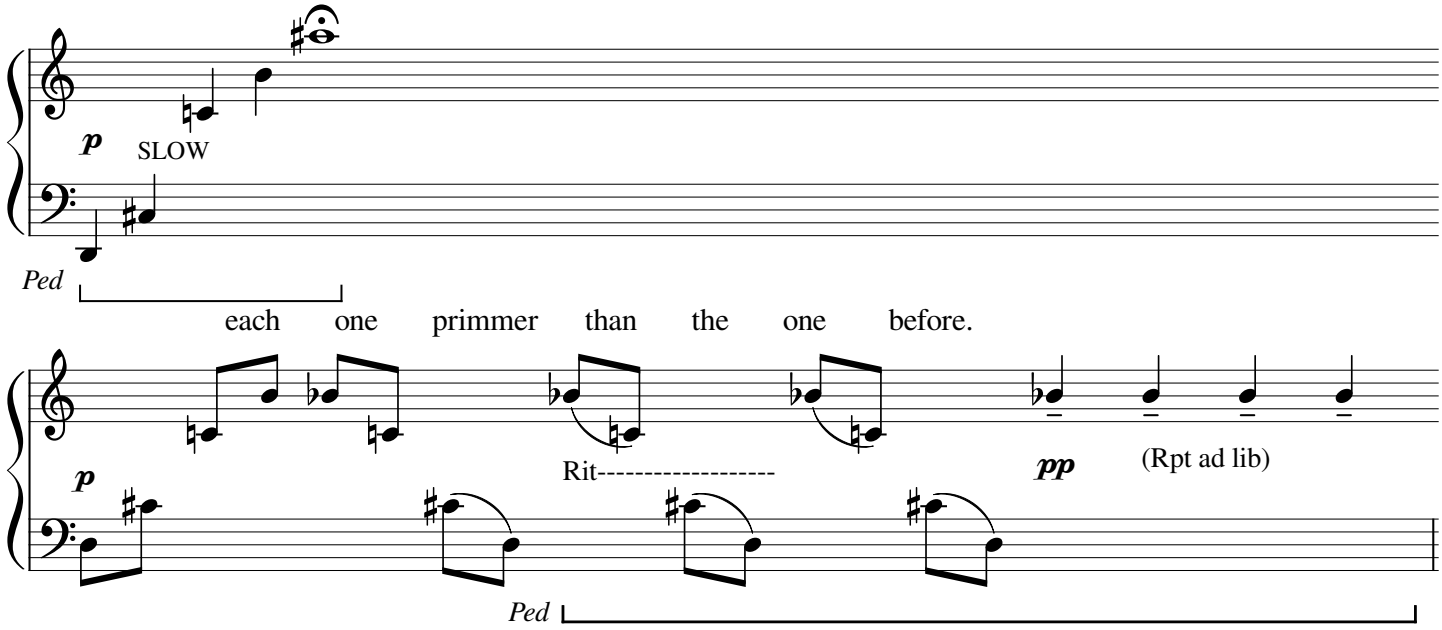
Jim Neat - Five Poems

Mary Oliver

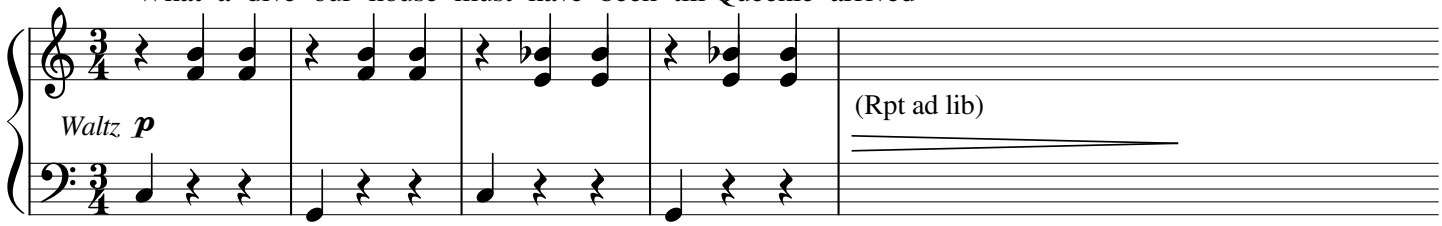
Music by Judith Bailey

Queenie and I Strike a Deal, London 1904

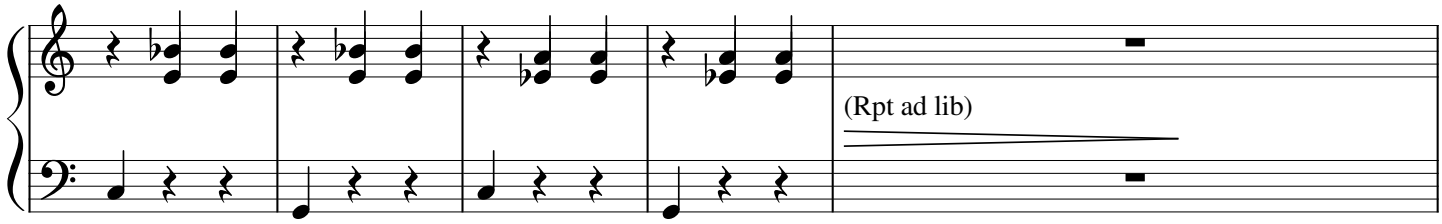
First there was Fred the Recluse then Victor, who died, followed by five prim girls,



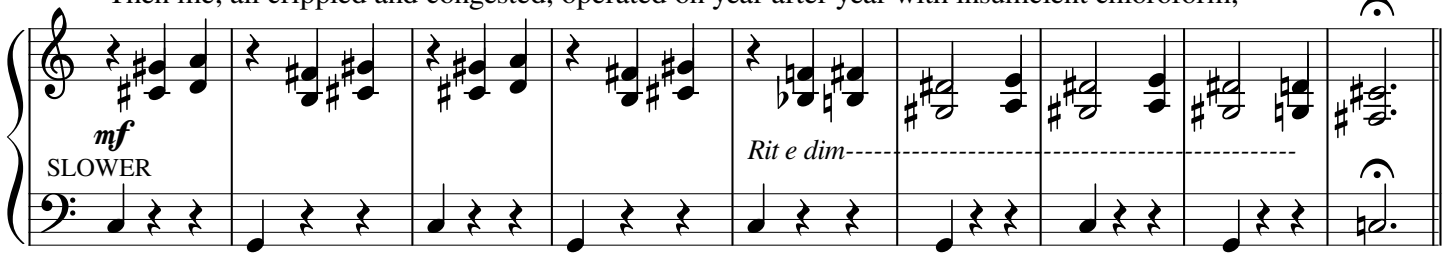
What a dive our house must have been till Queenie arrived



pretty as a picture and belle of the ball.



