“All Quiet Along the Potomac”

words by Ethel Lynn Beers (1827 – 1879)

music by Sheena Phillips

for women's chorus (SSAA), piano and optional percussion
(castanets, wood block, drum set)

Beers’ poem satirizes a news report following one of the battles of the Civil War, which described the situation (stereotypically) as “all quiet”. A small addendum mentioned the death of a single picket (a soldier on watch, usually outside the main camp). Beers brings back to life the unfortunate picket, and portrays the great loss sustained by him and his family, even if it was only a small incident in the context of the war as a whole. The poem was first published in *Harper’s Weekly* on November 30, 1861.

The piece also incorporates the chorus of the song *John Brown’s Body*, a popular marching song on the Union side during the Civil War.

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perusal score
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“All quiet along the Potomac”

"All quiet along the Potomac," they say,
"Except now and then a stray picket
Is shot, as he walks on his beat, to and fro,
By a rifleman hid in the thicket.

'T is nothing—a private or two, now and then,
Will not count in the news of the battle;
Not an officer lost—only one of the men,
Moaning out, all alone, the death rattle."

All quiet along the Potomac tonight,
Where the soldiers lie peacefully dreaming;
Their tents in the rays of the clear autumn moon,
Or the light of the watch-fires, are gleaming.

There's only the sound of the lone sentry's tread
As he tramps from the rock to the fountain,
And he thinks of the two in the low trundle-bed,
Far away in the cot on the mountain.

His musket falls slack; his face, dark and grim,
Grows gentle with memories tender,
As he mutters a prayer for the children asleep,
For their mother, may Heaven defend her!

The moon seems to shine just as brightly as then,
That night when the love yet unspoken
Leaped up to his lips: when low, murmured vows
Were pledged to be ever unbroken;

Then drawing his sleeve roughly over his eyes,
He dashes off tears that are welling,
And gathers his gun closer up to its place,
So to keep down the heart that is swelling.

Now he passes the fountain, the blasted pine tree,
The footstep is lagging and weary;
Yet onward he goes, through the broad belt of light,
Toward the shade of the forest so dreary.

Hark! was it the night wind that rustled the leaves?
Was it moonlight so wondrously flashing?
It looked like a rifle—"Ha! Mary, good-by!"
And the life-blood is ebbing and plashing.

All quiet along the Potomac to-night,
No sound save the rush of the river;
While soft falls the dew on the face of the dead.
The picket's off duty forever.

