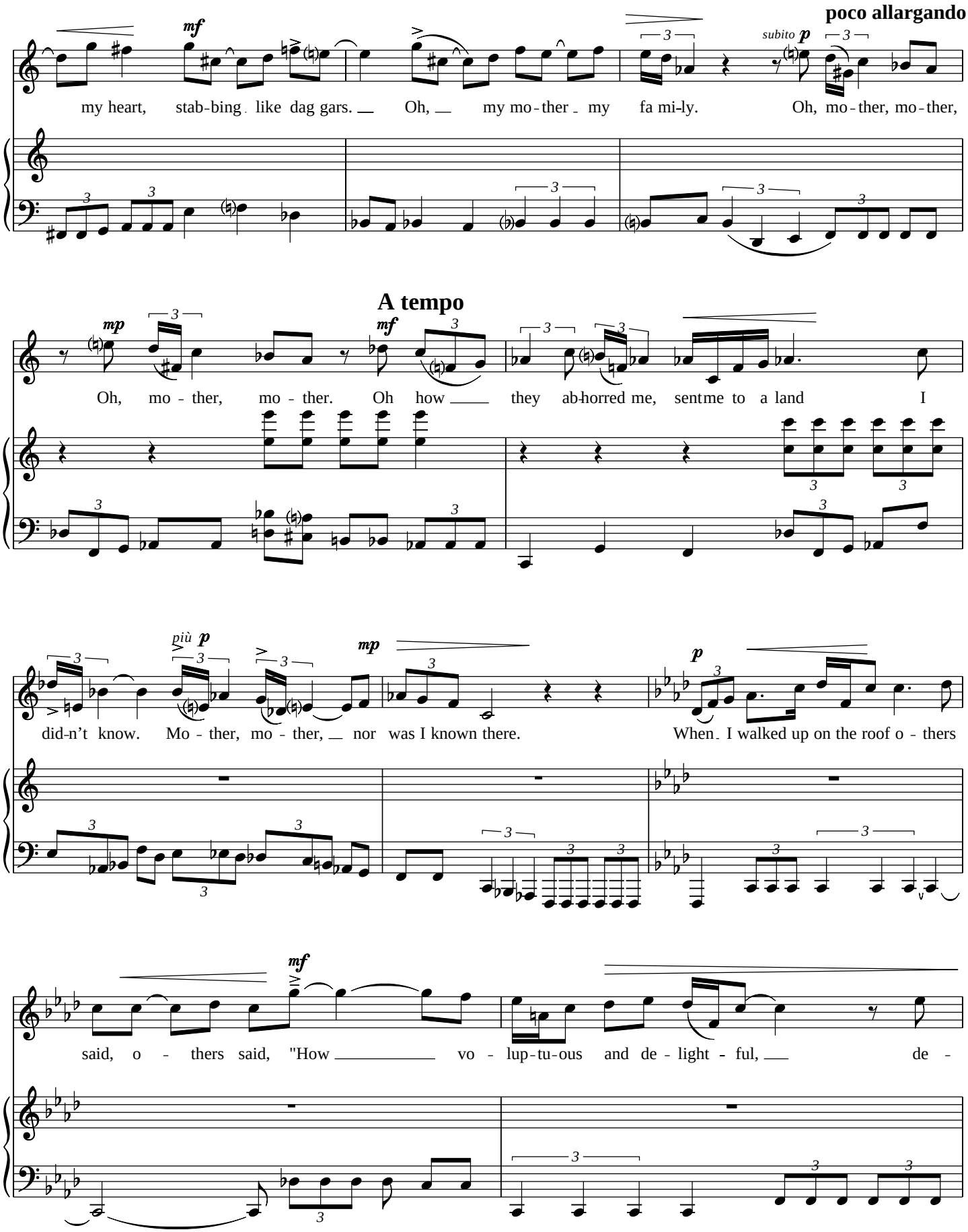
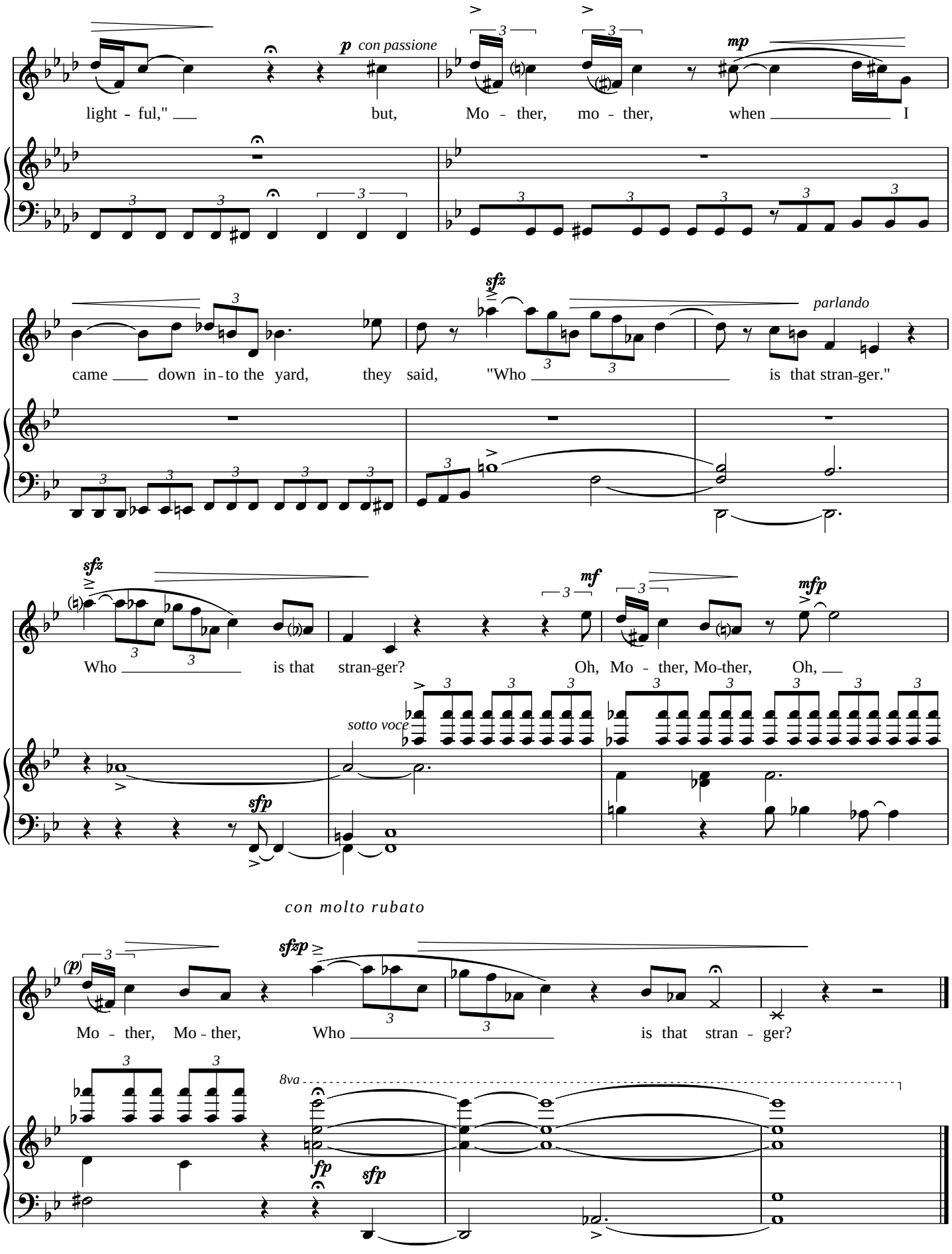

