SWATTE VERE Sul Jille Ed III. Edited by Milton Kun



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SUZANNE VEGA

"I suppose that the things that interest me most are character and place," says Suzanne Vega, the New York-based recording artist whose distinctive songwriting talent and eclectic musical approach have brought her both national and international acclaim in the two short years since the release of her stunning debut A&M album in April of 1985.

"I'm always curious about the atmosphere that people come from, and not so much what they do but why they do it," she stresses. If striving for getting beneath the surface and uncovering those private feelings and secret thoughts that all people harbor within themselves is a theme that seems to recur throughout many of her songs, that's only understandable, since she is someone who knows all too well that our perception of things can often be quite different than what they actually are.

To be sure, there has been, since virtually the beginning of her professional career, much more to Suzanne Vega than meets the eye. Watching her performing alone on the small stages of various Greenwich Village clubs several years ago, with nothing but her own acoustic guitar serving as musical accompaniment, her earliest supporters could certainly be forgiven if, in their enthusiasm, they mistook her for the kind of *traditional* folk singer she never really claimed, nor sought, to be.

"When I first started playing in clubs in the early Eighties," she recalls, "my perspective must have seemed very strange. At the time, I wasn't quite sure where I fit in, with music, with the world. I knew that I was aiming for something, but I wasn't really sure what it was. I knew it wasn't folk, necessarily, although there were a lot of things that I liked about early folk—Woody Guthrie, Cisco Houston, for instance—because it was real and you could tell it was real. It wasn't real for me personally—I certainly didn't know anything about freight trains—but you could tell from listening that these people had been there, and that there was no pretentiousness about them. But after I started performing regularly, suddenly there was all this press calling me a folk singer, even though I didn't think that a

song like, say "Cracking," could really be construed as a folk song. After all, it wasn't exactly 'Wild Mountain Thyme.' "

Suzanne's "perspective" ("I think it's probably my favorite word right now," she says) at the time was that of a young woman barely into her twenties, a woman who, though she hardly looked it, had been raised in the tough neighborhoods of New York City, who'd been a serious dance student for almost a decade, and who was working in theatre while majoring in English at Barnard College. Although Suzanne grew up in a home where the tastes in music leaned heavily towards folk ("When I was young, the whole aura around singer/ songwriters like Dylan, Paul Simon and Leonard Cohen was very strong") and jazz ("I remember listening to a lot of Astrud Gilberto and Brazilian music"), and as a teenager had done some performing at church basement-type coffeehouses where "they'd give you a plate of brownies and a cup of juice after you played," she is quick to point out that her philosophy in regard to songwriting was profoundly influenced by a rock 'n' roll concert by former Velvet Underground leader Lou Reed that she witnessed in late 1979.

"At the time," she notes, "everybody around me was into punk and new wave, but I just wasn't paying much attention to it. I barely even knew who Lou Reed was-I remember asking the guy who wanted to take me if he had any hits, and he said, "Walk on the Wild Side," and I think I went because I at least knew that one song. He was being really aggressive and hostile towards the audience, and I just thought, 'What is going on here?' But there were a few songs that he did that night that really got to me, songs like "Heroin" and "Caroline Says Part II" that I found I just couldn't stop thinking about. And the concert really wound up having a great effect on me, because afterwards I didn't see songs, or songwriting, in the same light. For the first time it occurred to me that you could write a song using only one chord and say anything you wanted to over it, and someone just might listen to it. Before that, I always felt that songs had to make sense, have some kind of narrative, be somehow traditional in structure. But Lou Reed was writing in a very different way, and about things that I knew about. So it was a shock of recognition and realization at the same time-that you could not only write a song any way you felt like, but that you could also write about any-

thing you felt like."

As both her writing style and self-confidence developed and grew, Suzanne began to regularly venture down to Greenwich Village, and at clubs like the Speakeasy and the legendary Folk City she found a sympathetic and nurturing environment made up of musicians and listeners who shared her belief in the integrity of "intelligent music that takes risks." She quickly began to draw sizeable audiences and rave notices for

her shows in New York and Boston and, as the breadth of her songwriting skills became increasingly apparent and her musical horizons expanded, the simple tag of "folk singer" ceased to fit. "One of the most distinctively original performers in the entire pop realm" was the way one local critic put it-a description that seemed much better suited for the author of such far afield compositions as the raplike "Cracking," the jazz-tinged "Freeze Tag," and the ballad-styled "The Queen and the Soldier."

These songs, as well as such stellar works as the reflective "Marlene on the Wall," the atmospheric and dusky "Small

Blue Thing," and the graceful, free-falling "Some Journey," can all be found on Suzanne's self-titled first album, which was carefully and sympathetically produced by engineer (and, along with Ron Fierstein, comanager) Steve Addabbo and former Patti Smith Group guitarist Lenny Kaye. On it, Suzanne's voice and guitar were sensitively complemented by the elements of a full-scale electric band, and the experience ultimately led to her decision to tour with a complete backup group. "You get a sense of energy with a band that I never quite understood until I was playing inside of one," she says, "There's a rough edge that I simply couldn't get on my own that I think comes through now, and I'm happy for that."

While the Suzanne Vega LP received uniformly excellent reviews and a significant commercial response in the United States-given the strict formats of most American radio stations, and the general climate for music that may initially seem to be somewhat, er, left of center, Suzanne feels that "it's actually done much better than I thought it ever would"-the album was an overwhelming and unqualified success in Europe. "In some ways, I wasn't all that surprised about doing well over there," she admits. "Many of the people I like-Leonard Cohen, Laurie Anderson-have always tended to do better in Europe, so it kind of makes sense to me." In England, in fact, Suzanne has become quite a major star, to the extent that a British tour last fall included two sold-out performances at London's fabled

Albert Hall, and a half-hour BBC television show culled from footage of the concerts drew an estimated audience of over two and a half million viewers. "I spent a summer in England in 1979," she says, "and I was really very inspired by the country's style. I remember wishing that I could somehow make an impact there. So in many ways, the response I've gotten in England has been very, very gratifying."

Still, becoming a star-and, inevitably, a celebrityis not something that Suzanne is sure she's necessarily comfortable with, at least not yet. And in an age of big stars possessing even bigger egos, Suzanne Vega's impressive talents as a singer, songwriter, and performer are perhaps matched only by her equally impre-

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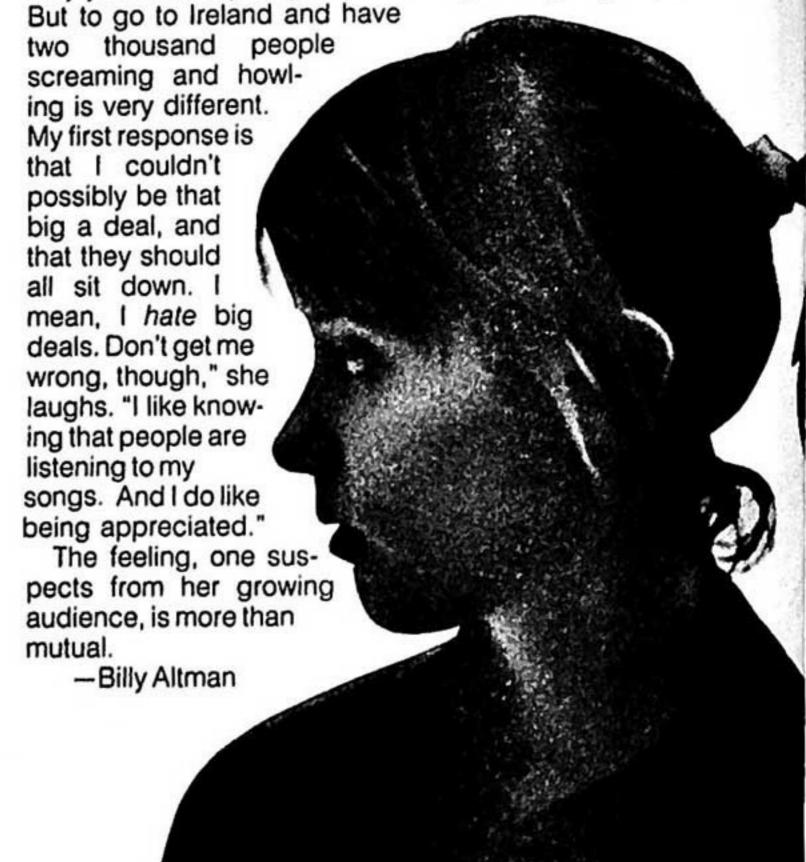
narrative, be somehow

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ssive perspective on the trappings of fame. While her brand new album, Solitude Standing, featuring such stand-out tracks as the provocative "Luka," the playful "Tom's Diner," the sinewy "Night Vision," and the foreboding "In the Eye," is certain to bring her not only more critical support but also a more expansive popularity than ever before, Suzanne Vega remains a refreshingly unassuming artist whose dedication is first and foremost, to the work at hand.