Then me, all crippled and congested, operated on year after year with insufficient chloroform,



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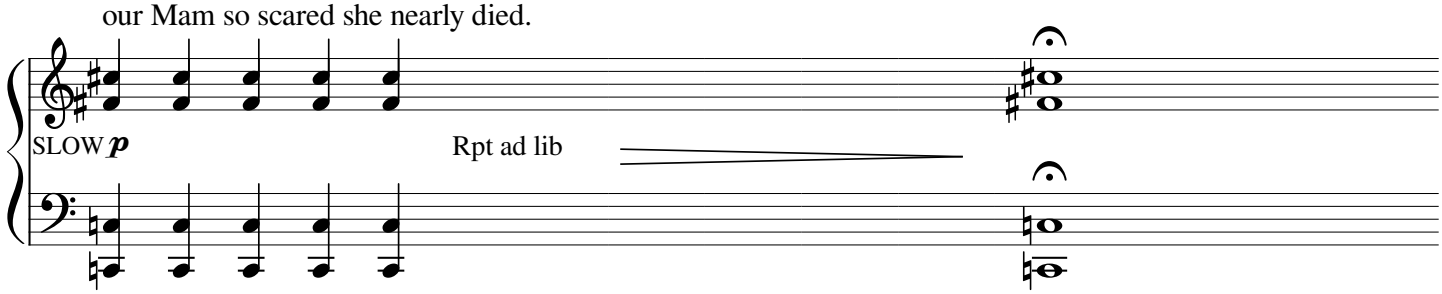
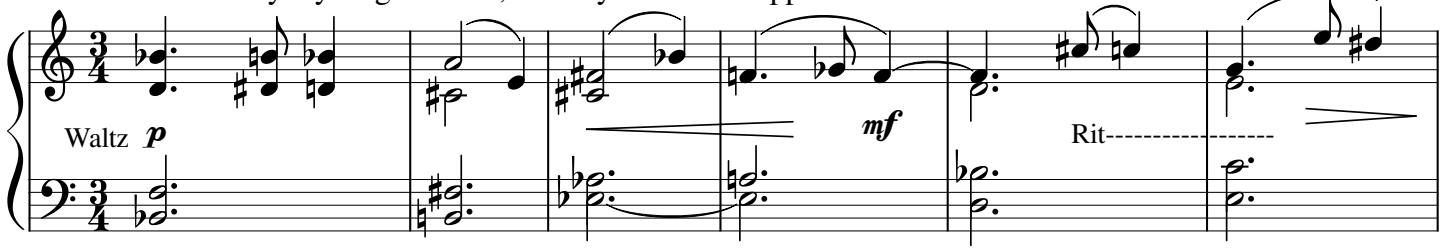
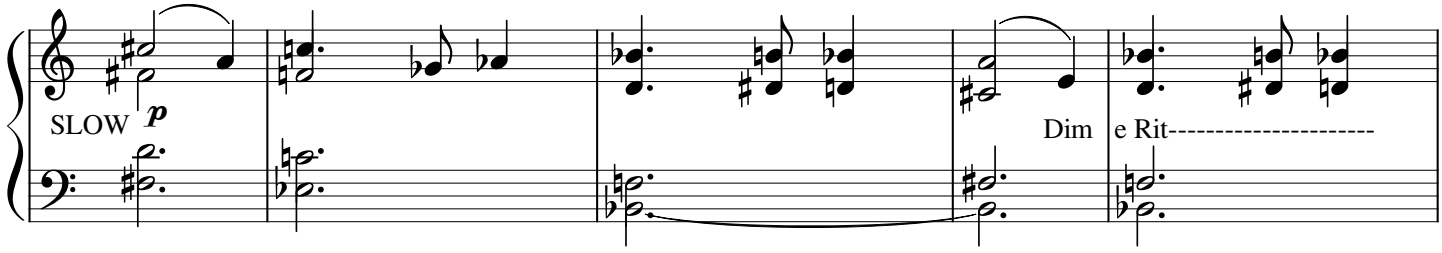
our Mam so scared she nearly died.

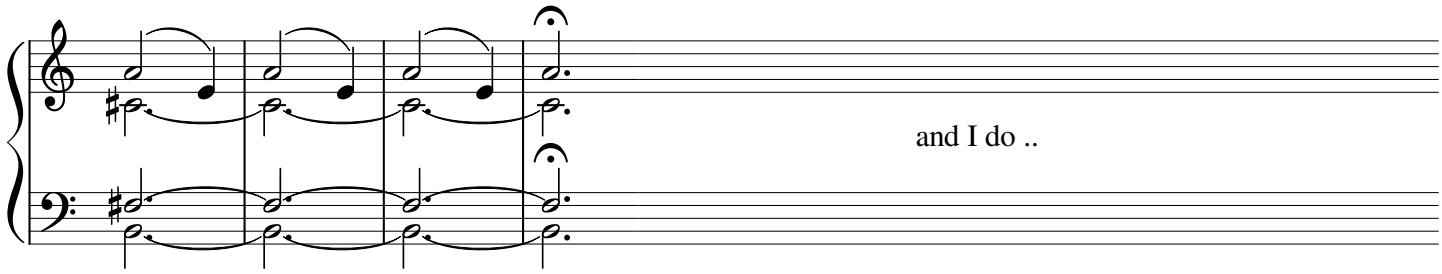


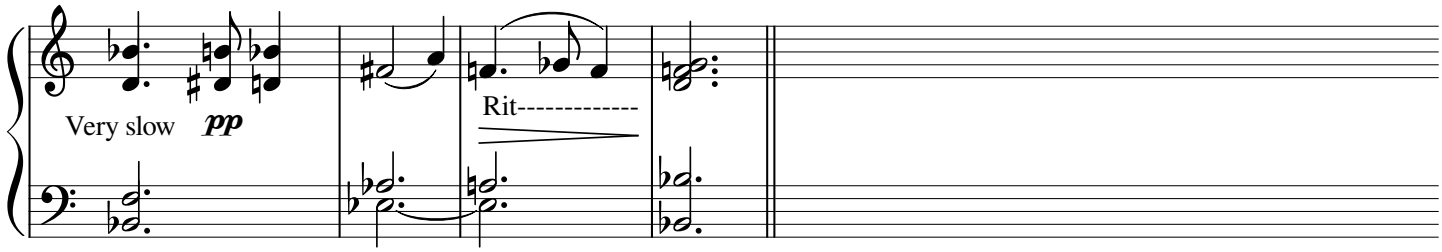
Queenie it was who cared for me most, promised to fight the bullies
amused by my surgical boot, who lay in wait to topple me -



"so long" she said, "as you promise to keep my secrets every one - "