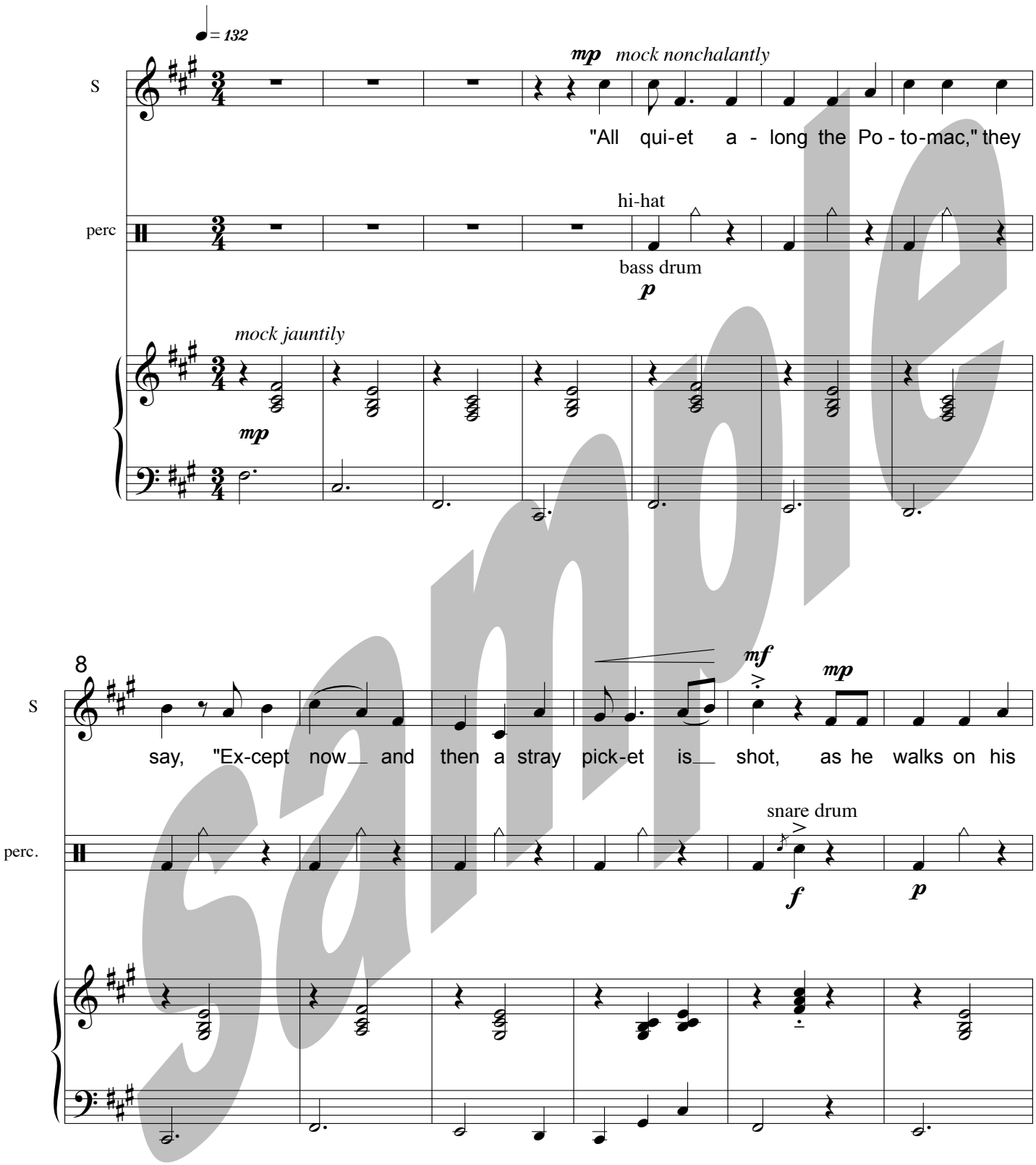
Ethel Lynn Beers (slightly adapted from the original)

The piece also incorporates the chorus of the popular marching song *John Brown’s Body*

