Jean Sibelius: Florestan

■ While at school and at the music institute, Sibelius wrote a number of minor pieces (that remained without an opus number) for a variety of occasions to entertain friends and relatives. The most significant piano work among these youthful compositions must be *Florestan*, a four-movement work that Sibelius wrote at the age of 23 in 1889. He dedicated it to his friend, author and pianist Adolf Paul (1863–1943), who later wrote a play entitled *Kuningas Kristian II* (King Christian II) for which Sibelius wrote incidental music in 1898.

In his book *Profiler* (Profiles, 1937), Adolf Paul describes the genesis of *Florestan*. Sibelius was ill over Easter and lay in bed at his lodgings in Kaivopuisto in Helsinki. Having returned from the country after Easter, Paul presented him with an armload of yellow Marechal-Niel roses. "The following day, his brother Christian came to the music institute for his cello lesson. He brought with him a few rolled-up sheets of music with his brother's compliments to thank me for the roses: a small four-part prose poem, a composition in words and music, one of the most delicate and beautiful things Sibelius ever wrote – a tale of spring awakening in the human heart, its sufferings and joys."

Florestan is today usually described as a suite for piano, but the composer himself provided no sub-title. In the context of the history of music, the title clearly alludes to Florestan and Eusebius, the characters in Schumann's music representing different aspects of the composer's persona, and of course also to E. T. A. Hoffmann, who was an important source of inspiration for Schumann and whose novels were also familiar to Sibelius and Paul. Florestan was passionate, ardent and restless, while Eusebius was sentimental, calm and meditative. The main key of Sibelius's *Florestan* is G minor, the same as in Schumann's *Kreisleriana*, which Sibelius had recently heard performed in concert by his friend Busoni. The format is also compatible with Schumann's extensive piano works: a suite that forms a coherent entity. The movements should be played without a break, as Sibelius clearly indicated, and the music of the first movement reappears in the last. The influence of Grieg is more apparent than usual in the Nordic lyricism and nature tones of the music.

Each of the four movements has a descriptive title provided by the composer, originally in Swedish. They are an interesting testimony to Sibelius's sources of inspiration and his fertile imagination, his communion with nature, his sensitivity and the conveying of all this through music. *Florestan* is perhaps not yet the work of a composer in full command of his faculties, but it is the product of a passionate artist whose original idiom and unrestrained freshness are apparent in the improvisational approach of this piece. Interestingly, the subject is closely related to that of the symphonic poem *Skogsrået* (The Wood-Nymph), written five years later.

Sibelius's original descriptive texts with translations:

I. *Florestan går ut i skogen. Han är nedstämd och olycklig. Det doftar af vildmossa och våt bark.*
Florestan goes out into the forest. He is dejected and unhappy. Scents of wild moss and wet tree bark are in the air.

II. *Florestan kommer till en fors, hvars vågryggar, under det han betraktar dem, förvandlas till vattennymfer. Det doftar av neckrosor.*
Florestan comes to a cataract whose foaming waters under his eyes into water-nymphs. Scents of water lilies.

III. *En af vattennymferna har våta, svarta ögon och guldgult hår. Florestan förälskar sig i henne.*
One of the water-nymphs has wet, black eyes and golden yellow hair. Florestan falls in love with her.

IV. *Florestan försöker locka henne till sig, men hon försvinner. Nedstämd och olycklig återvänder Florestan genom skogen.*
Florestan tries to entice her to him, but she disappears. Dejected and unhappy, Florestan returns through the forest.