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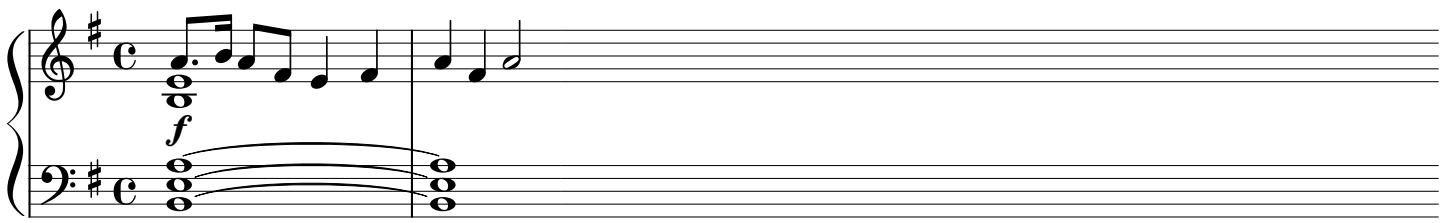
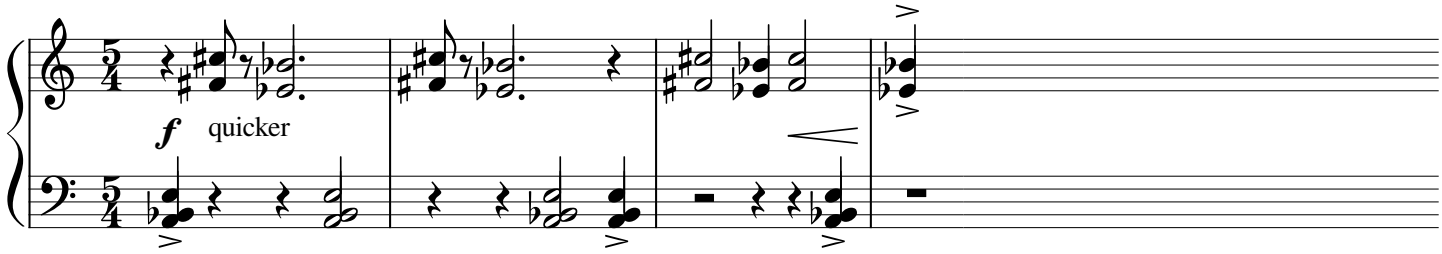
Play to Win, London 1916

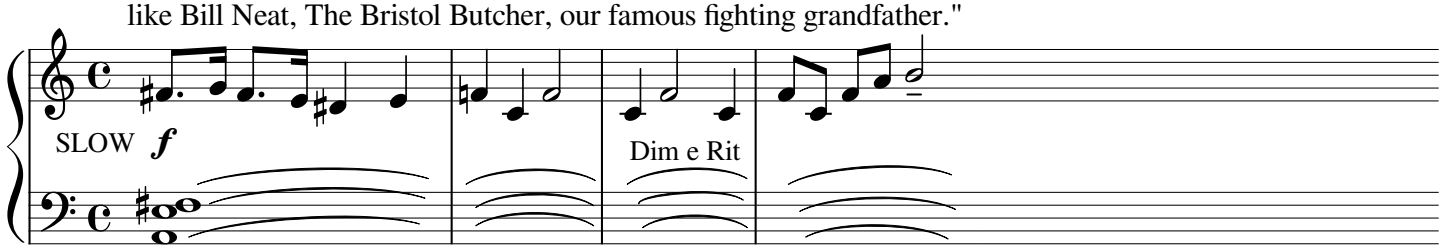
INTRO. ♩ = 60



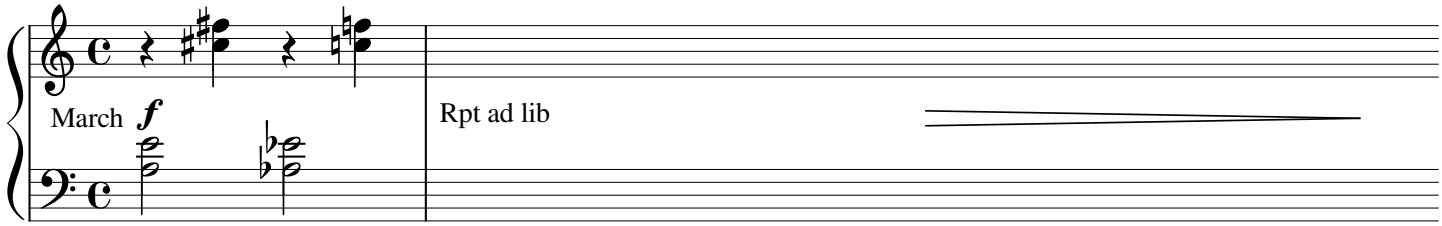
Fred refused to come down from the attic. "Stay up here little brother,
with me," he'd say, "Learn the savage art of bare-knuckle boxing



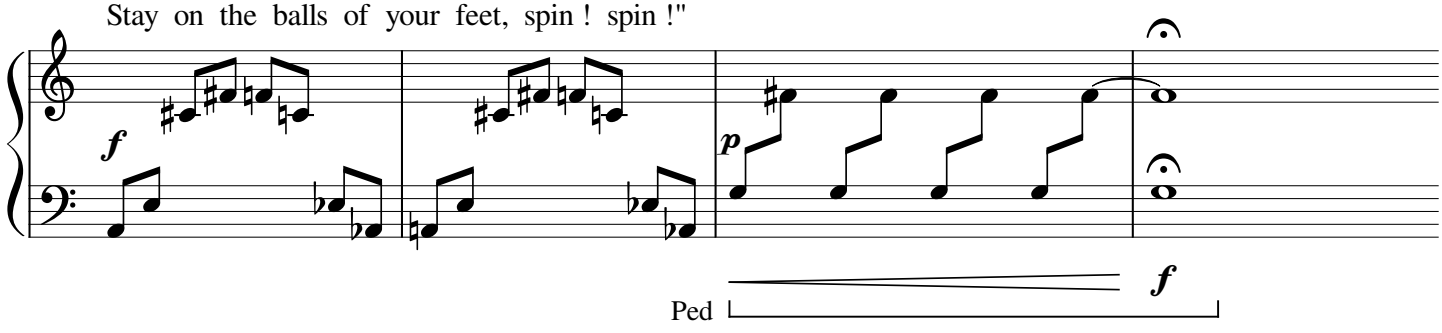
like Bill Neat, The Bristol Butcher, our famous fighting grandfather."