"All Quiet Along the Potomac Tonight"

Ethel Lynn Beers

Sheena Phillips



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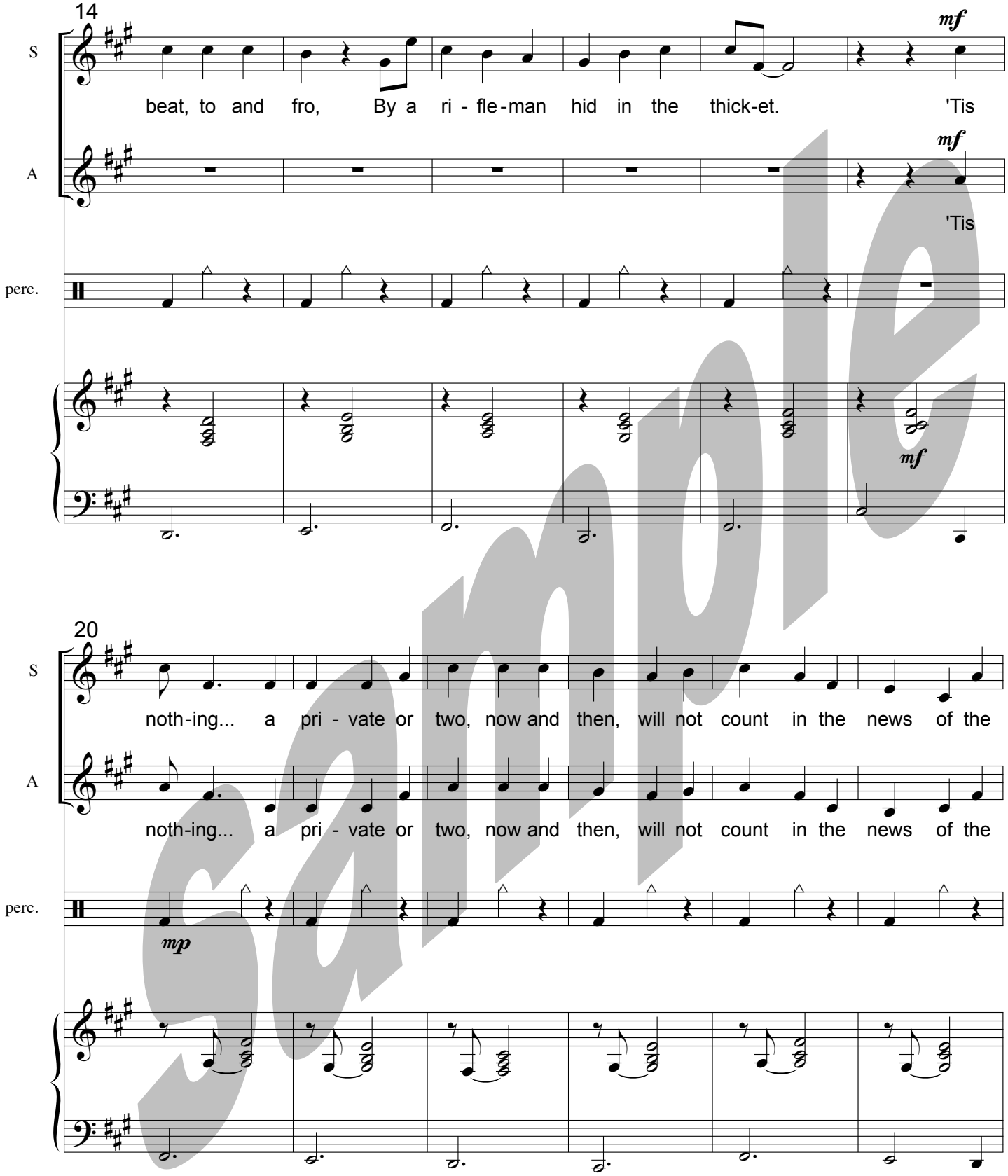