Eero Heinonen
English translation by Jaakko Mäntyjärvi

Till Adolf Paul — Dedicated to ***Adolf Paul***

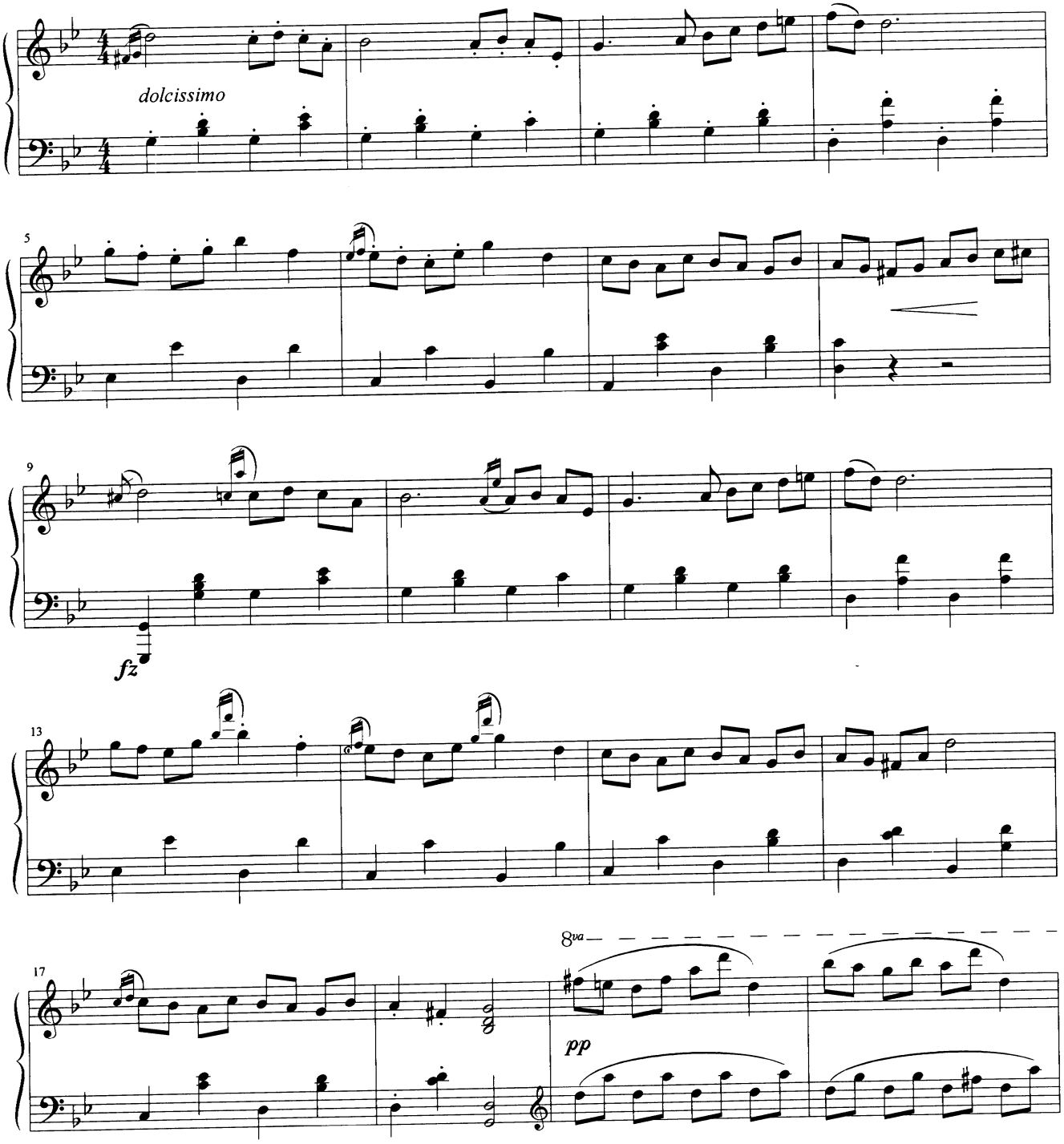
Florestan

Suite för piano — Suite for piano

Florestan går ut i skogen. Han är nedstämd och olycklig.
Det doftar av vildmossa och våt bark.

JEAN SIBELIUS (1889)