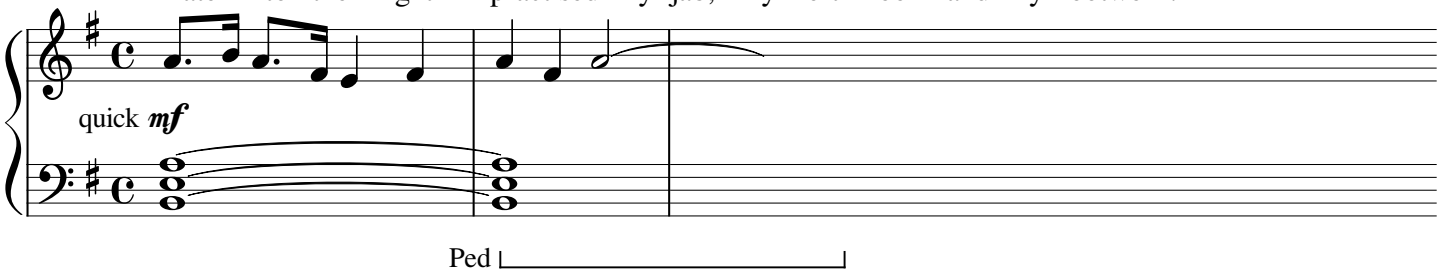
He'd dust me up: "Come on Jim, defend yourself, Your Country needs you!



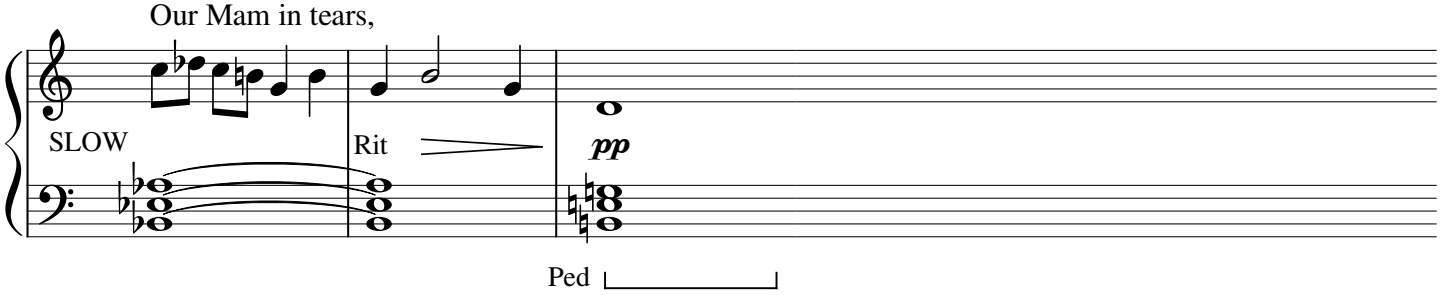
Stay on the balls of your feet, spin ! spin !"



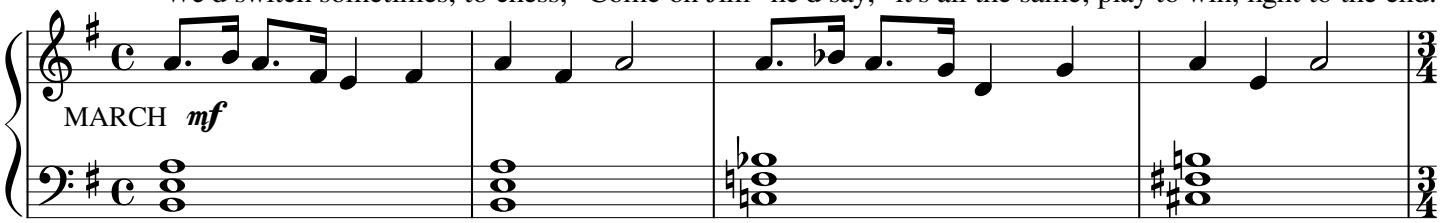
Late into the night I practised my jab, my left hook and my footwork.

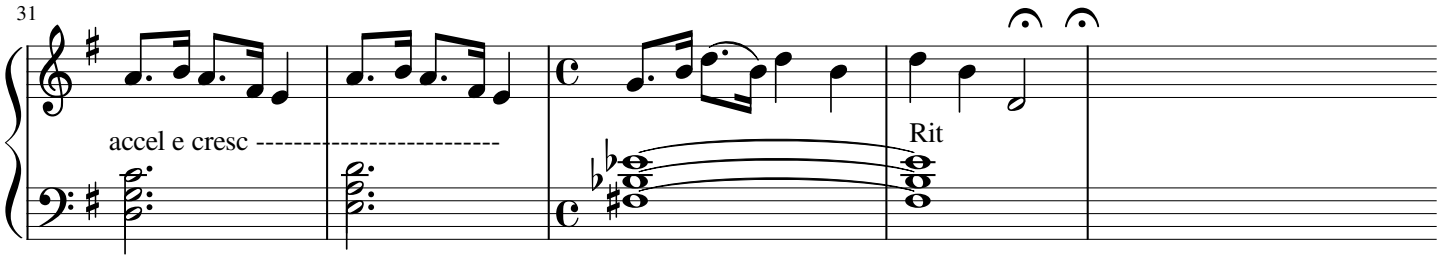


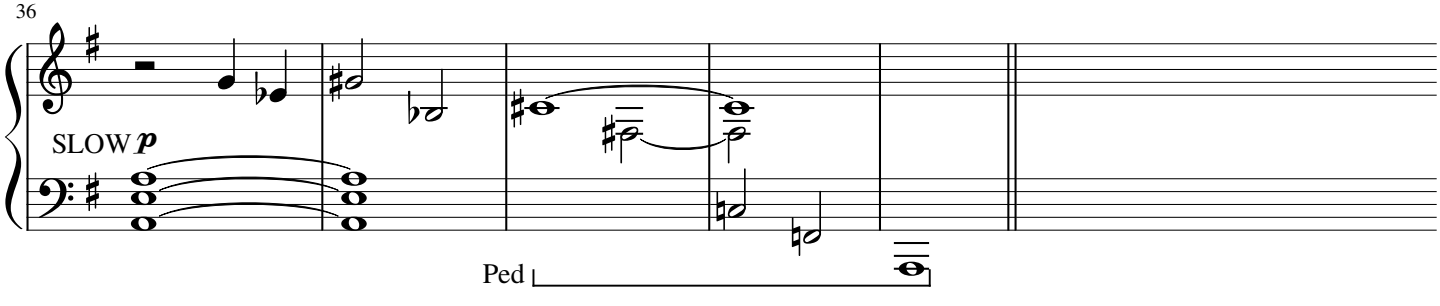
Our Mam in tears,



We'd switch sometimes, to chess, "Come on Jim" he'd say, "it's all the same, play to win, fight to the end."