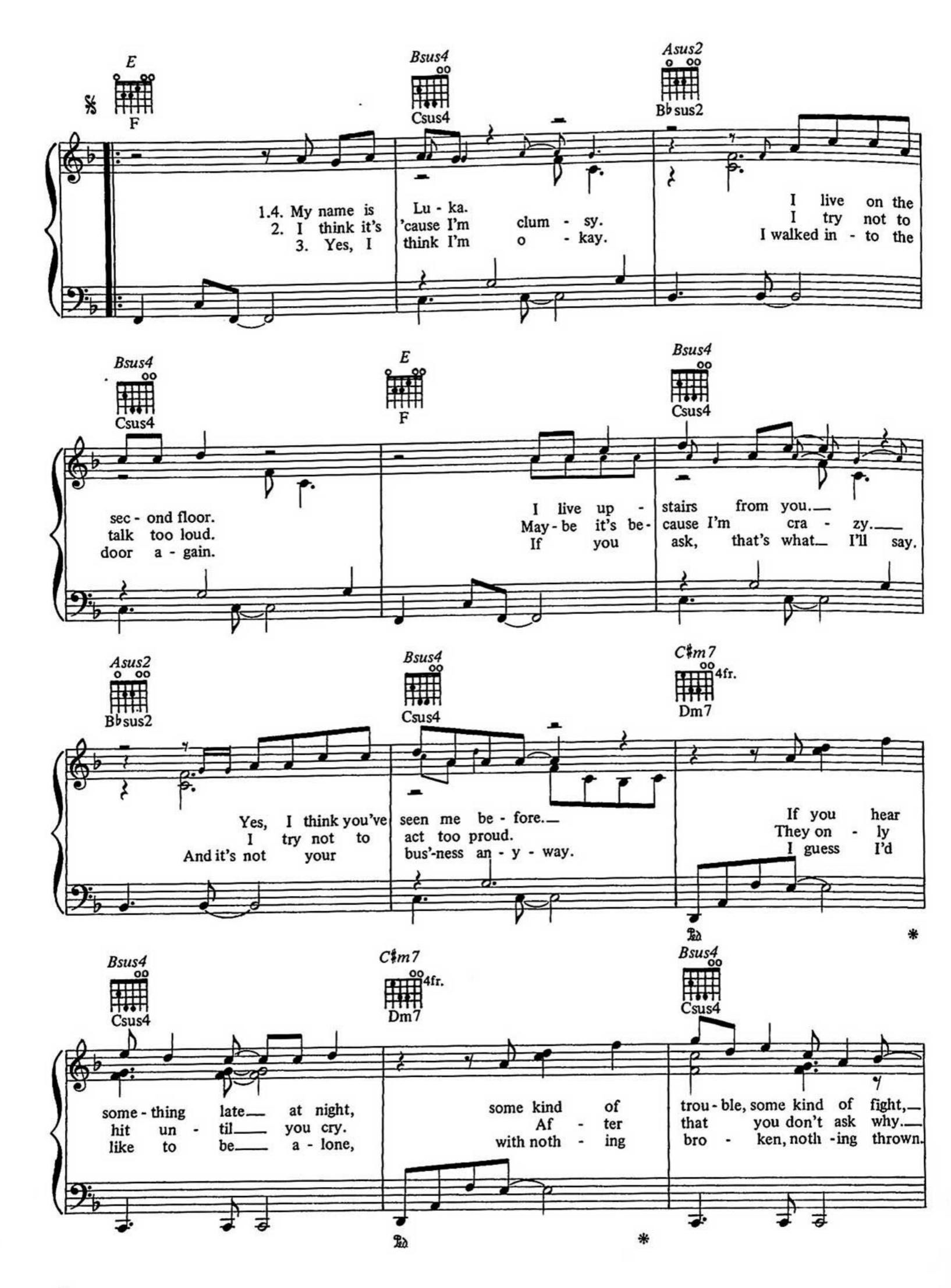
"When I'm performing at a concert and I finish my set and I see people getting all excited, I always feel a bit ambivalent," she confesses. "There's a part of me that

says, 'Be happy for this,' and another part that just feels distracted, that wants to say to the audience, 'Hey, calm down, alright?' In New York, if you stand up and they just look at you, you know things are going well.





[•]Recorded a half step higher.