Moderato



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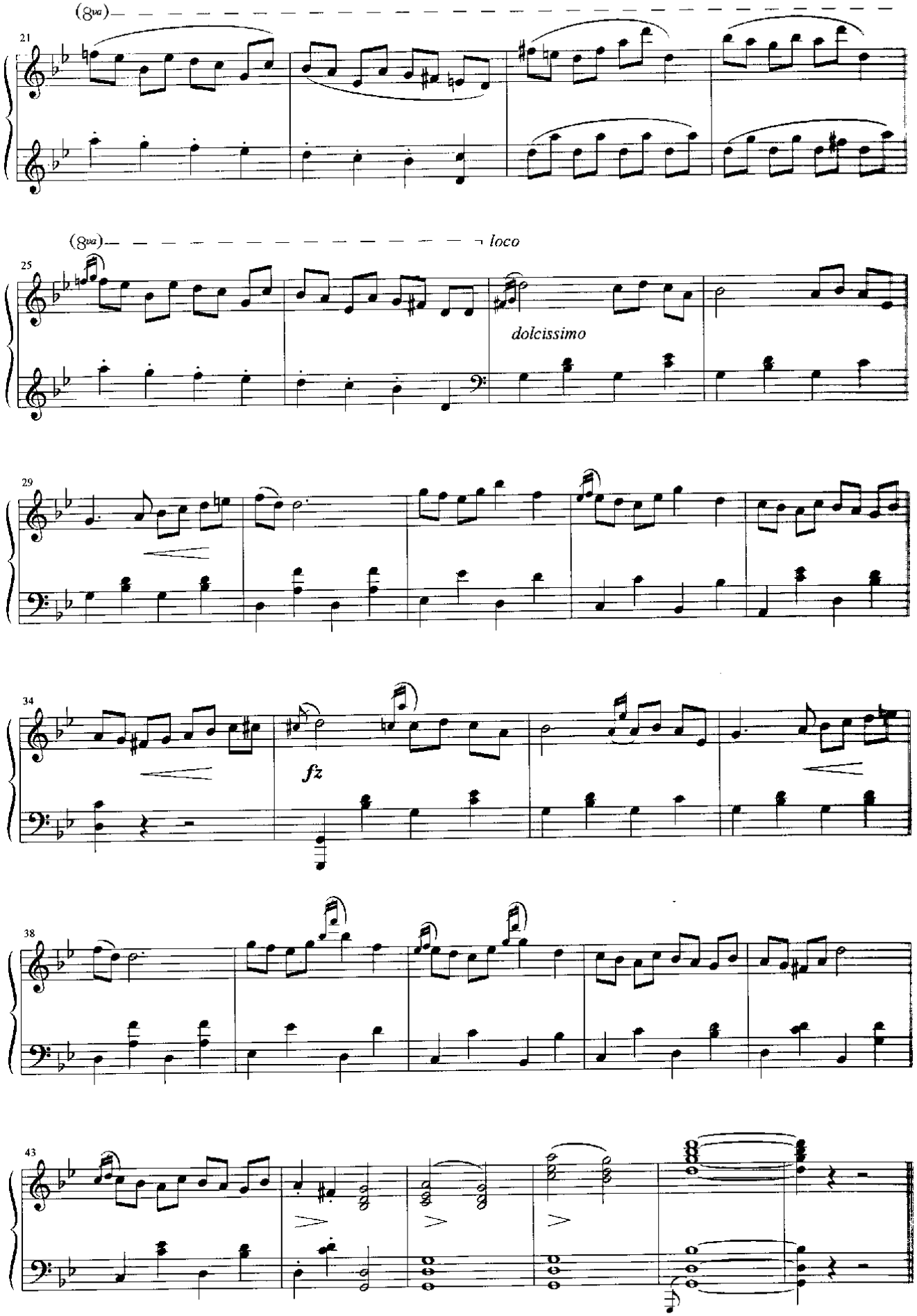
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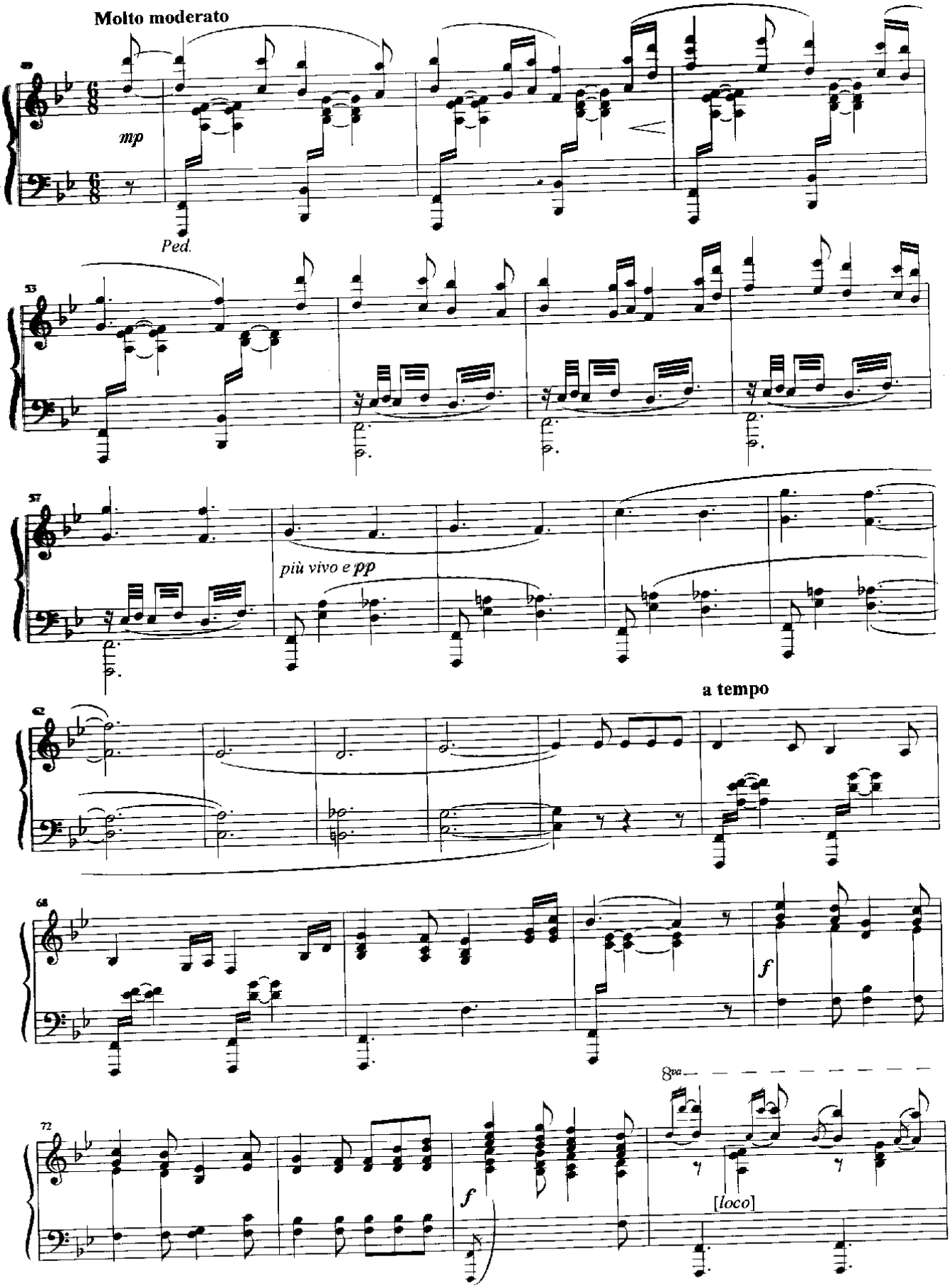