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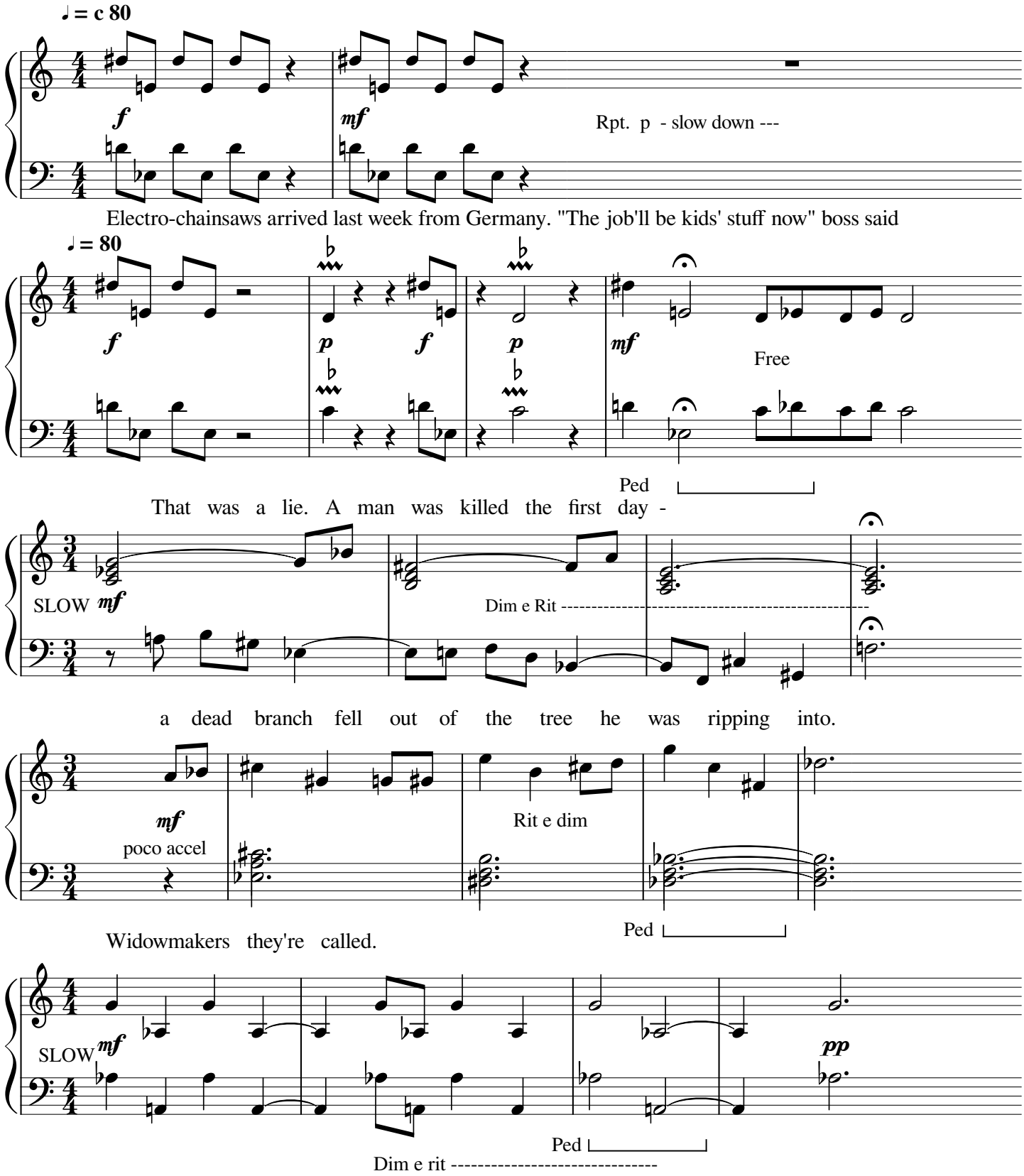
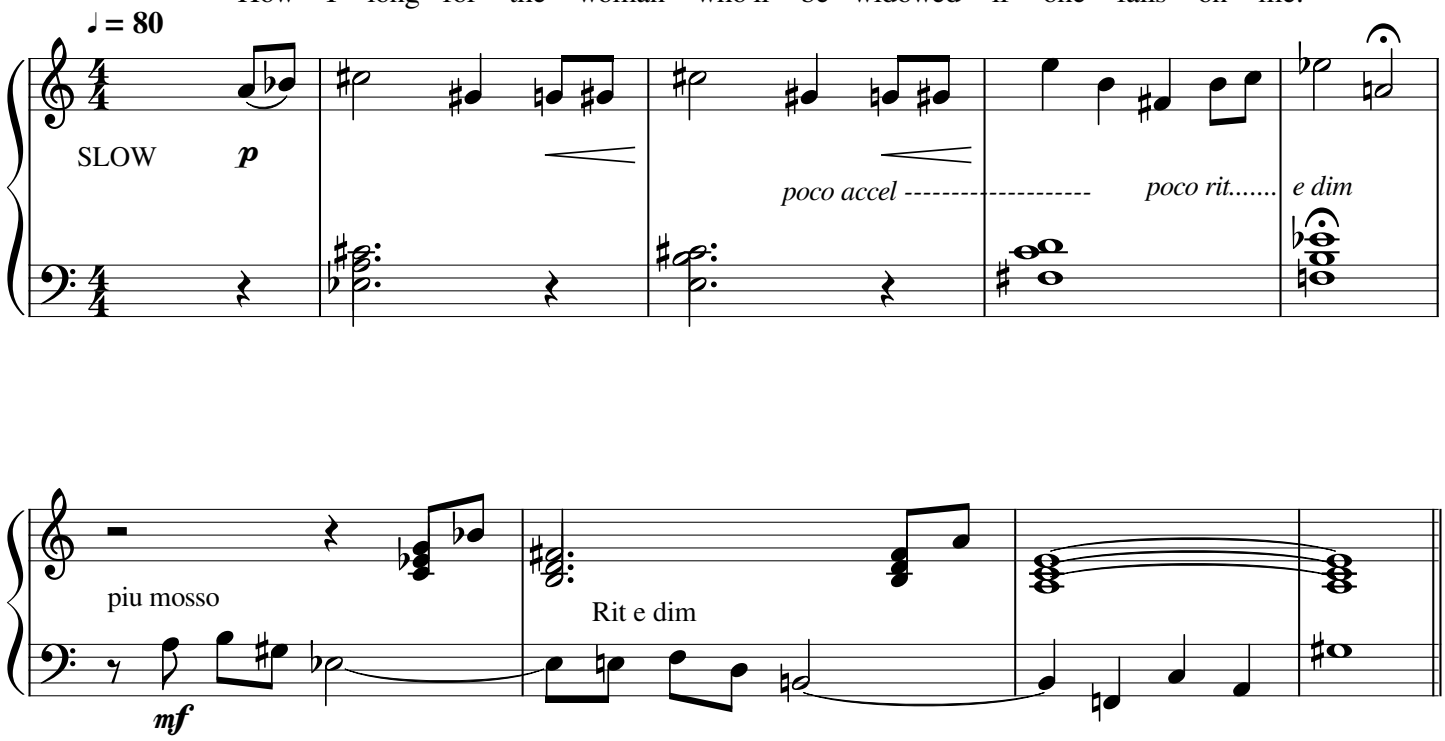
Imaginary Widow, December 1926, Lumber Camp, North Saskatchewan



How I long for the woman who'll be widowed if one falls on me.