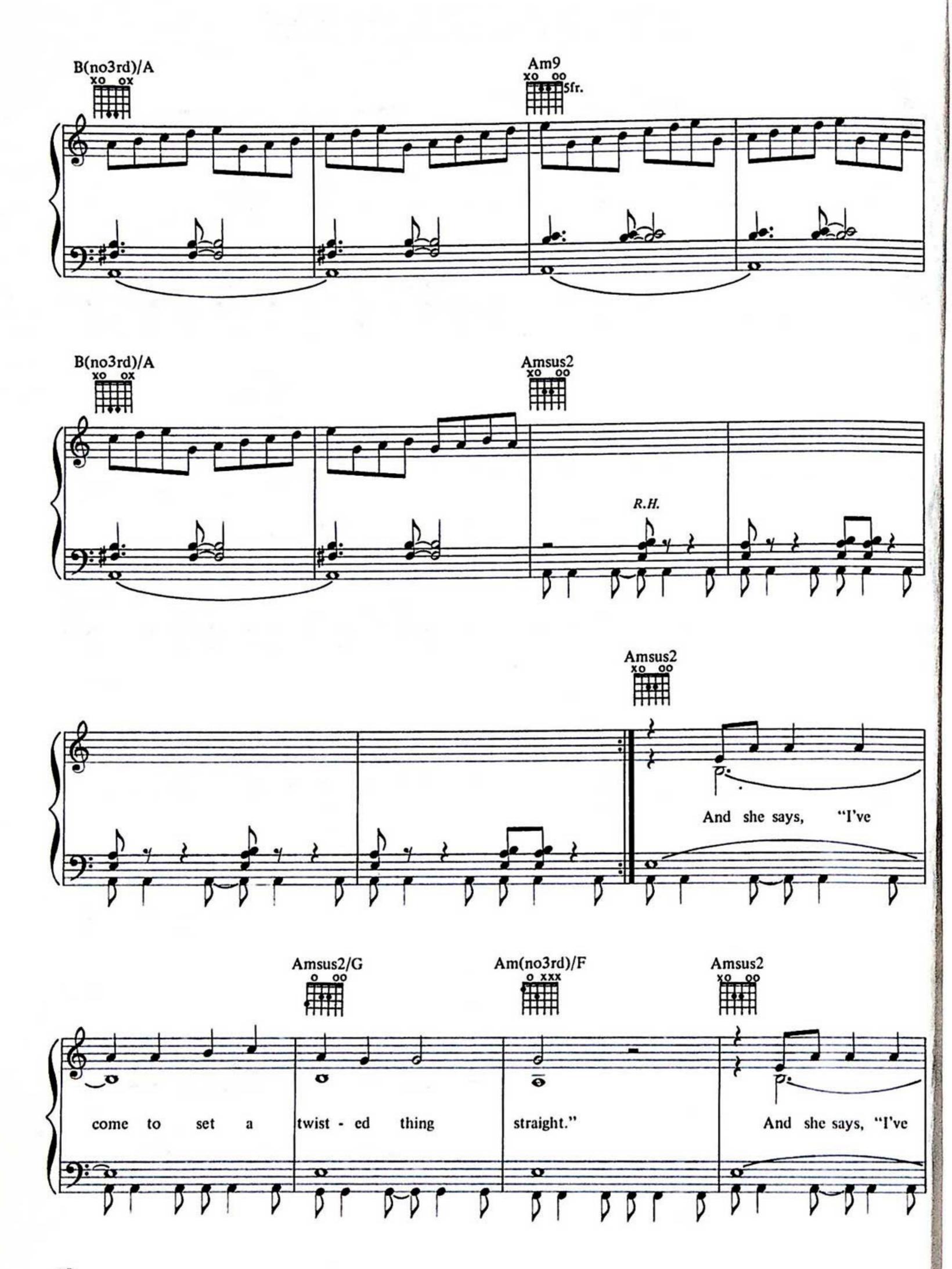


SOLITUDE STANDING

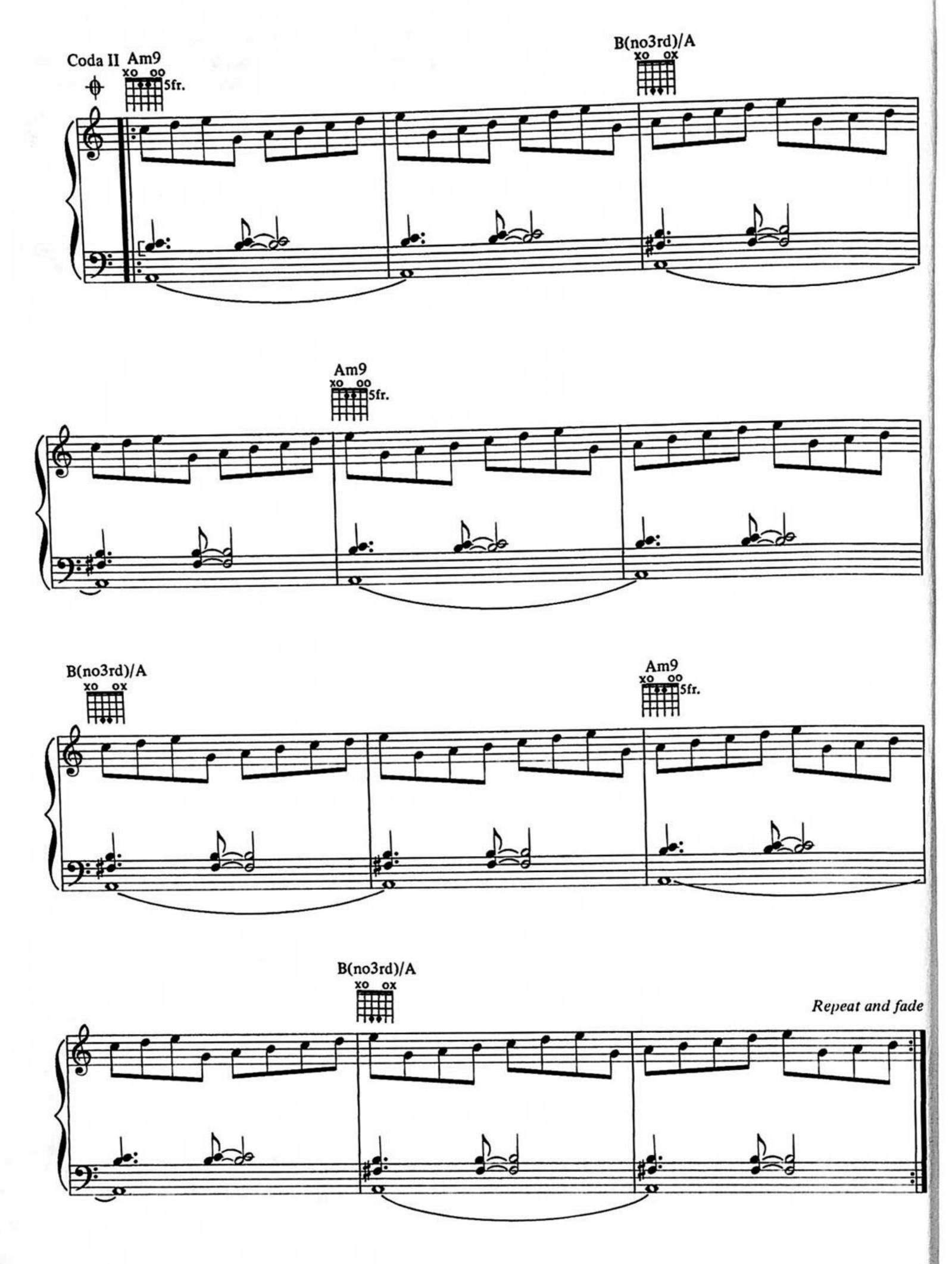
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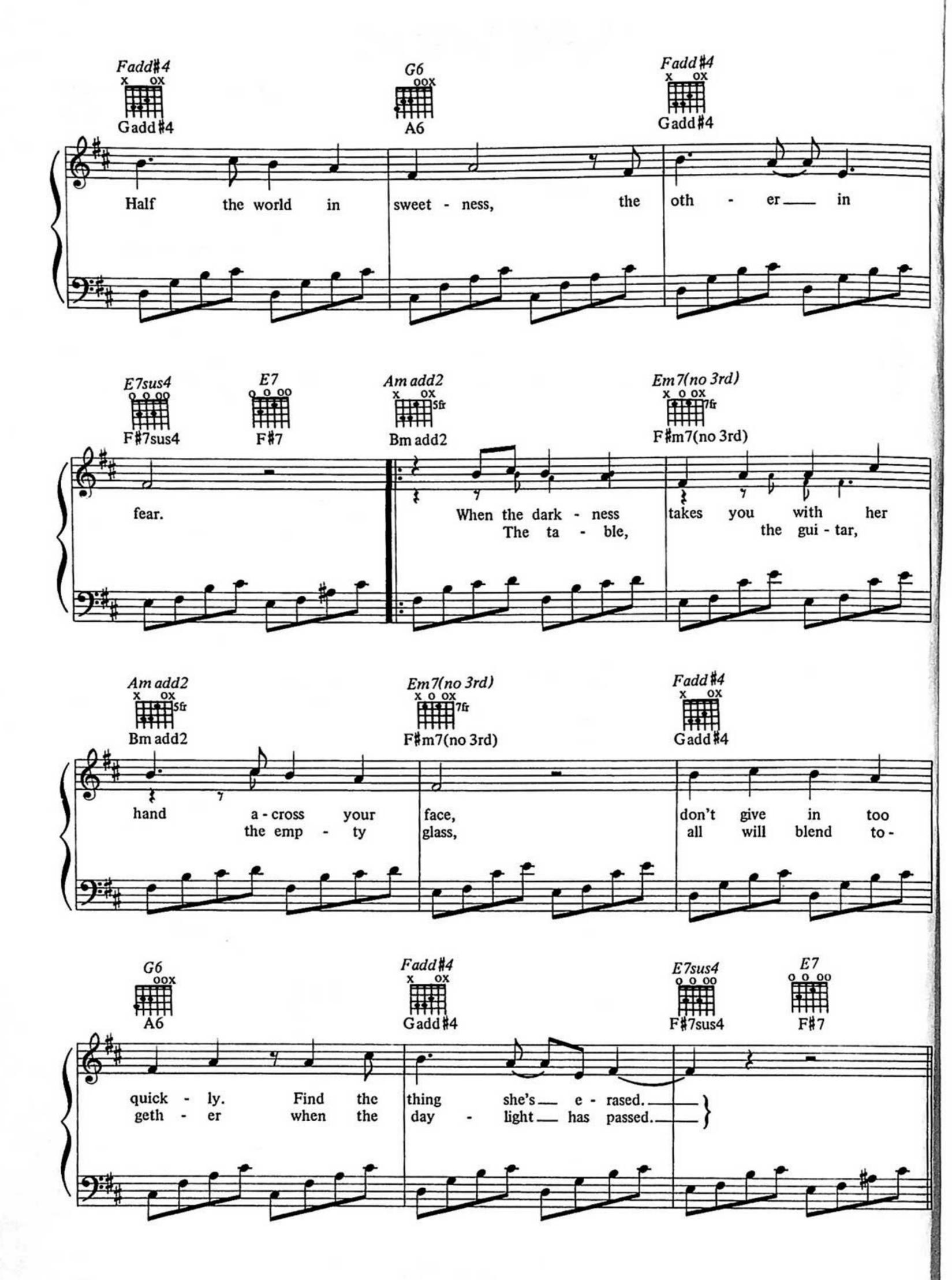