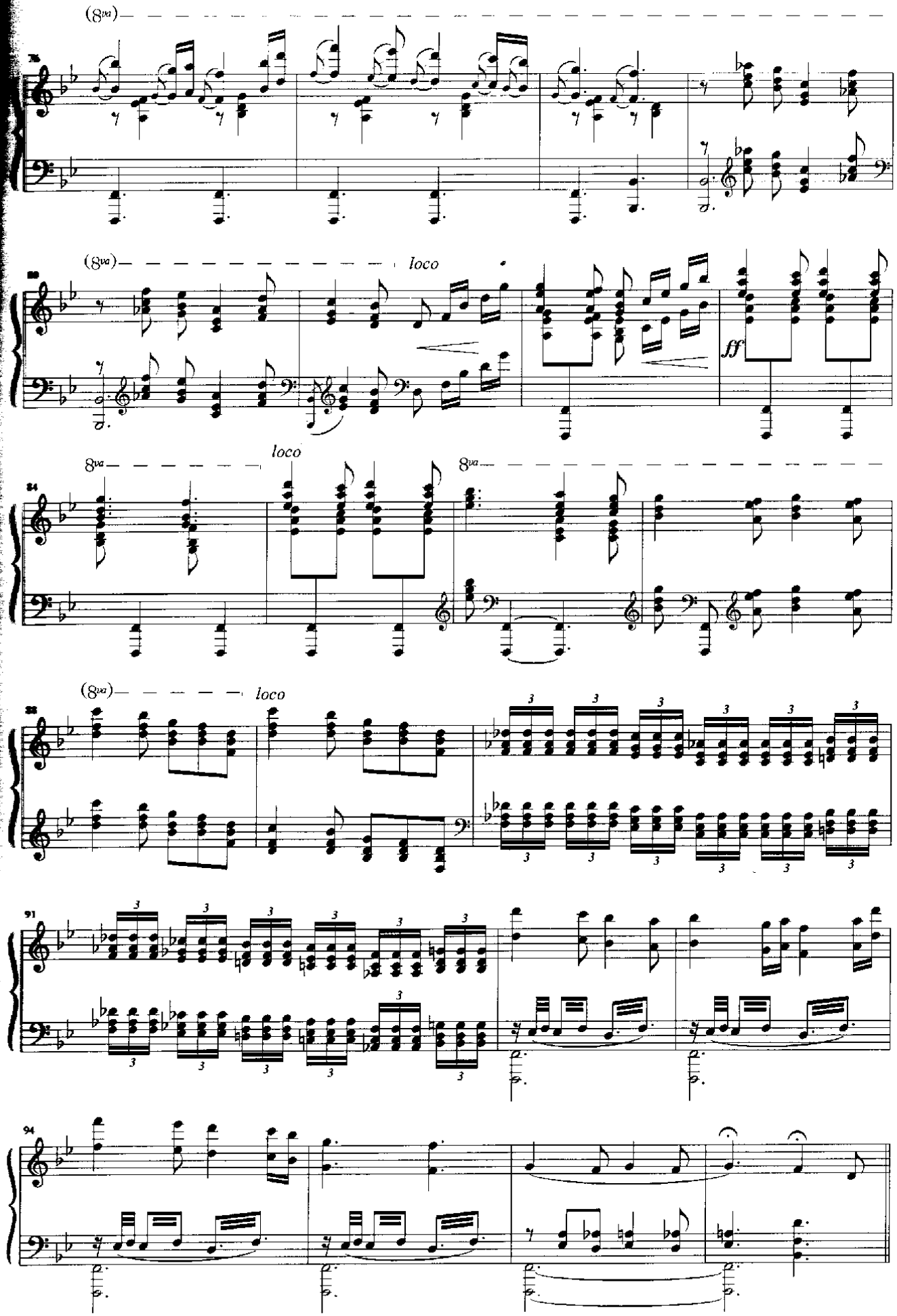
***Flarestan** kommer till en fors, vars vågryggar, under det han **betraktar** dem, förvandlas till vattennymfer. Det doftar av neckrosor.*