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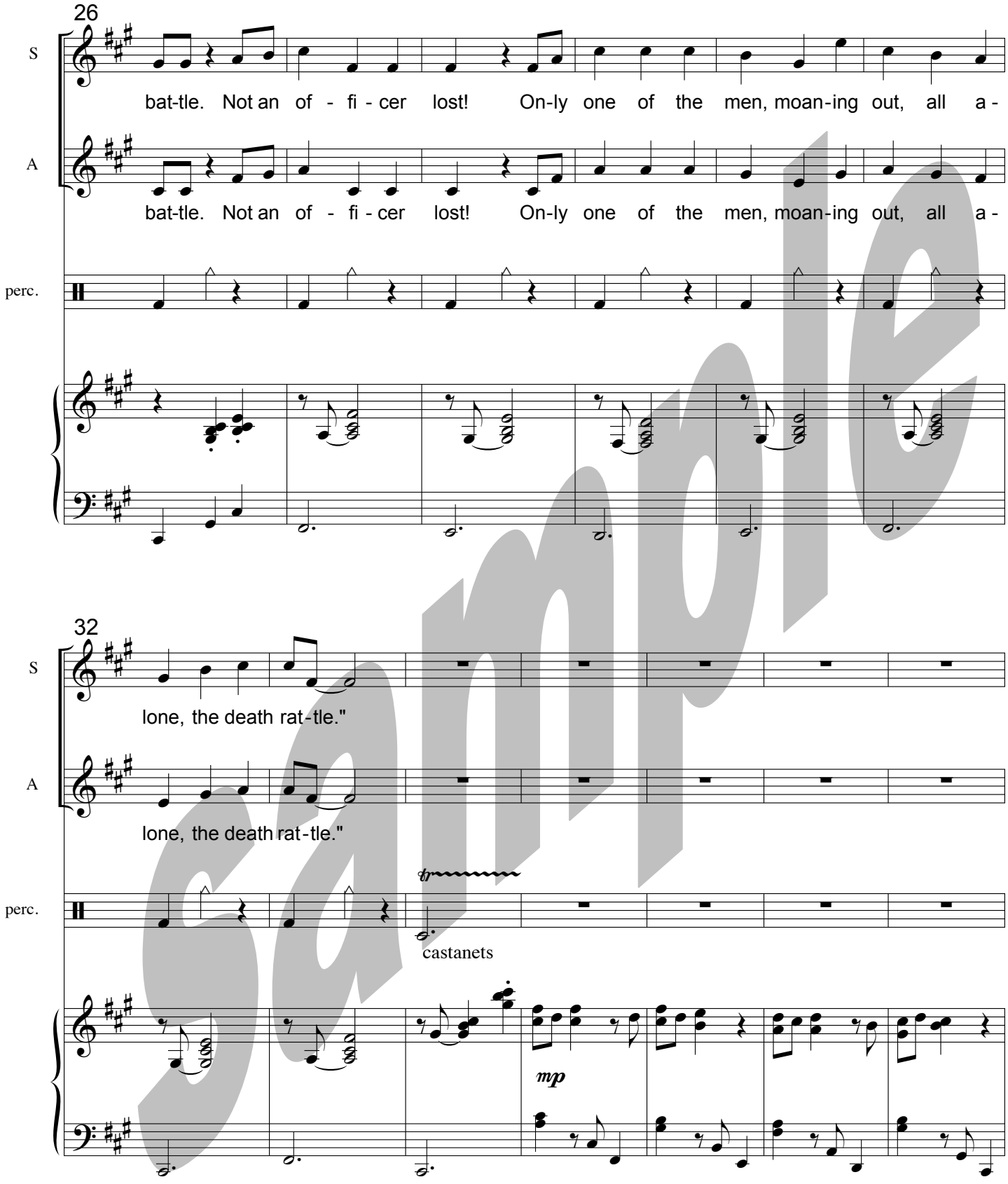