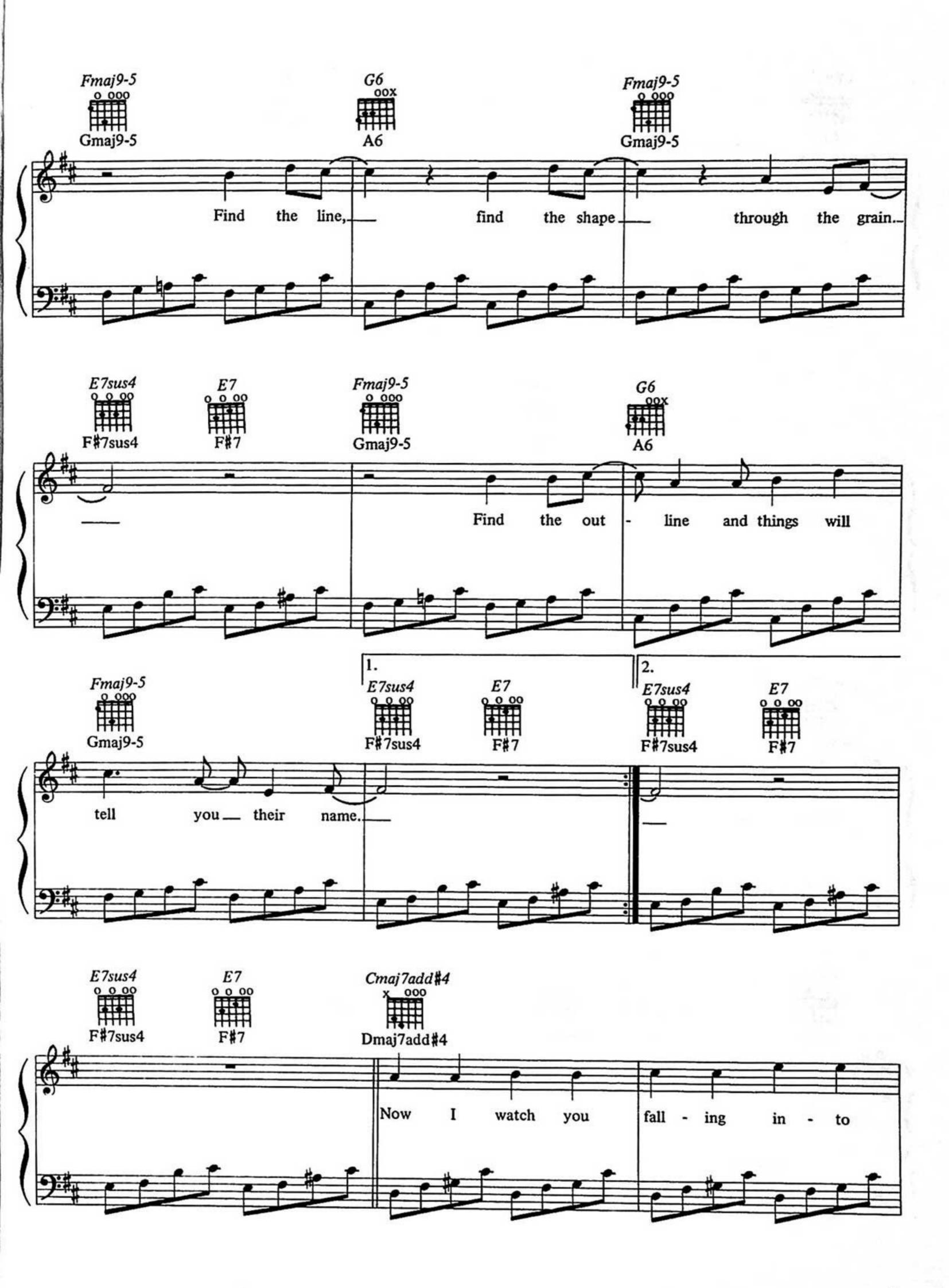


NIGHT VISION

Lyrics by Suzanne Vega Music by Suzanne Vega and Anton Sanko











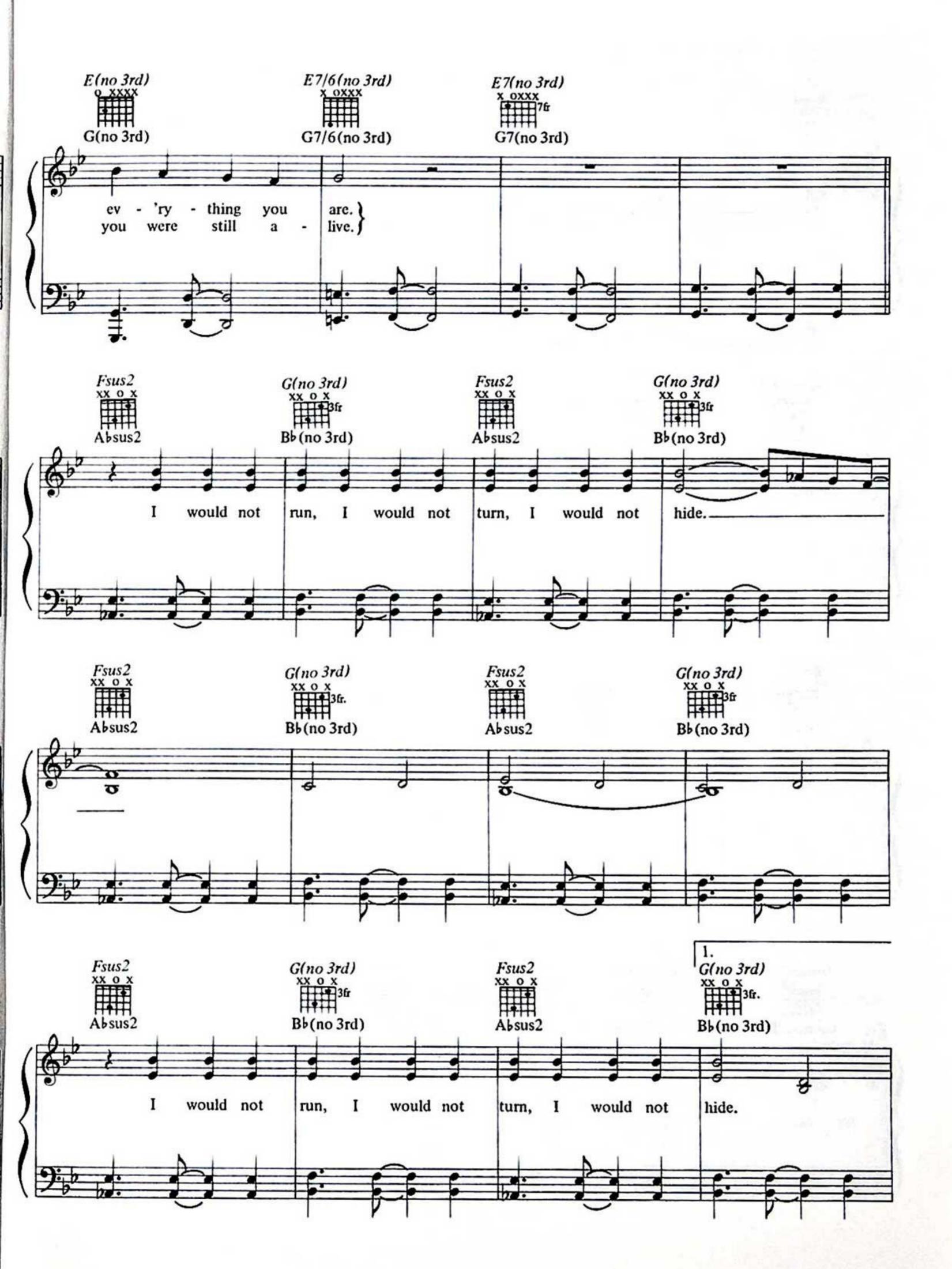


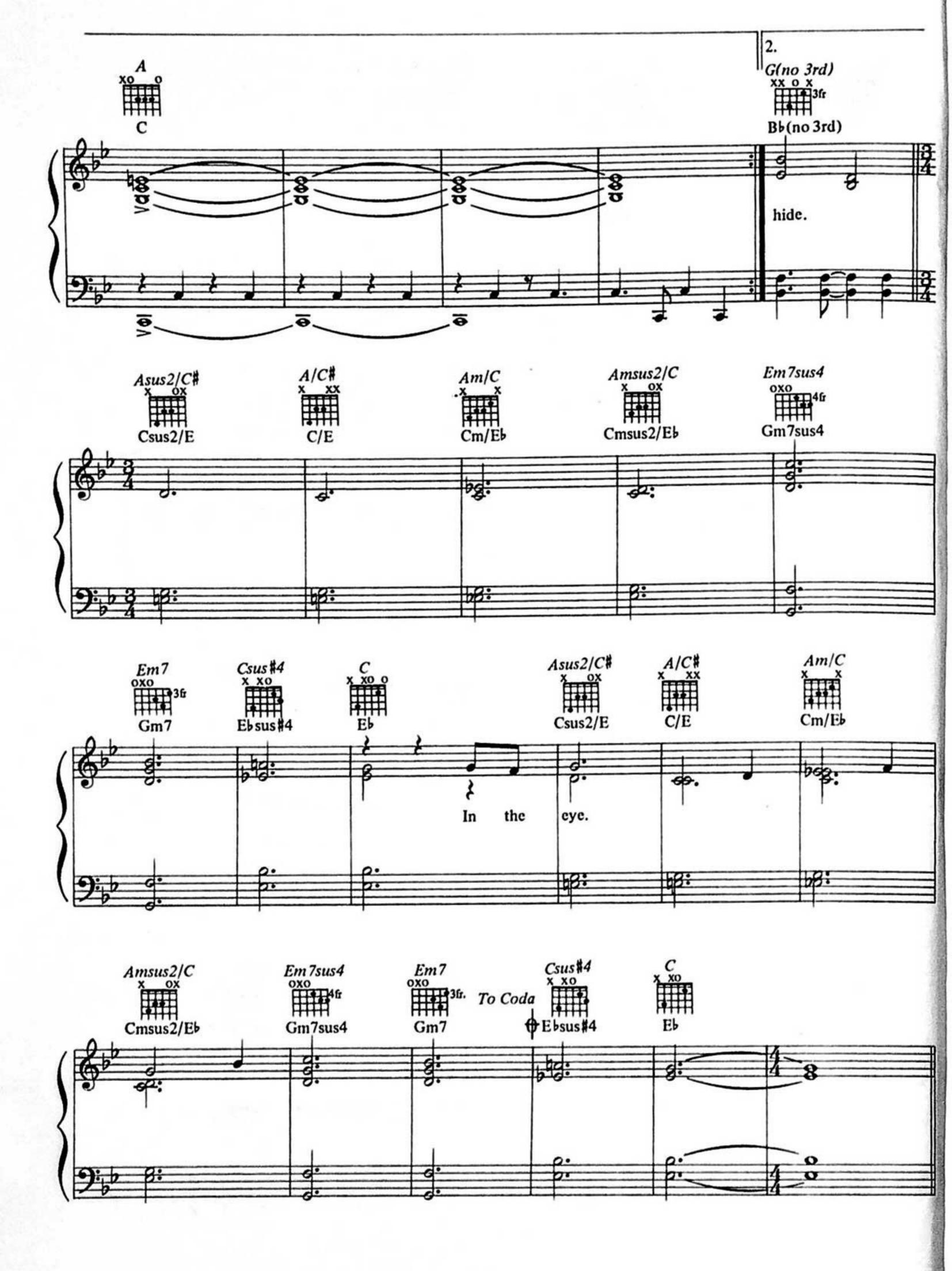
IN THE EYE

Lyrics by Suzanne Vega Music by Suzanne Vega and Marc Shulman











LANGUAGE