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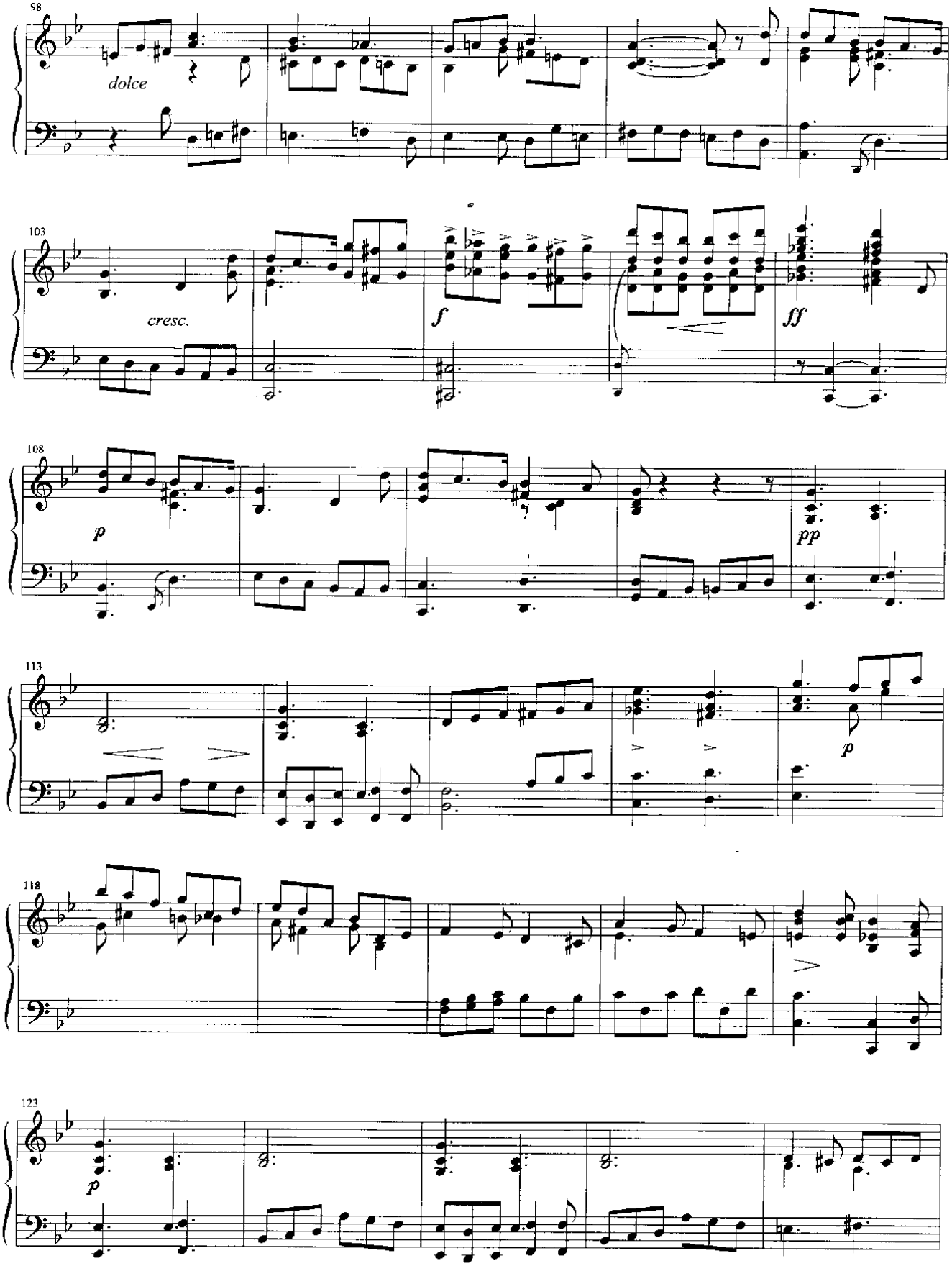
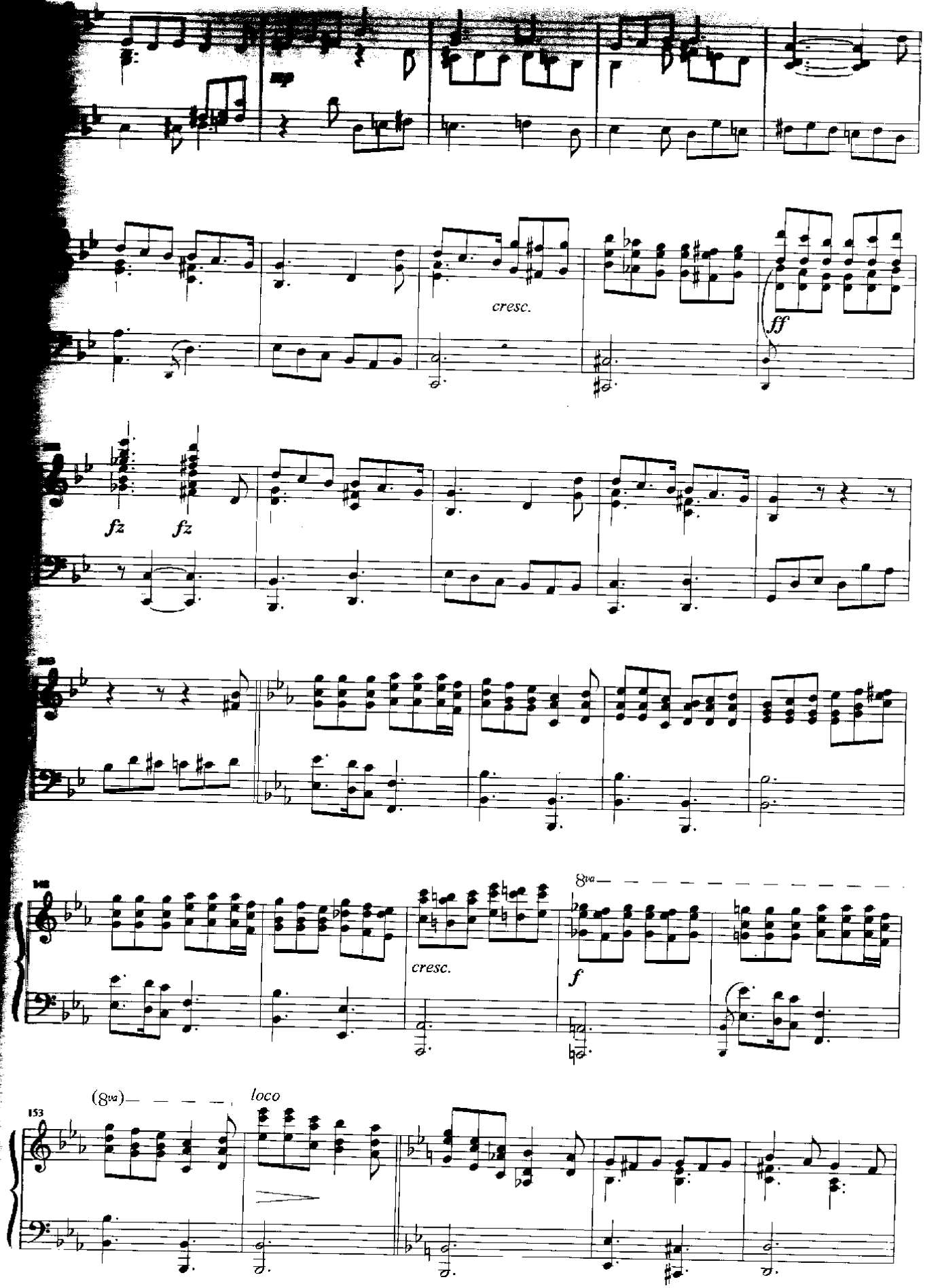
En av vattennymferna har våta, svarta ögon och guldgult hår. Florestan förälskar sig i henne.