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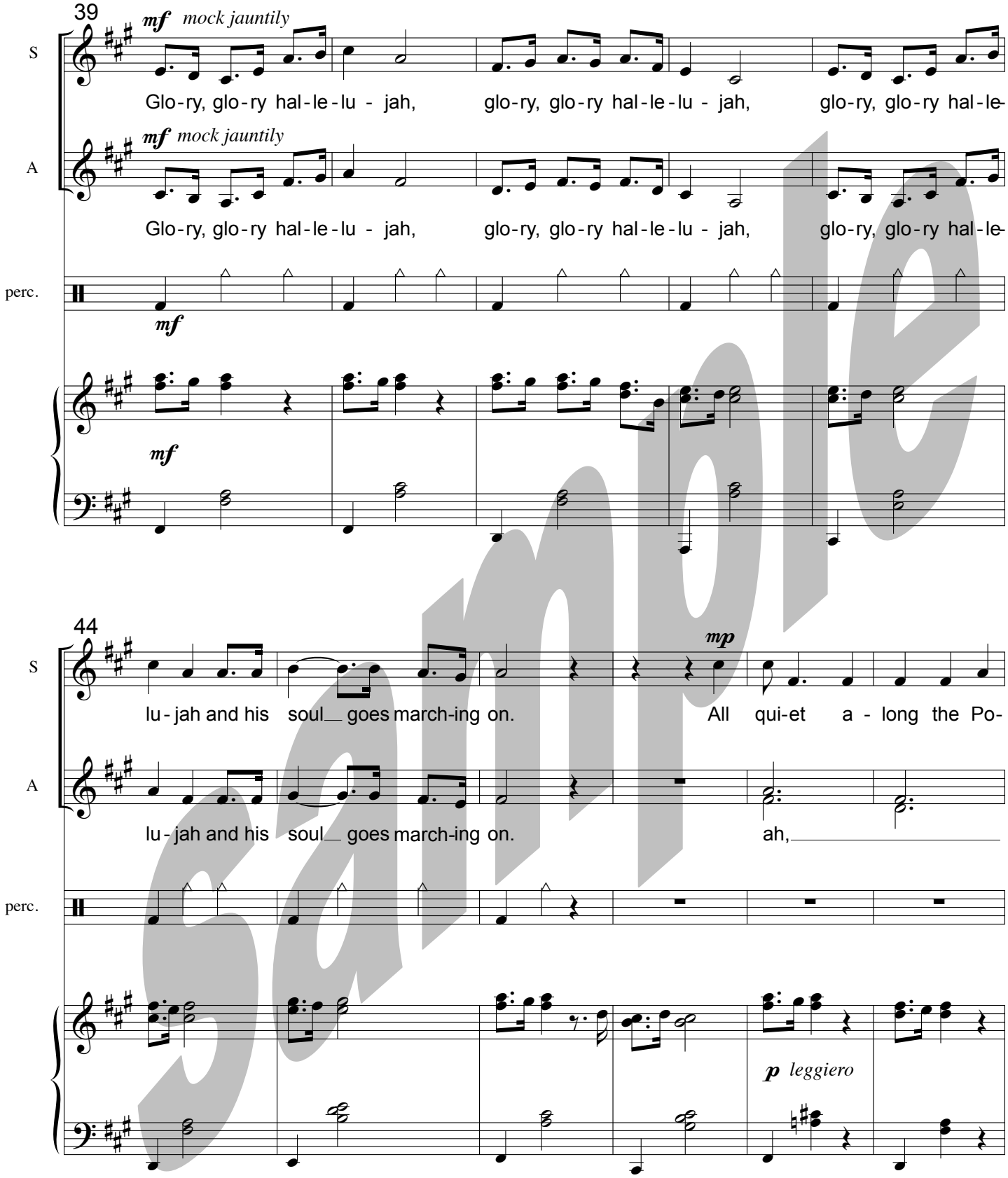
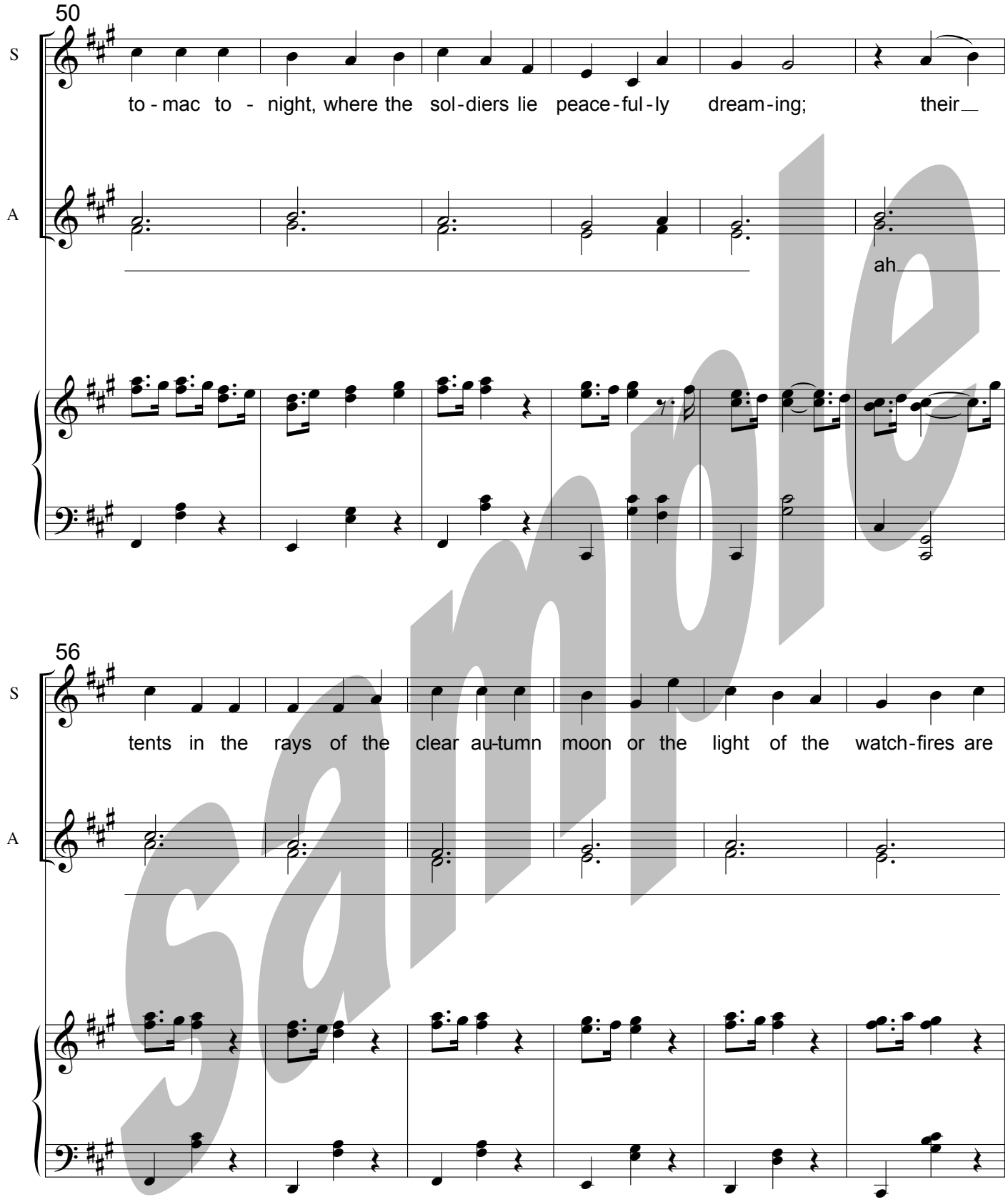