mf
ra-dise, o - pen for me to come in.
mp
O dwell-er in
mp
pa - - ra - dise, dwell er - in pa - ra - dise,
mp
mf
p
dwell-er in pa - ra - dise,
mp
dwell-er in
p
pa - ra-dise, dwell-er in pa - - - ra - dise
p
lontano
pp

II
I Shall Begin to Sing

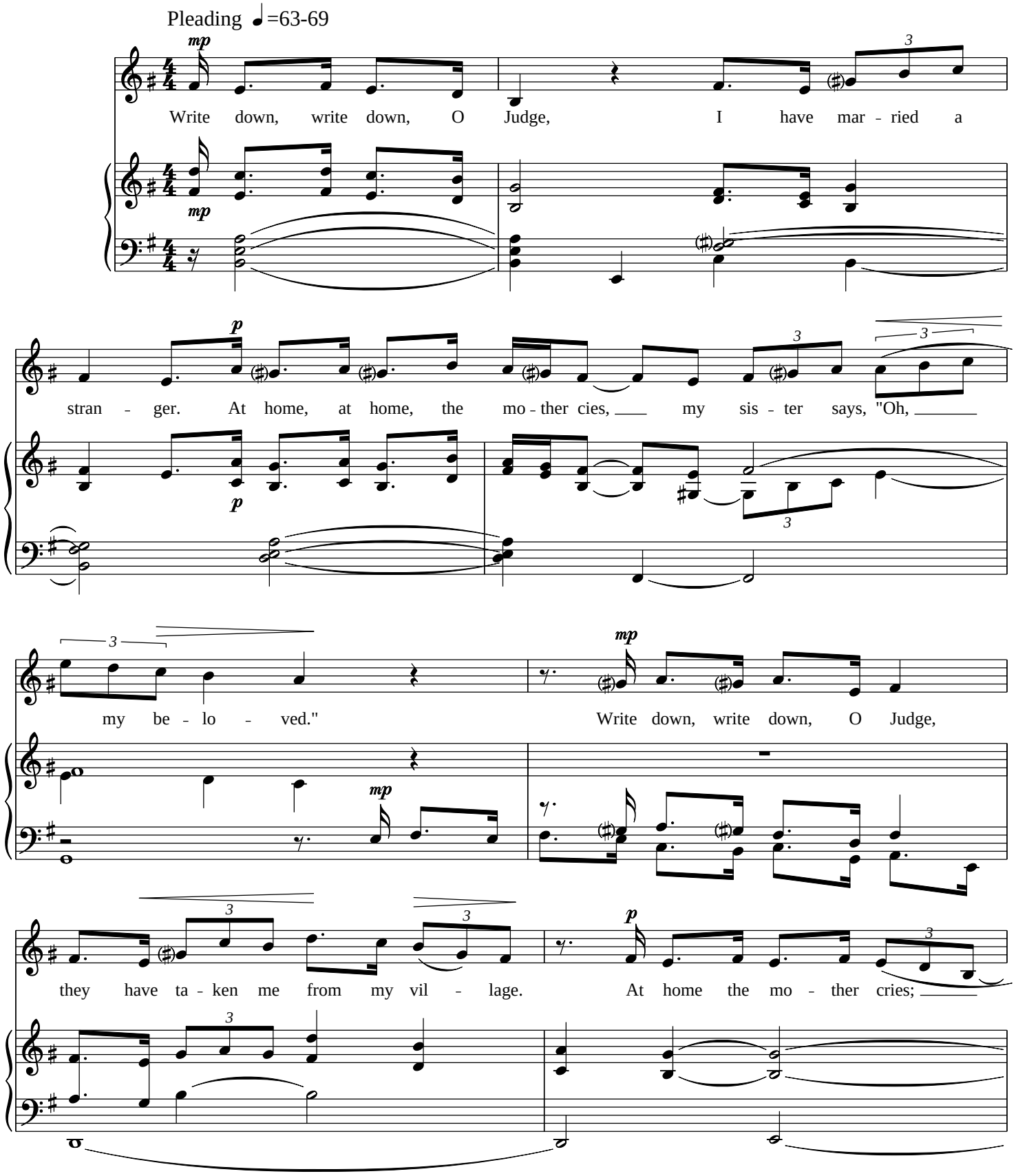
Subtly ominous and menacing

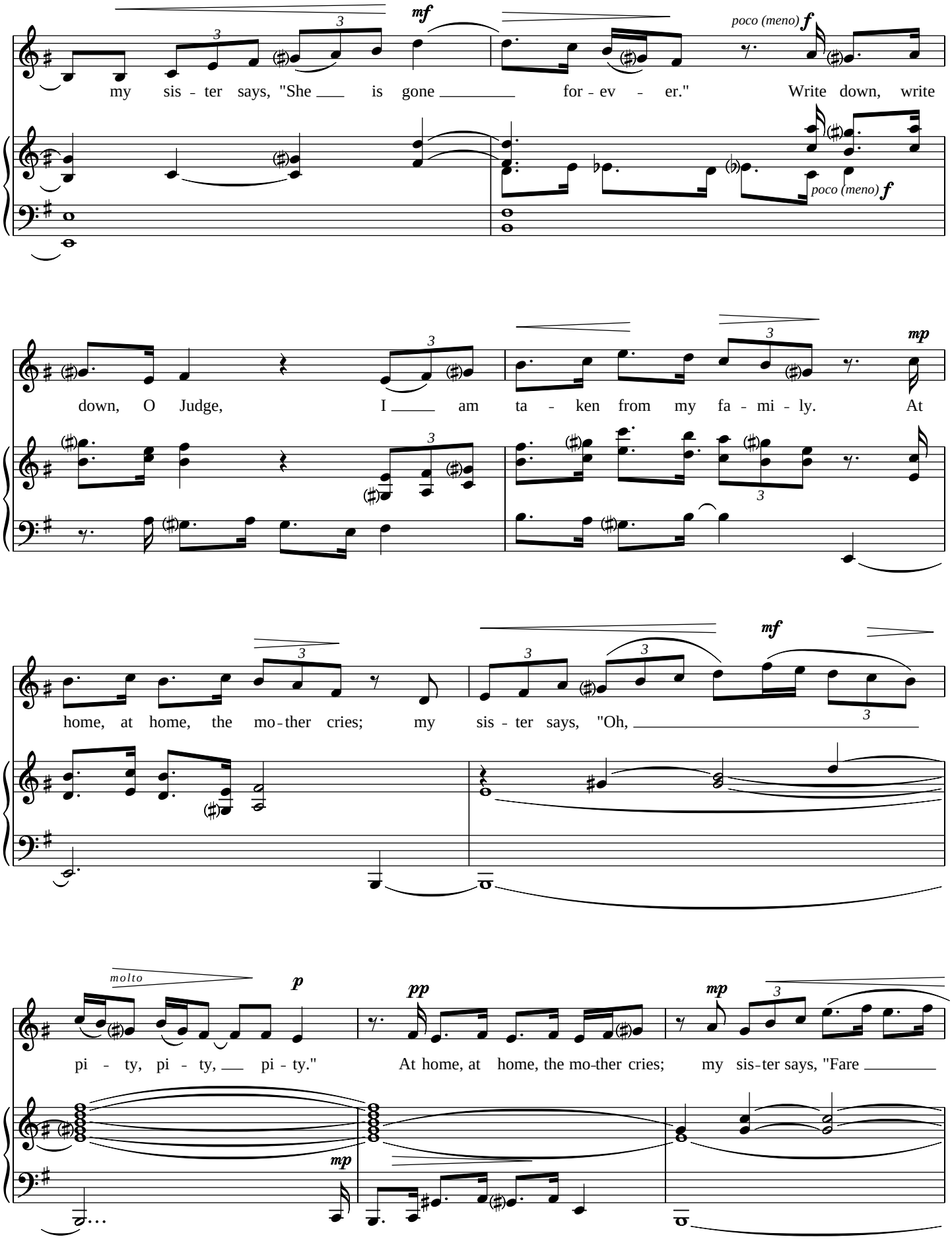


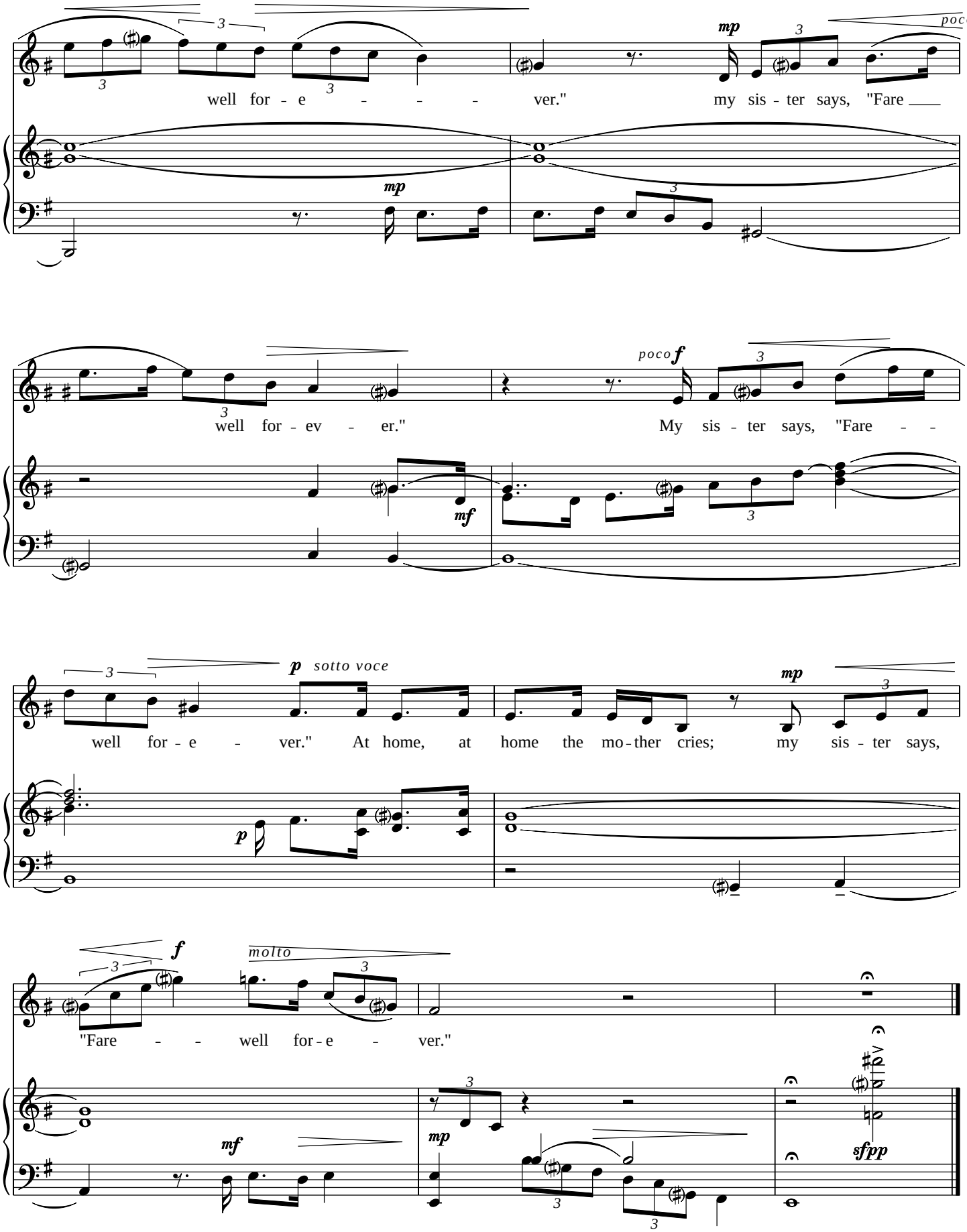

poco allargando
mf
subito p
my heart, stab-bing like dag gars. Oh, my mo-ther my fa mi-ly. Oh, mo-ther, mo-ther,
A tempo
mp
mf
Oh, mo - ther, mo - ther. Oh how they ab-horred me, sentme to a land I
più p
mp
p
did-n't know. Mo - ther, mo - ther, nor was I known there. When I walked up on the roof o - thers
mf
said, o - thers said, "How vo - lup-tu-ous and de - light - ful, de -


p con passione
mp
light - ful," but, Mo - ther, mo - ther, when I
sfz
parlando
came down in-to the yard, they said, "Who is that stran-ger."
sfz
mf
mfp
Who is that stran-ger? Oh, Mo - ther, Mo-ther, Oh,
sotto voce
sfp
con molto rubato
(p)
sfzp
Mo - ther, Mo - ther, Who is that stran - ger?
8va
fp
sfp