Lyrics by Suzanne Vega Music by Suzanne Vega and Michael Visceglia















CALYPSO

Music and Lyrics by Suzanne Vega



















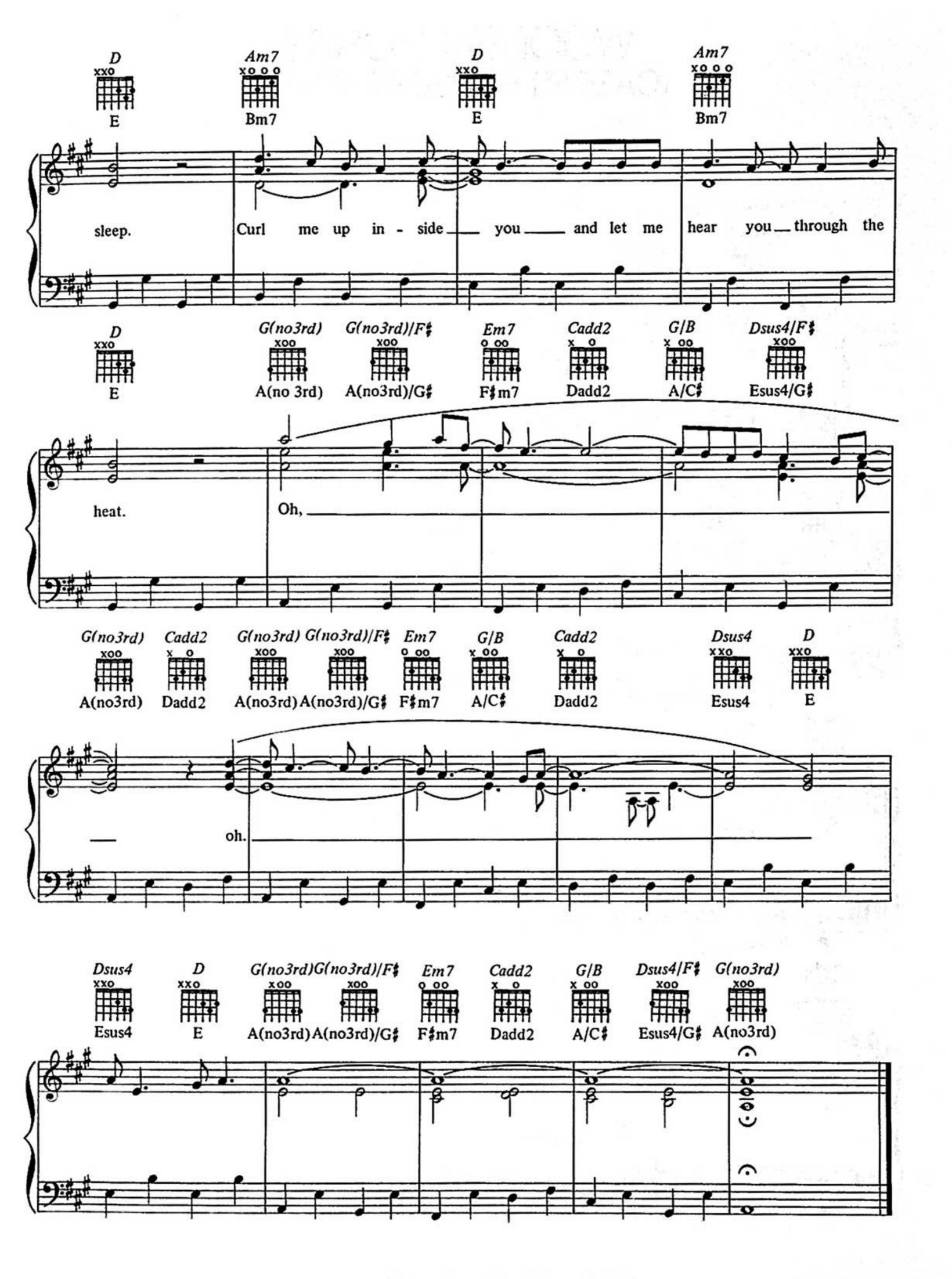








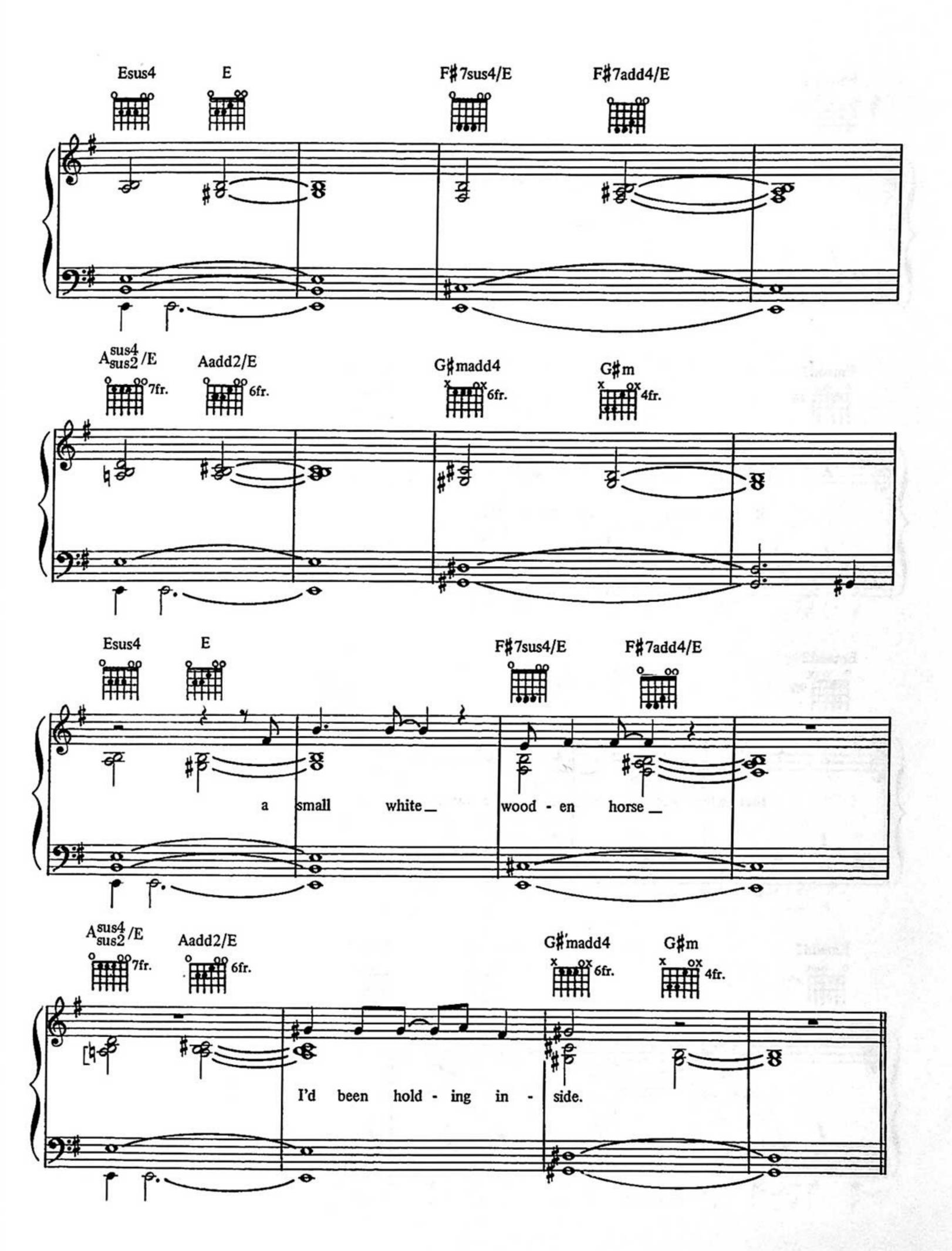




WOODEN HORSE (CASPAR HAUSER'S SONG)

Lyrics by Suzanne Vega Music by Suzanne Vega, Michael Visceglia, Anton Sanko, Marc Shulman and Stephen Ferrera