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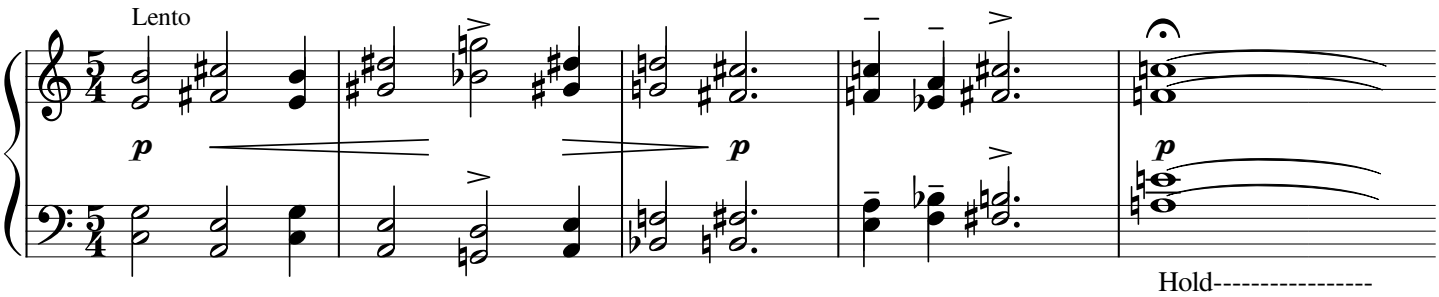
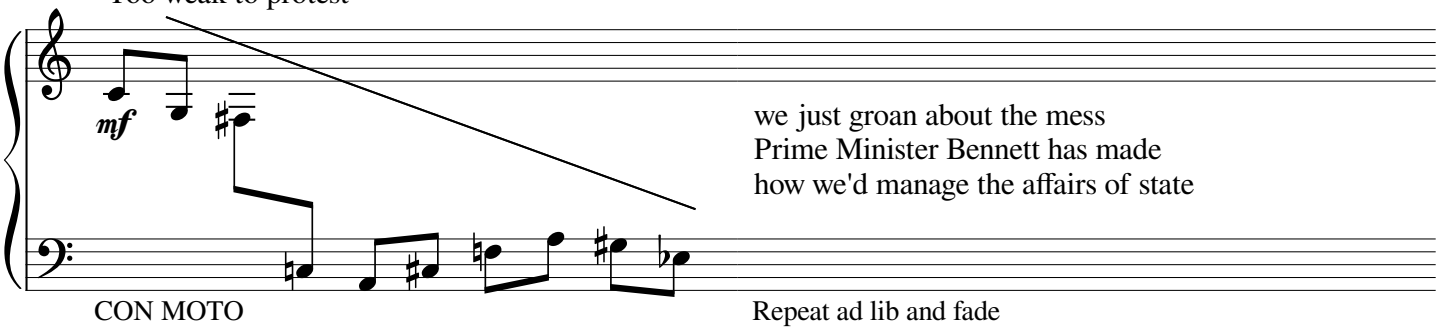
Undressing the dead, Vancouver 1929

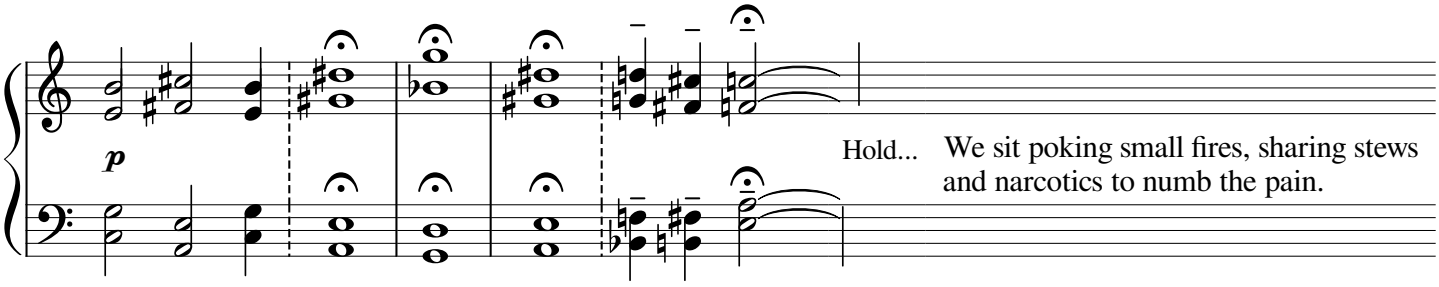
Introduction:



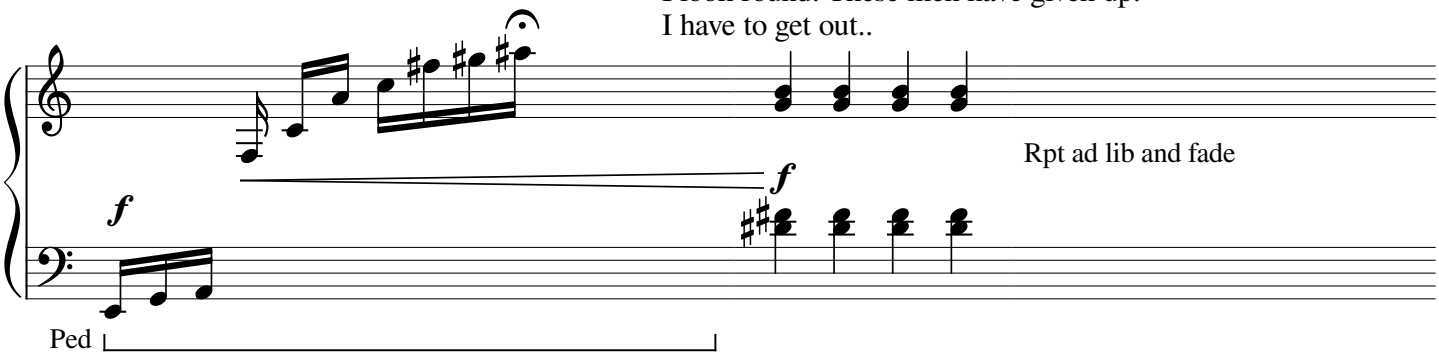
Men of the jungle we sit in slilence on the shore of Burrard Isle.
Too weak to protest -