III
Write Down, Write Down, O Judge

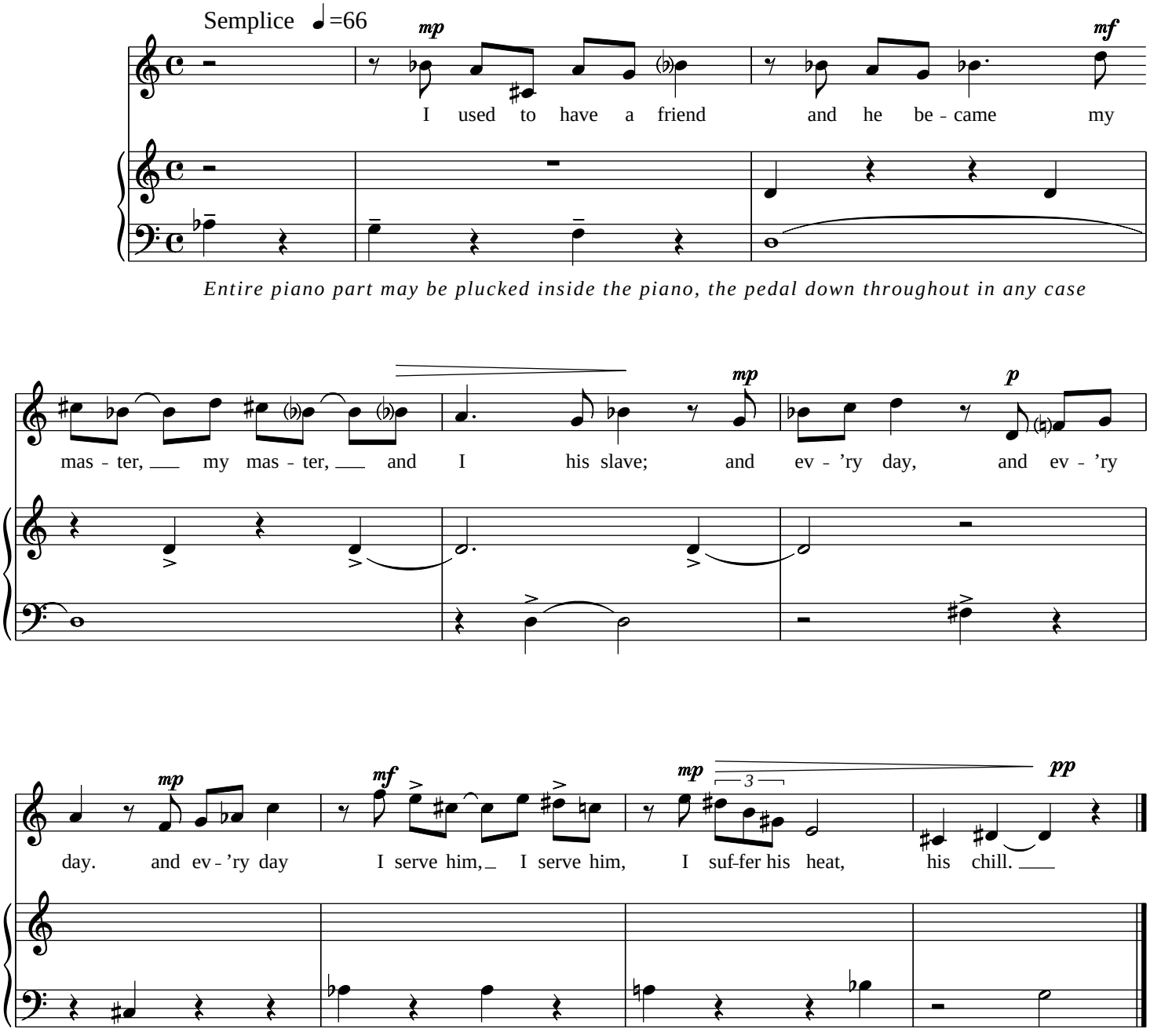



mf
my sis - ter says, "She is gone for - ev - er." Write down, write
poco (meno) f
poco (meno) f
down, O Judge, I am ta - ken from my fa - mi - ly. At
mp
home, at home, the mo-ther cries; my sis - ter says, "Oh,
mf
molto
p
pi - ty, pi - ty, pi - ty."
pp