39
mf mock jauntily
S
Glo-ry, glo-ry hal-le-lu - jah, glo-ry, glo-ry hal-le-lu - jah, glo-ry, glo-ry hal-le-
mf mock jauntily
A
Glo-ry, glo-ry hal-le-lu - jah, glo-ry, glo-ry hal-le-lu - jah, glo-ry, glo-ry hal-le-
perc.
mf
mf
44
mp
S
lu-jah and his soul goes march-ing on. All qui-et a - long the Po-
A
lu-jah and his soul goes march-ing on. ah,
perc.
p leggiero

sample



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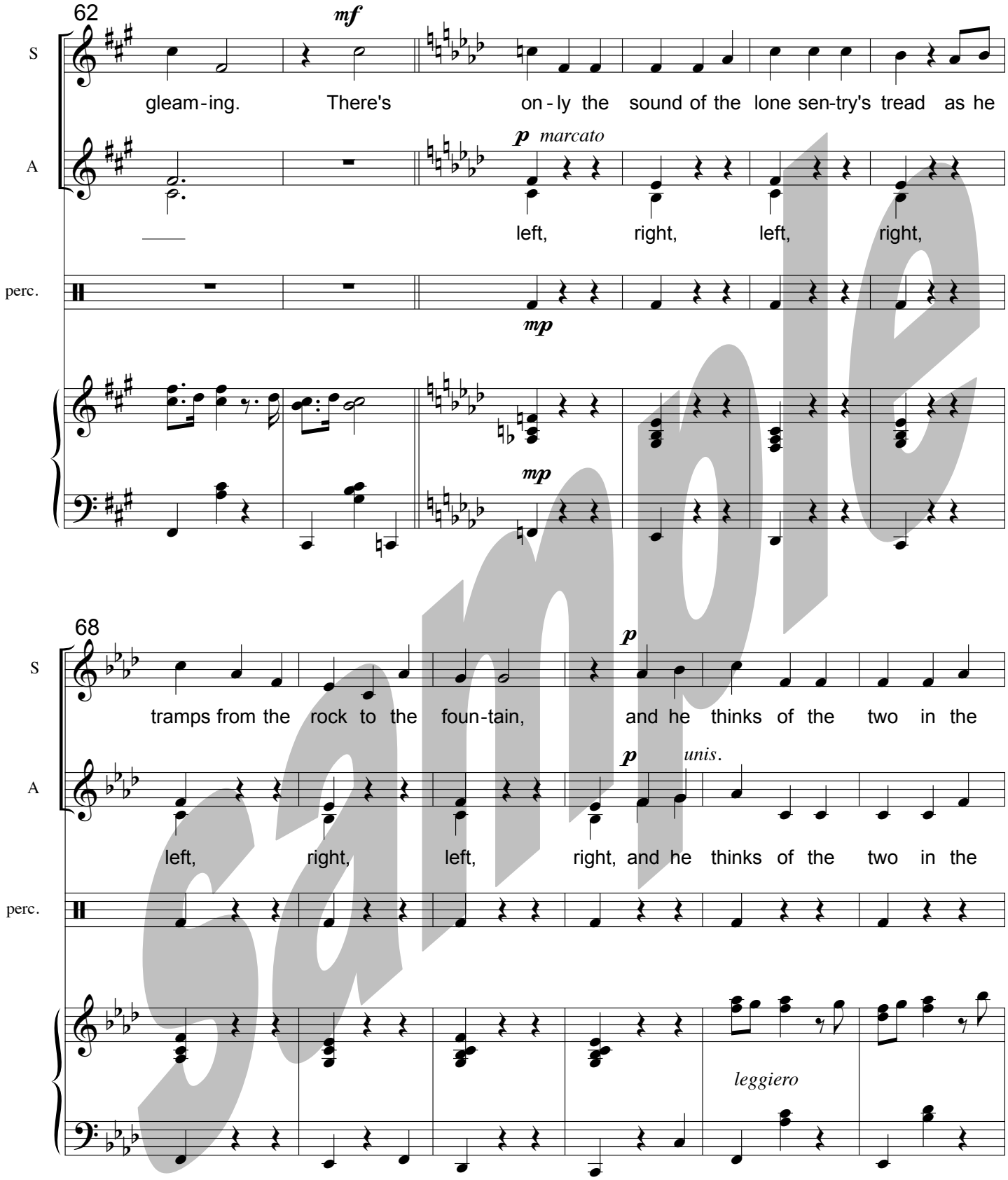