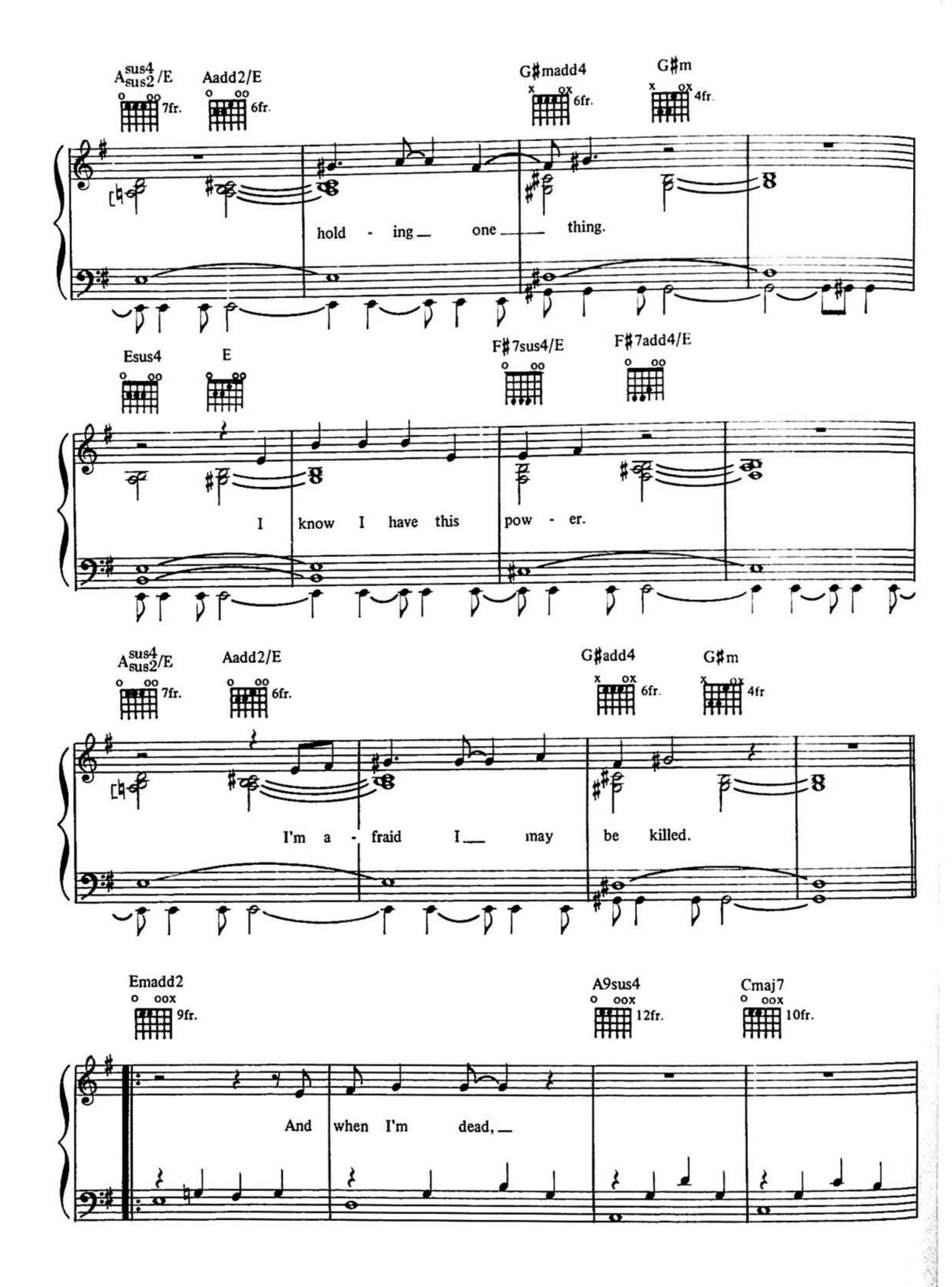


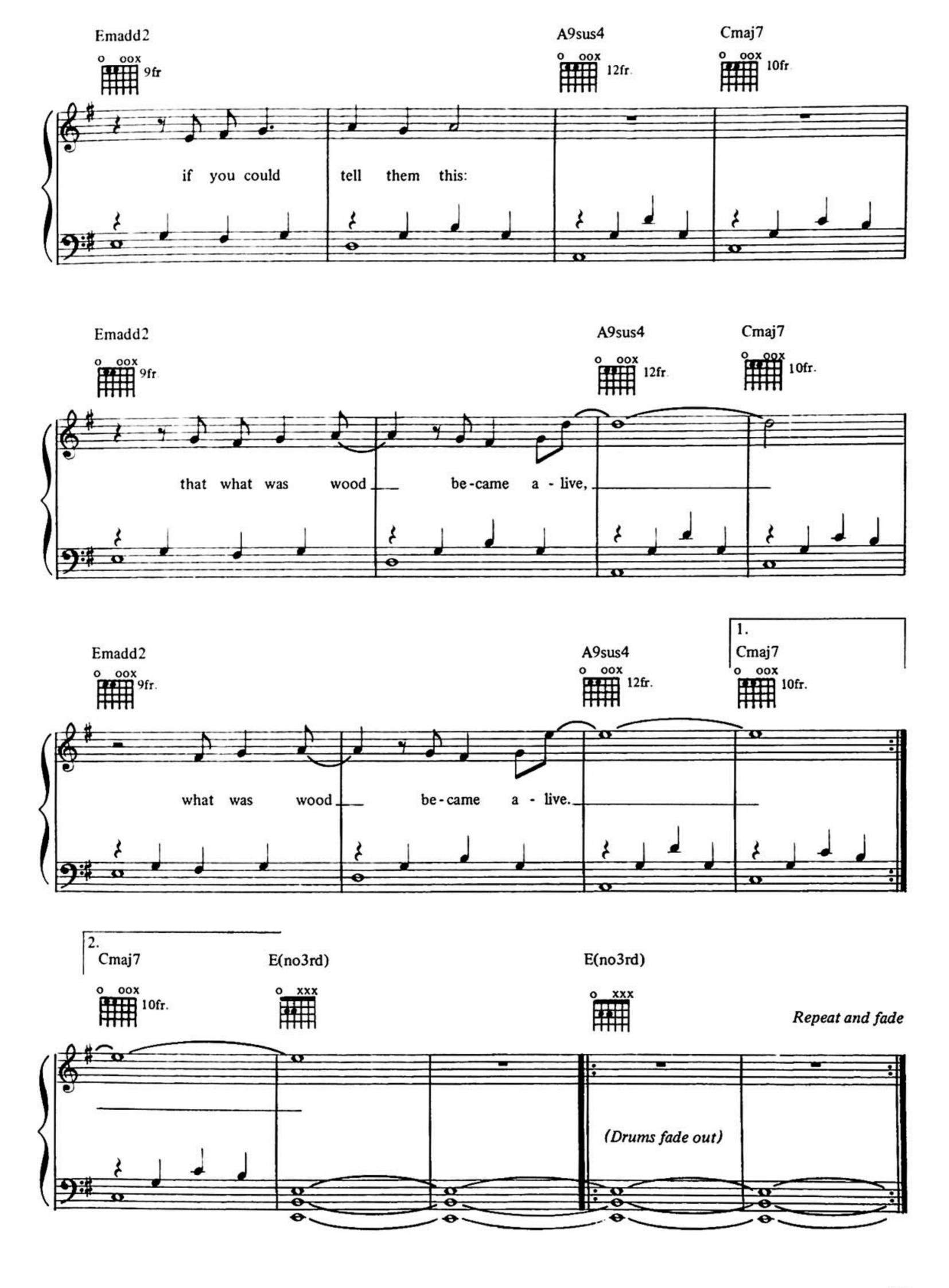








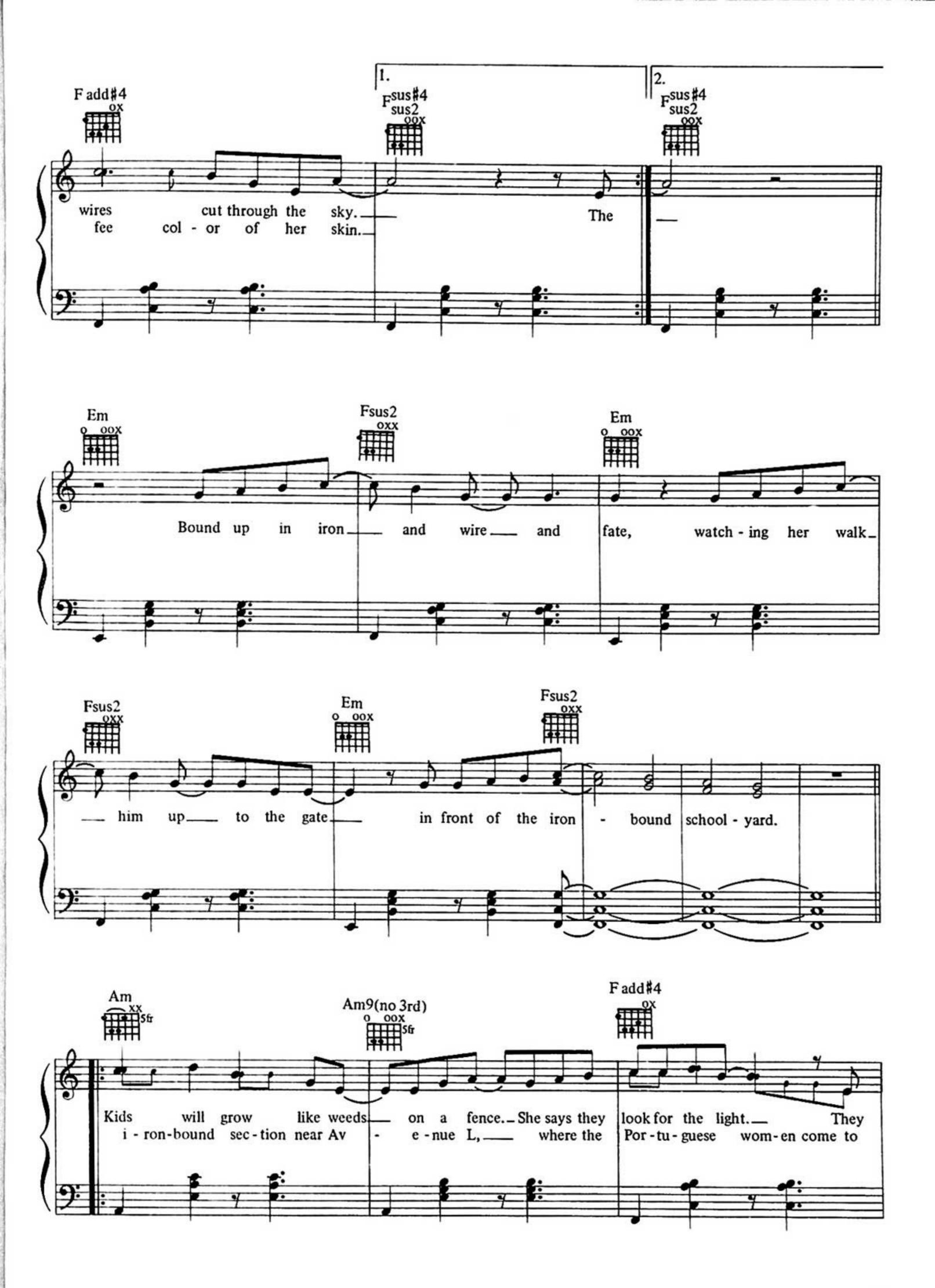