At home, at home, the mo-ther cries; my sis-ter says, "Fare
mp
mp

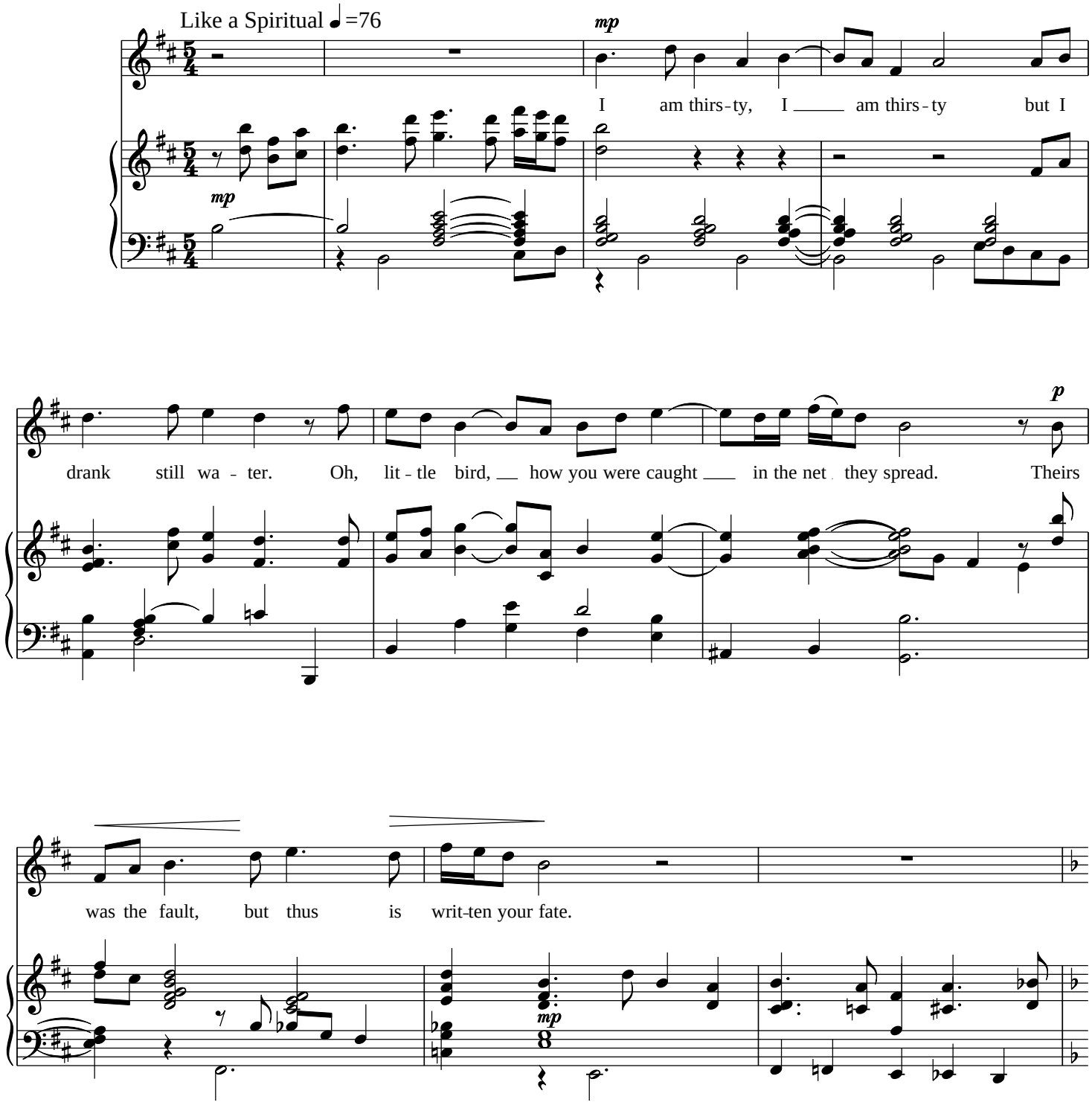

well for - e - - - ver." my sis - ter says, "Fare ___
mp
poco
well for - ev - er." My sis - ter says, "Fare - -
poco f
mf
well for - e - ver." At home, at home the mo - ther cries; my sis - ter says,
p sotto voce
mp
"Fare - - well for - e - ver."
f
molto
mf
mp
sfpp