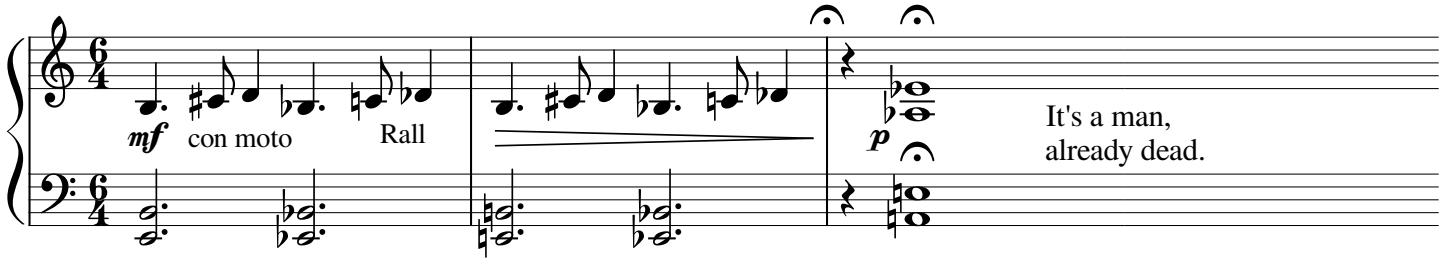
a bloody sight better if we had his millions, his private education -

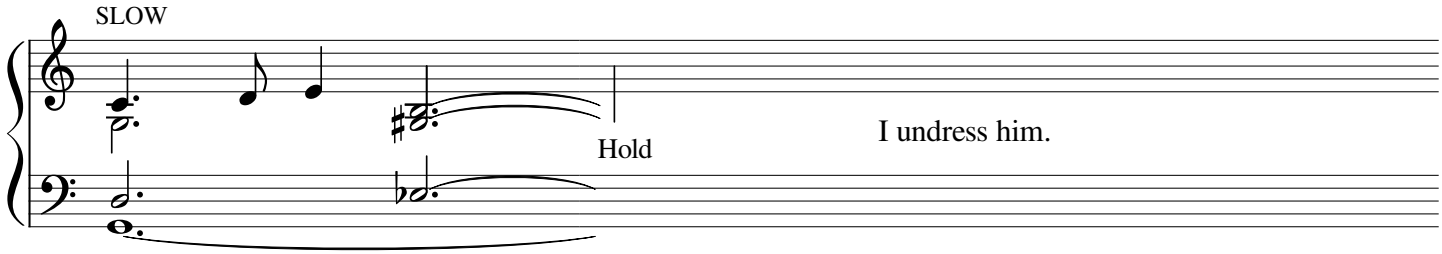


I look round. These men have given up.
I have to get out..

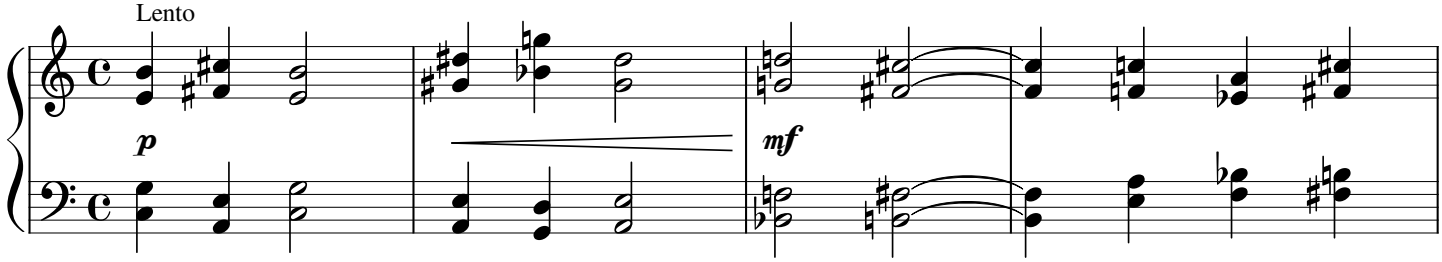


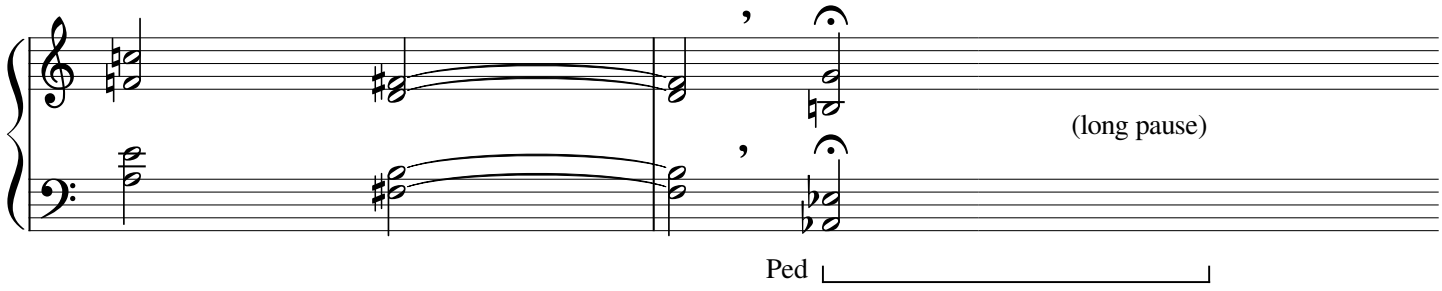
But I need a coat. I root through a bundle of clothes on a trailer
It's solid...