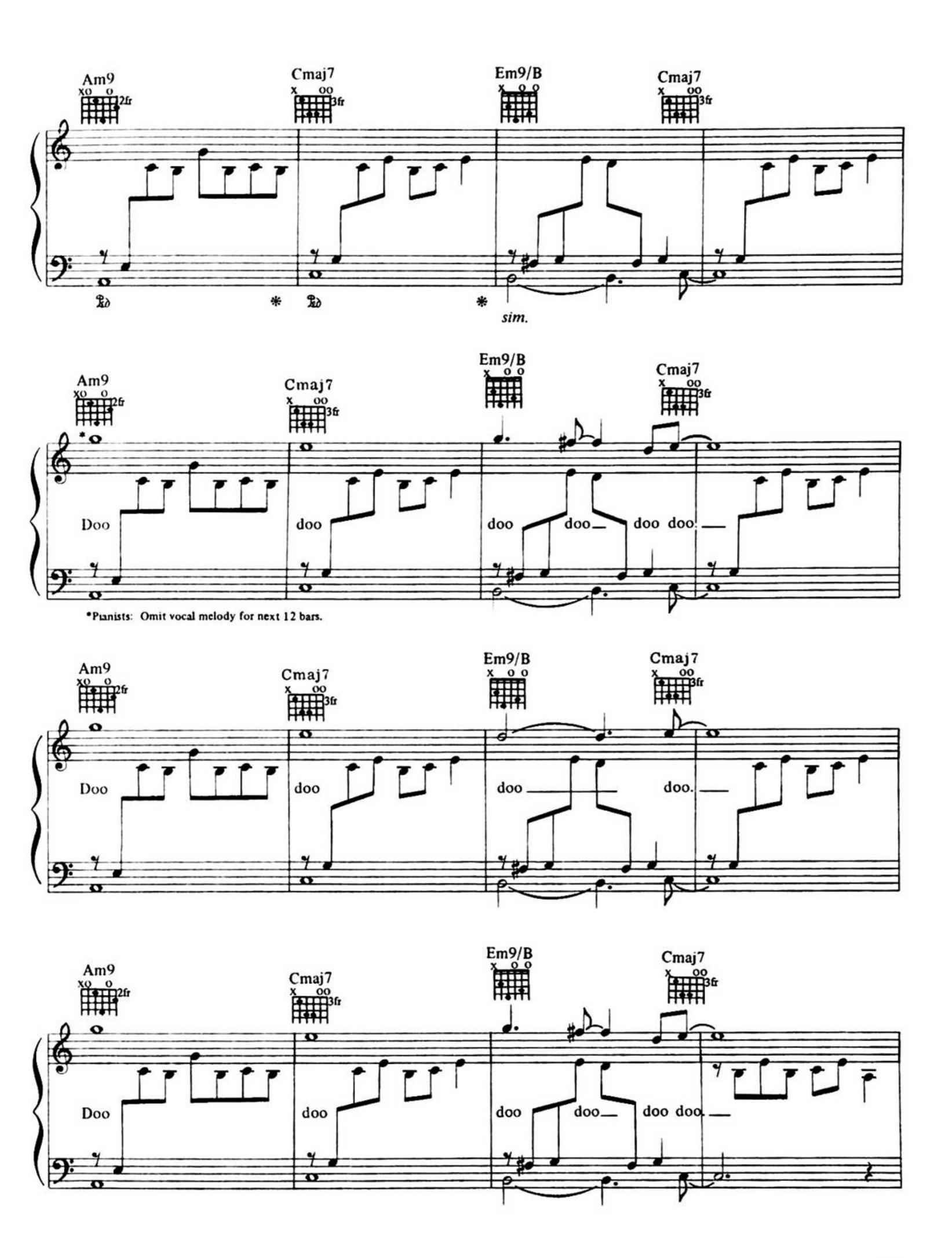
IRONBOUND/FANCY POULTRY

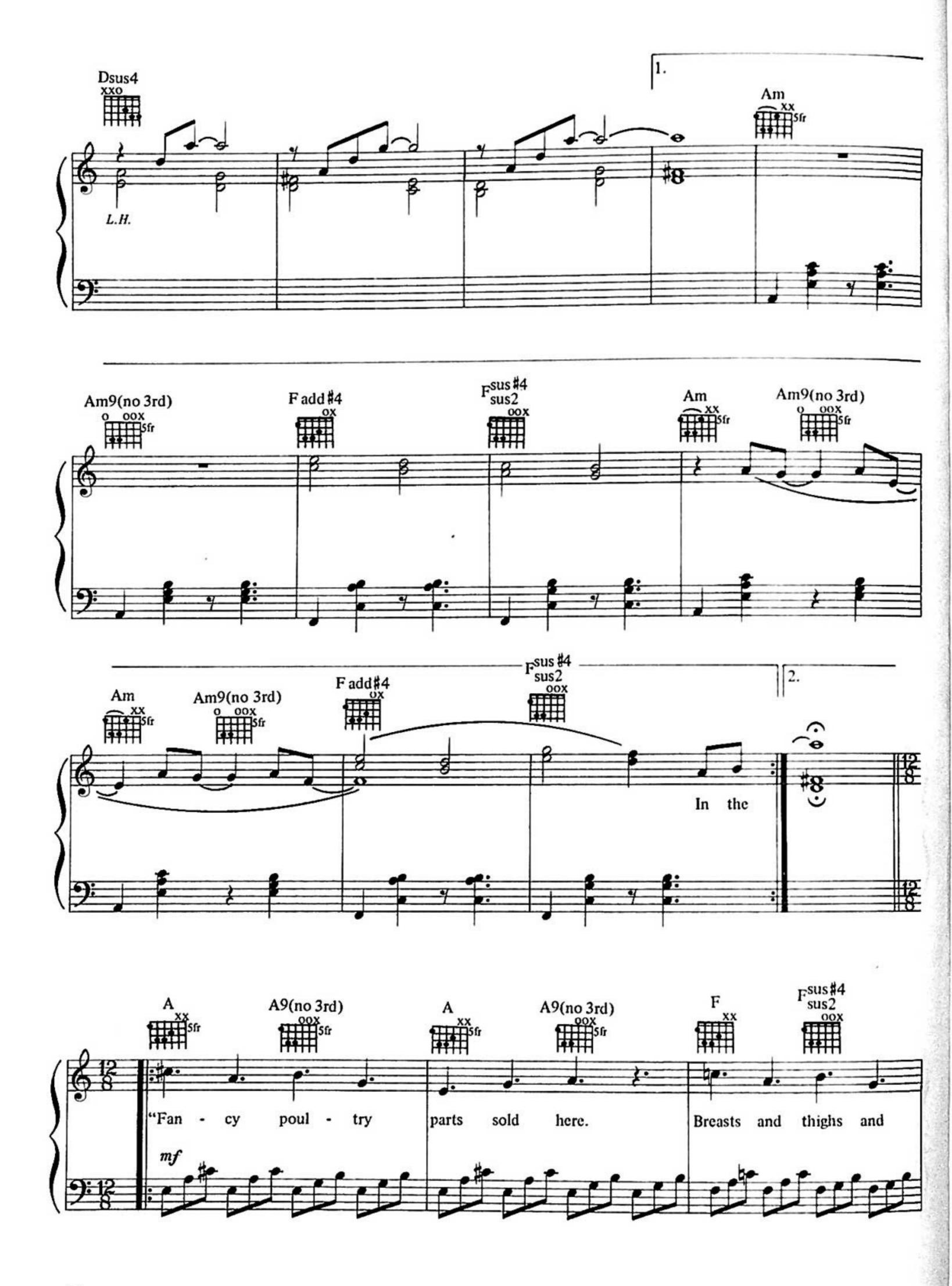
Lyrics by Suzanne Vega Music by Suzanne Vega and Anton Sanko