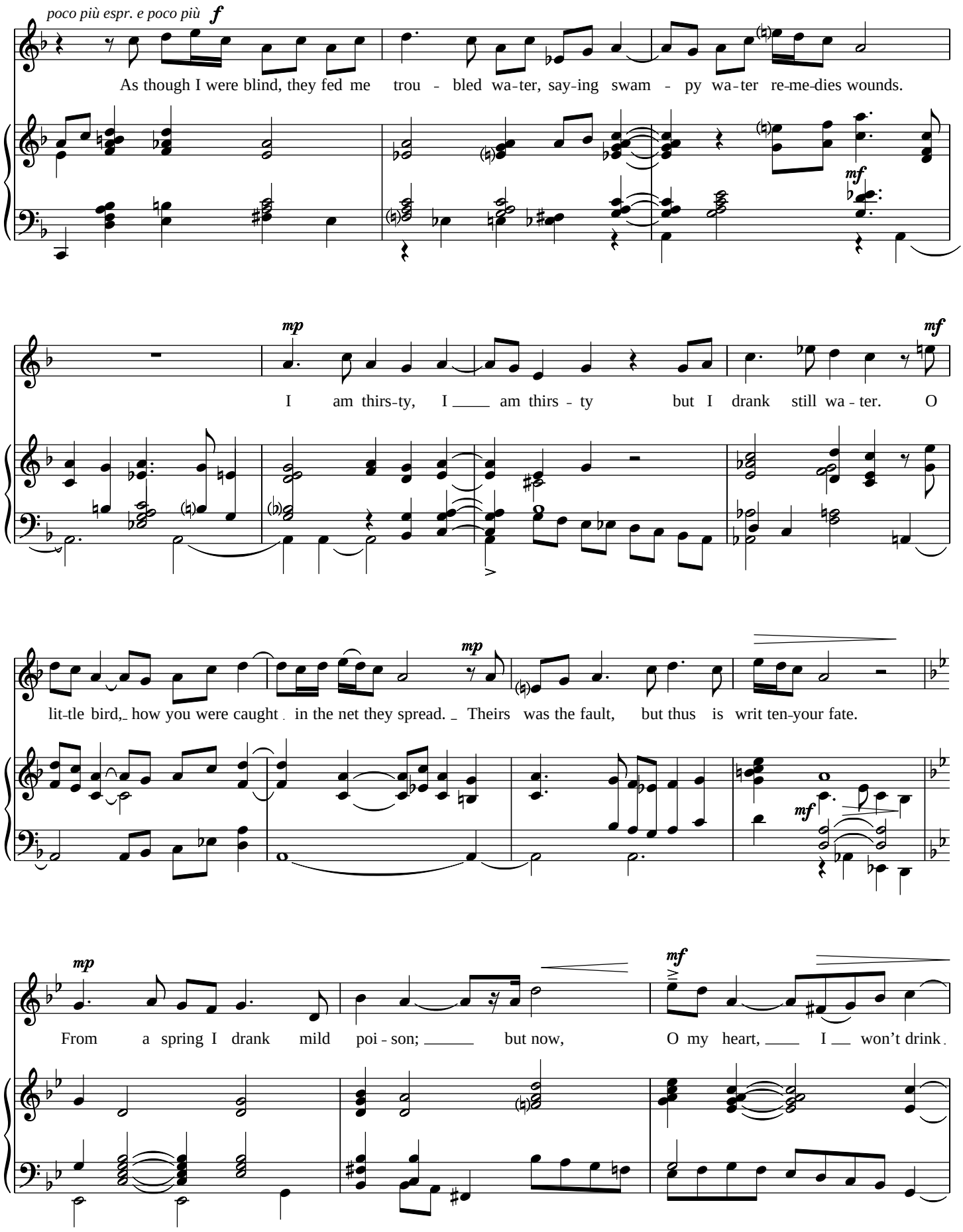
IV

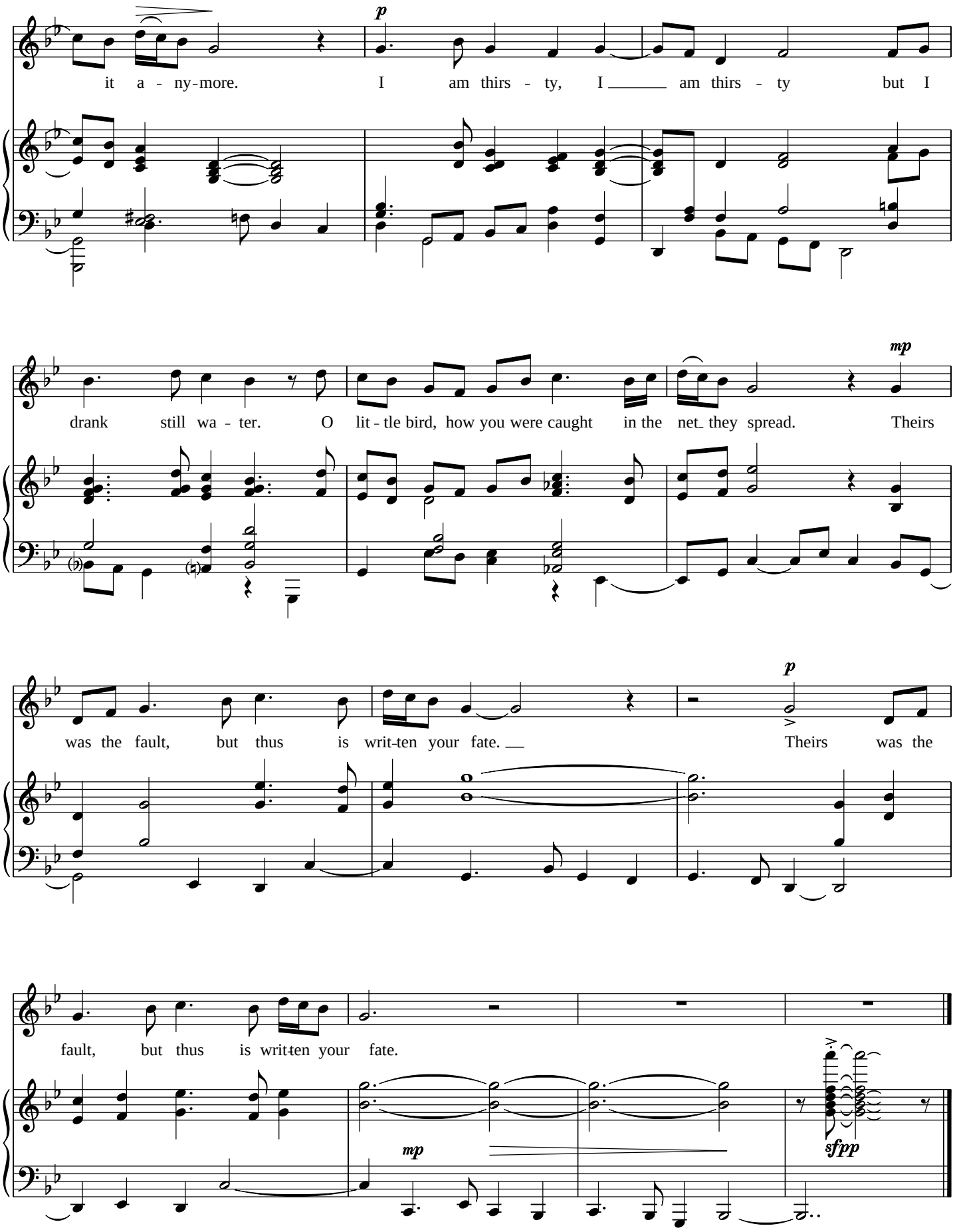
I Used to Have a Friend



V
I am Thirsty

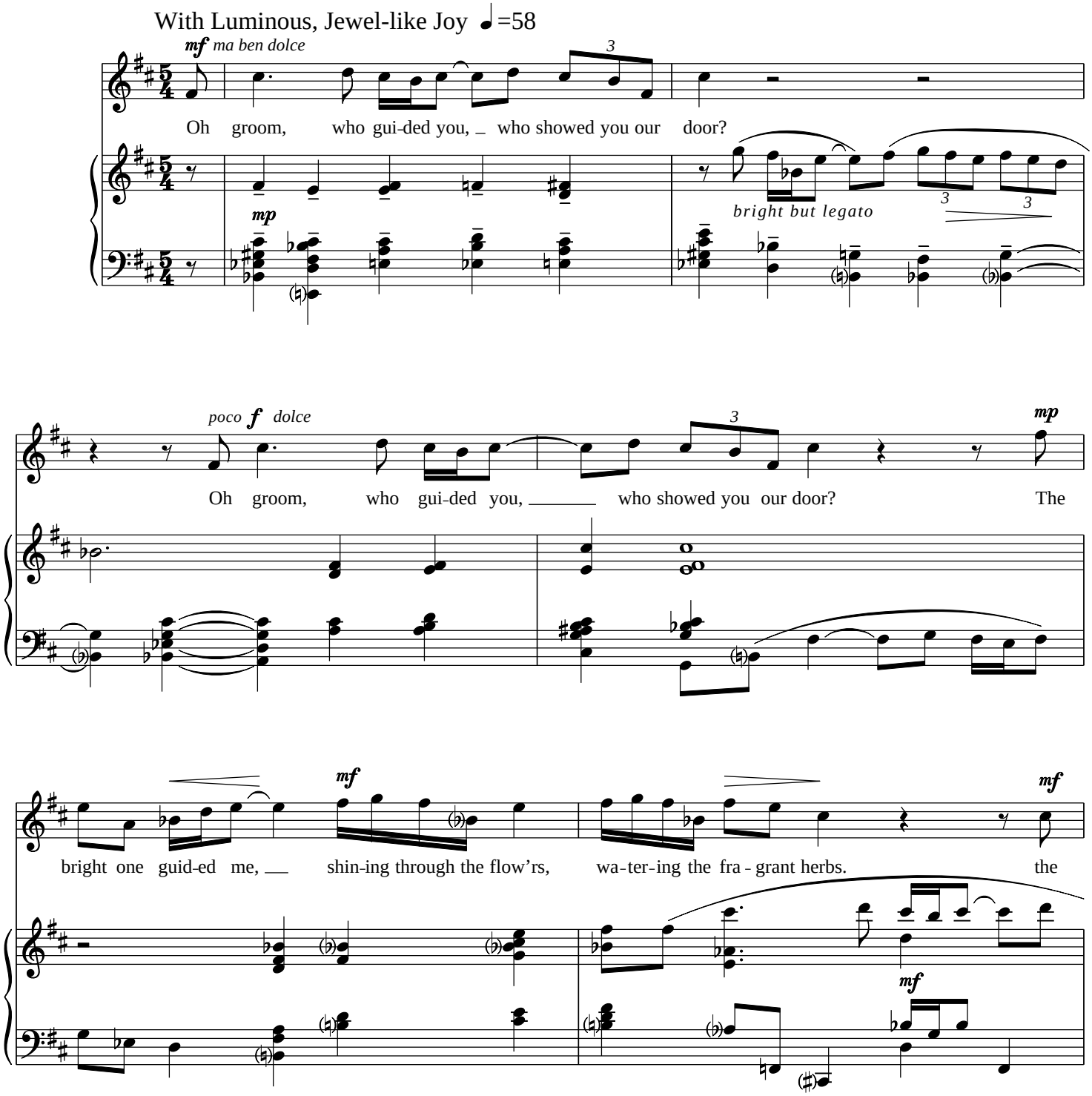


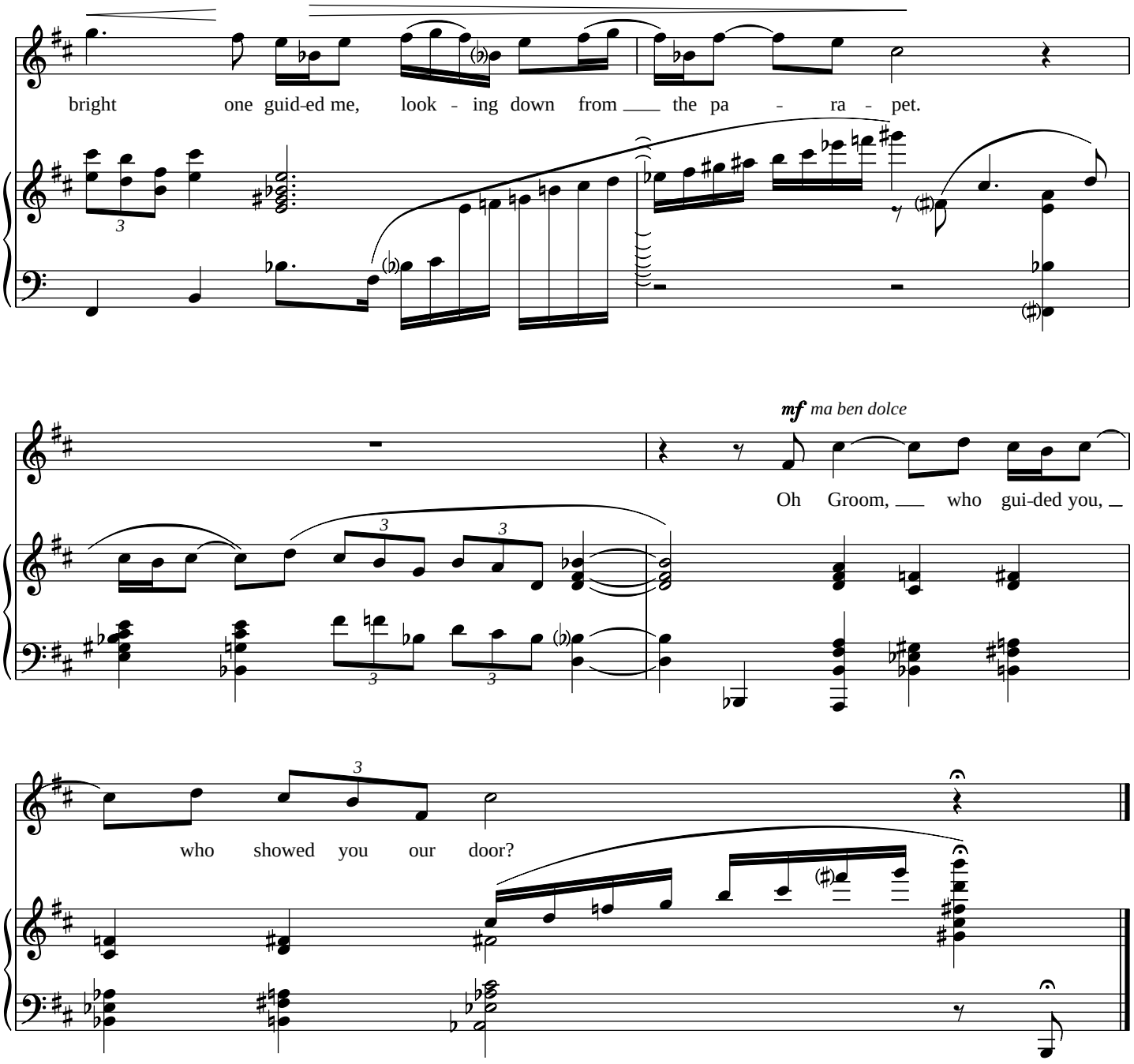

poco più espr. e poco più
f
As though I were blind, they fed me trou - bled wa-ter, say-ing swam - py wa-ter re-me-dies wounds.
mf
mp
I am thirs-ty, I ____ am thirs - ty but I drank still wa - ter. O
mf
mp
lit-tle bird, how you were caught in the net they spread. Theirs was the fault, but thus is writ ten-your fate.
mf
mp
From a spring I drank mild poi - son; ____ but now,
mf
O my heart, ____ I won't drink.


p
it a - ny-more. I am thirs - ty, I am thirs - ty but I
mp
drank still wa - ter. O lit - tle bird, how you were caught in the net they spread. Theirs
p
was the fault, but thus is writ-ten your fate. Theirs was the
fault, but thus is writ-ten your fate.
mp
sfpp

VI

Oh Groom, Who Guided You




bright one guid-ed me, look - ing down from the pa - ra - pet.
mf ma ben dolce
Oh Groom, who gui-ded you,
who showed you our door?