Andante

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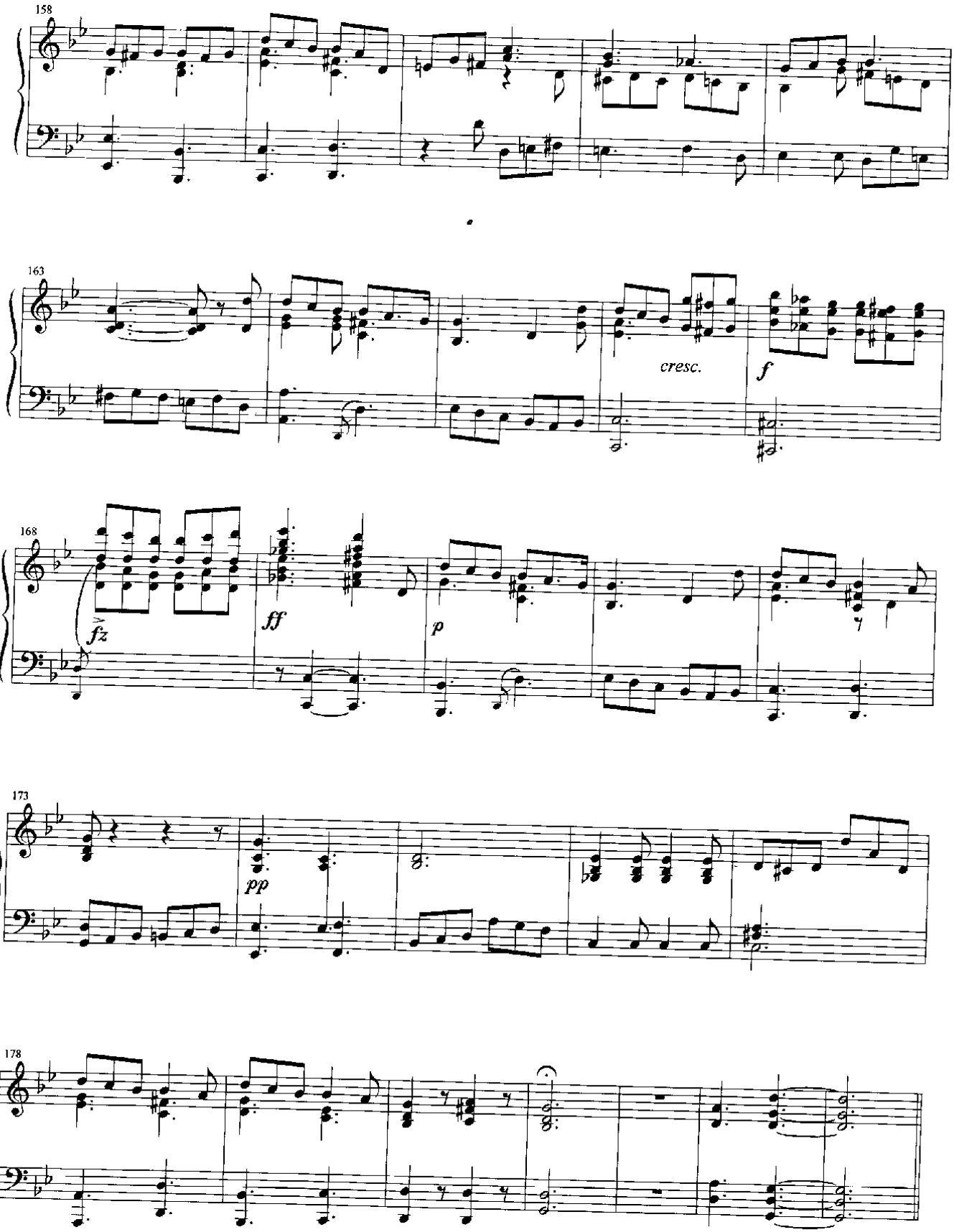
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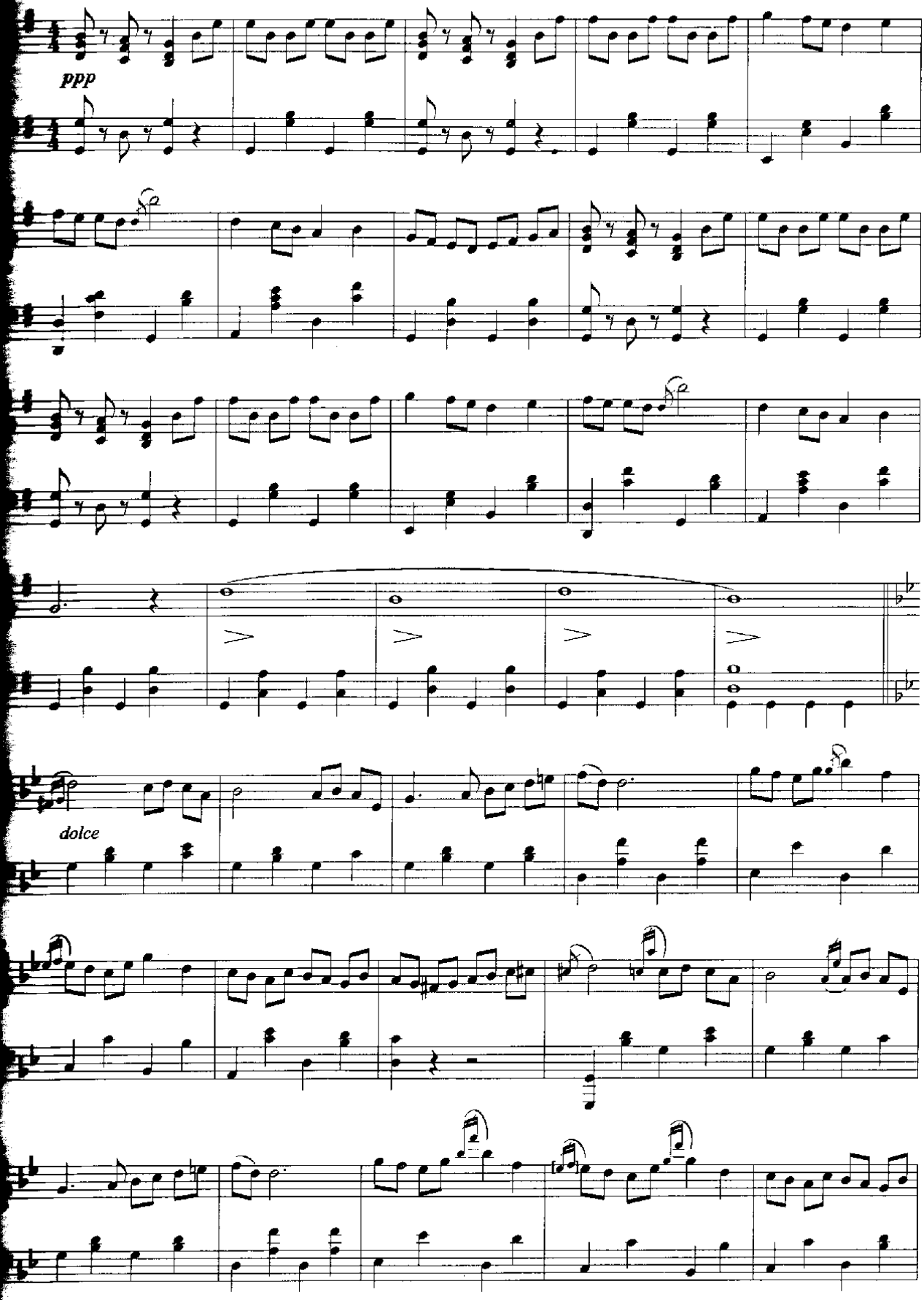