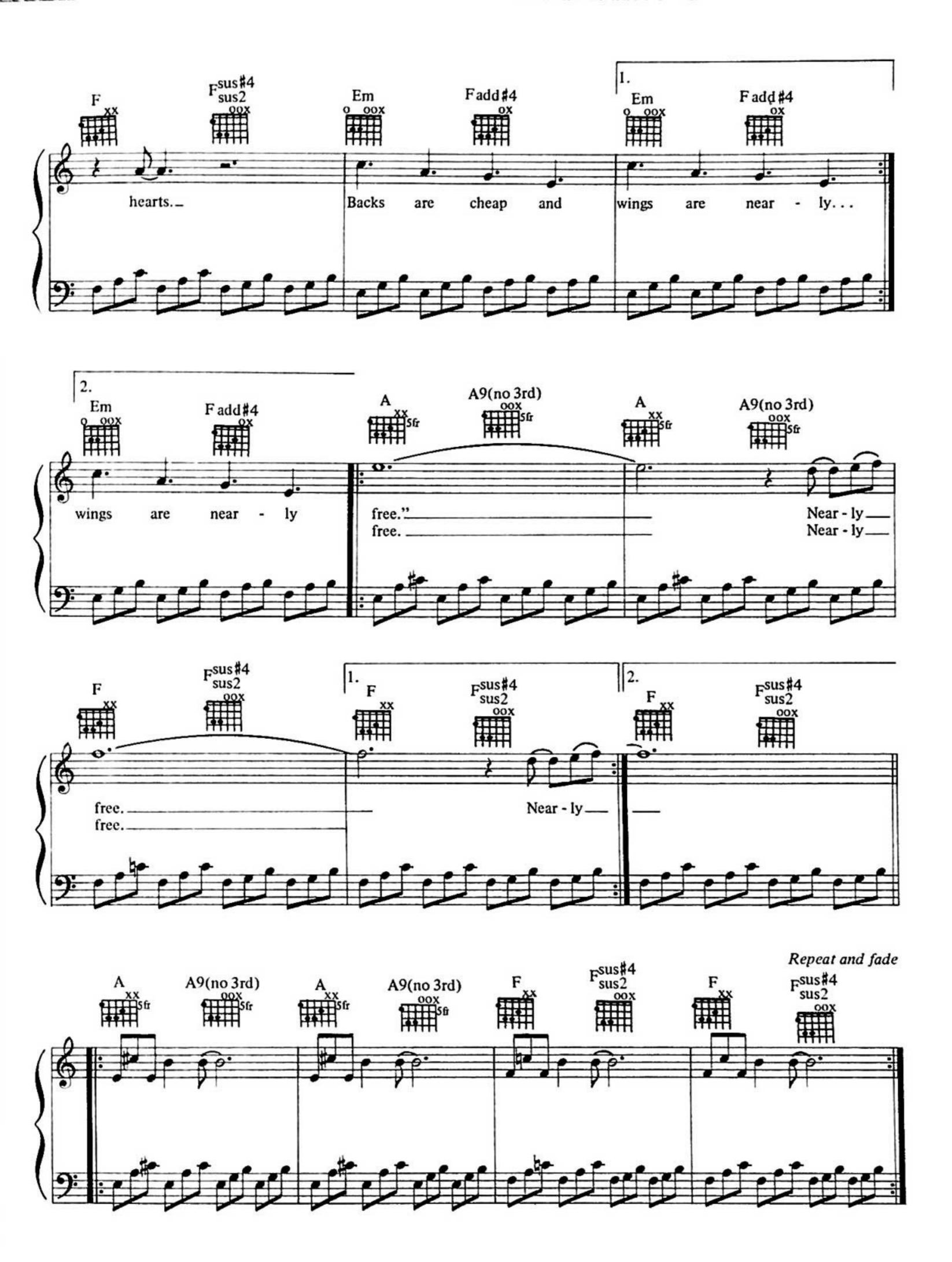








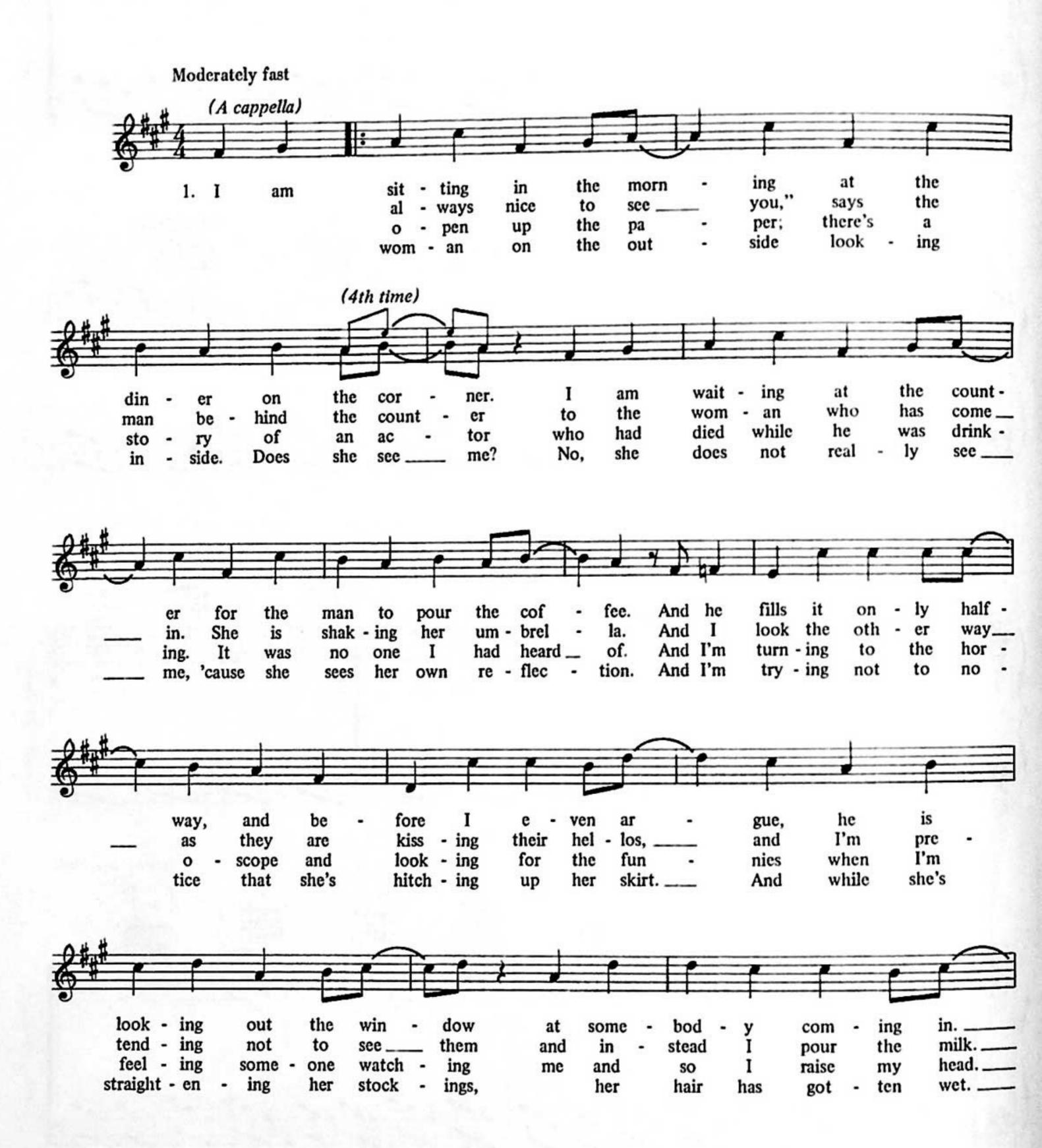




TOM'S DINER

Music and Lyrics by Suzanne Vega

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TOM'S DINER (REPRISE)

Music by Suzanne Vega





Iom's Diner
Luka
Ironbound/Fancy Poultry
In the Eye
Night Vision
Solitude Standing
Calypso
Language
Gypsy
Wooden Horse (Caspar Hauser's Song)
Tom's Diner (Reprise)