Postlude





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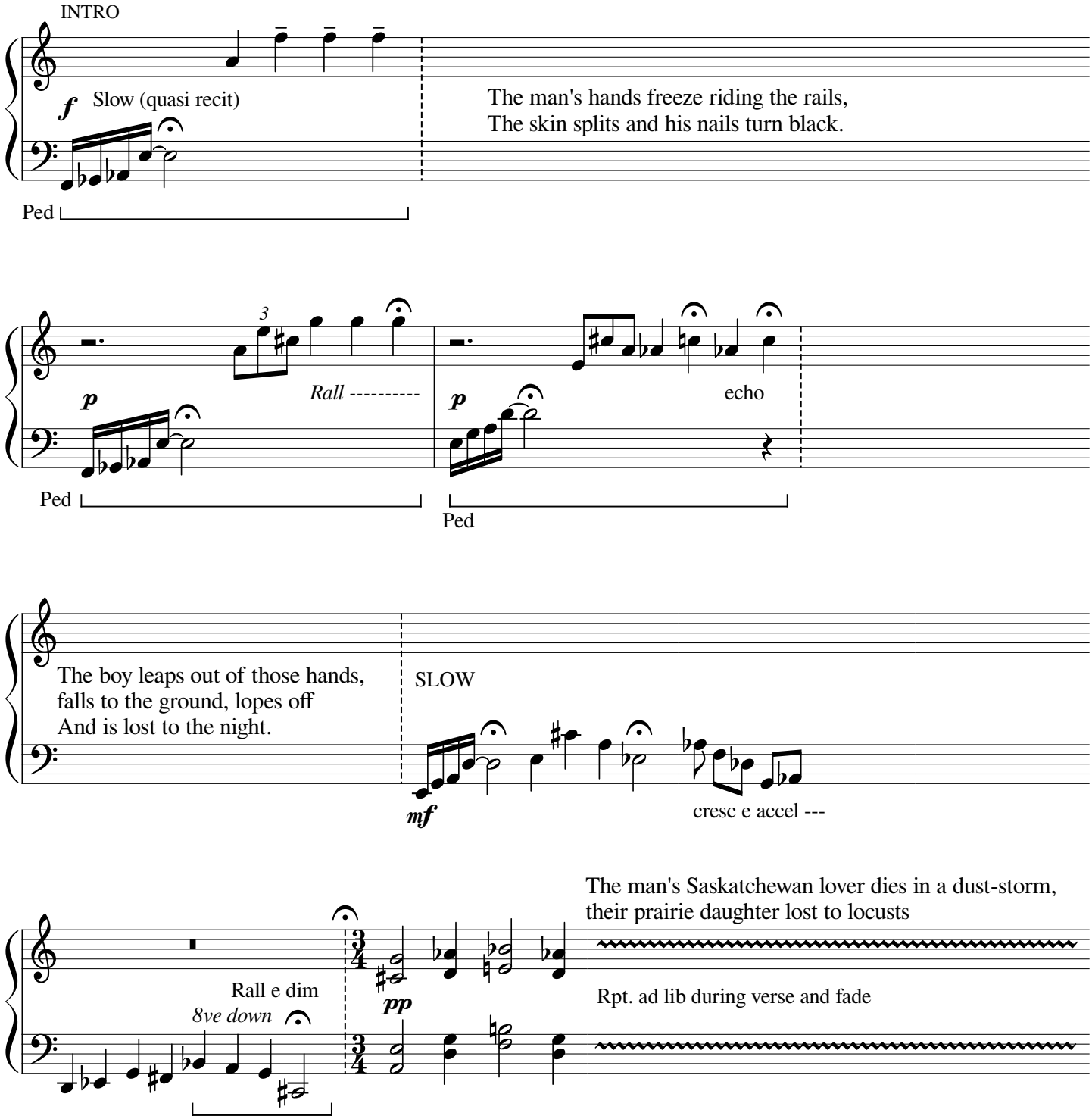
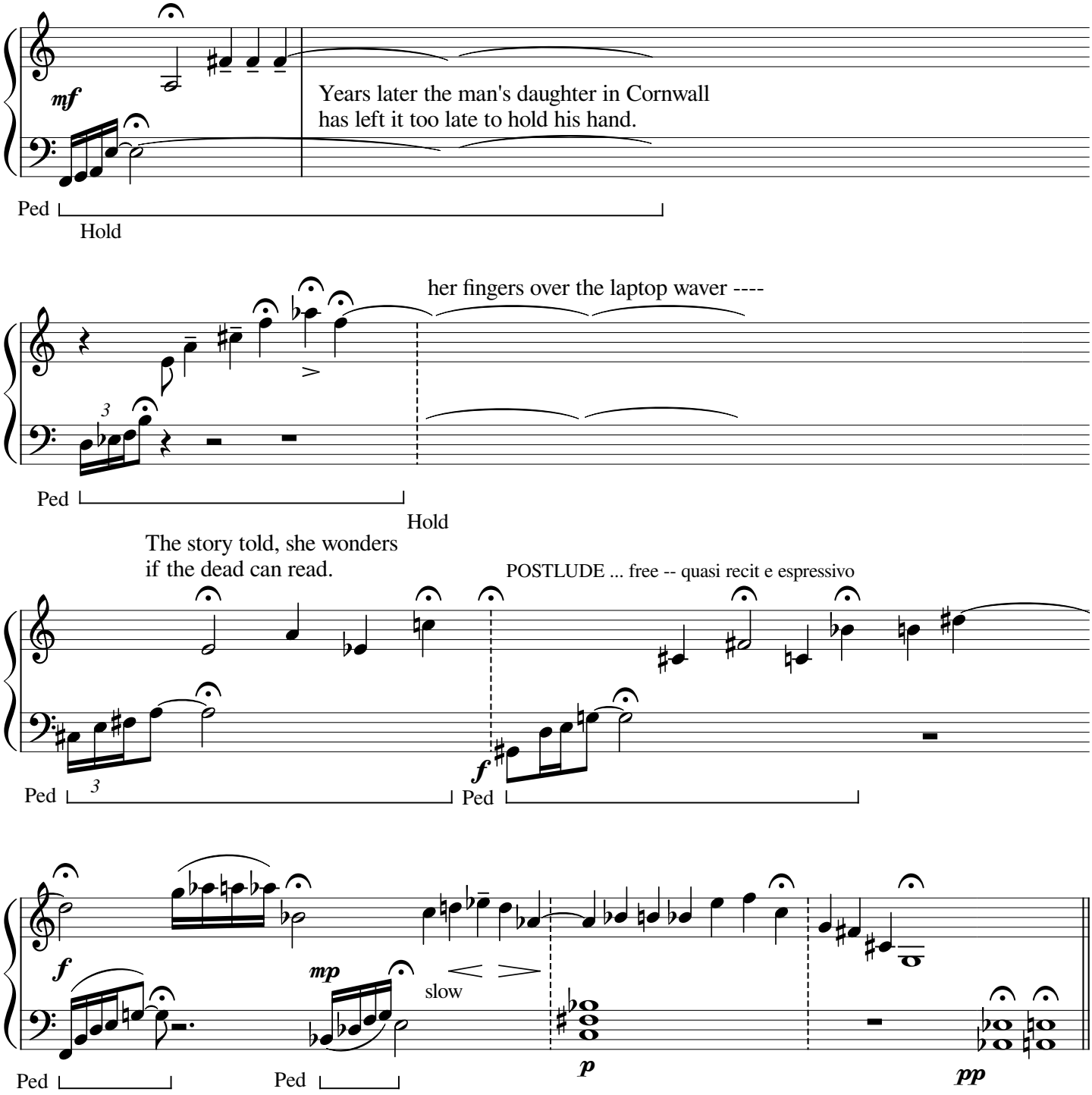
"Mary's Psalm"


INTRO
f
Slow (quasi recit)
The man's hands freeze riding the rails,
The skin splits and his nails turn black.
Ped
3
p
Rall ----------
Ped
p
echo
Ped
The boy leaps out of those hands,
falls to the ground, lopes off
And is lost to the night.
SLOW
mf
cresc e accel ---
The man's Saskatchewan lover dies in a dust-storm,
their prairie daughter lost to locusts
Rall e dim
8ve down
pp
Rpt. ad lib during verse and fade



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