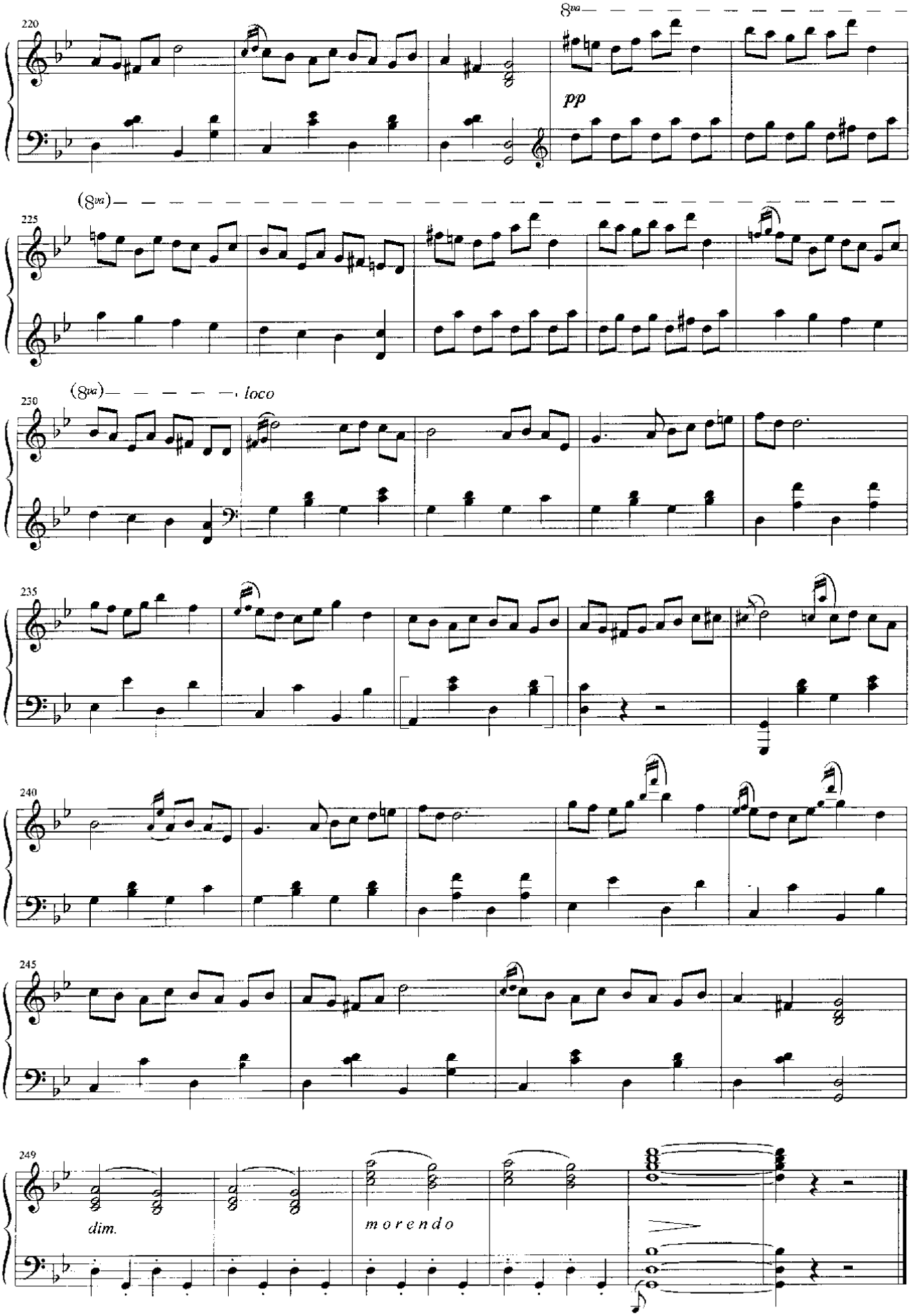
[illegible] försöker locka henne till sig, men hon försvinner.
[illegible]nd och olycklig återvänder Florestan genom skogen.

Tempo I

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