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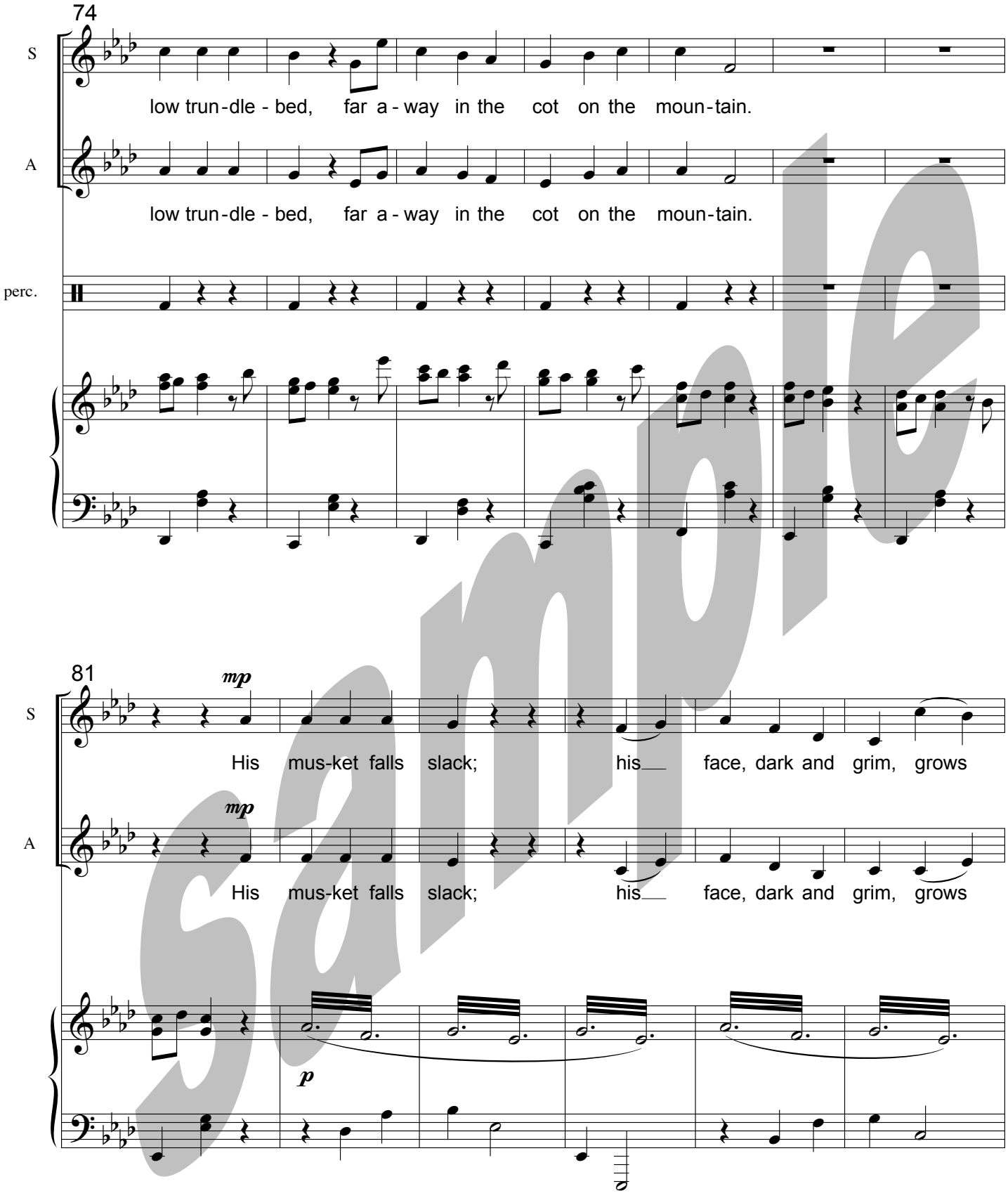

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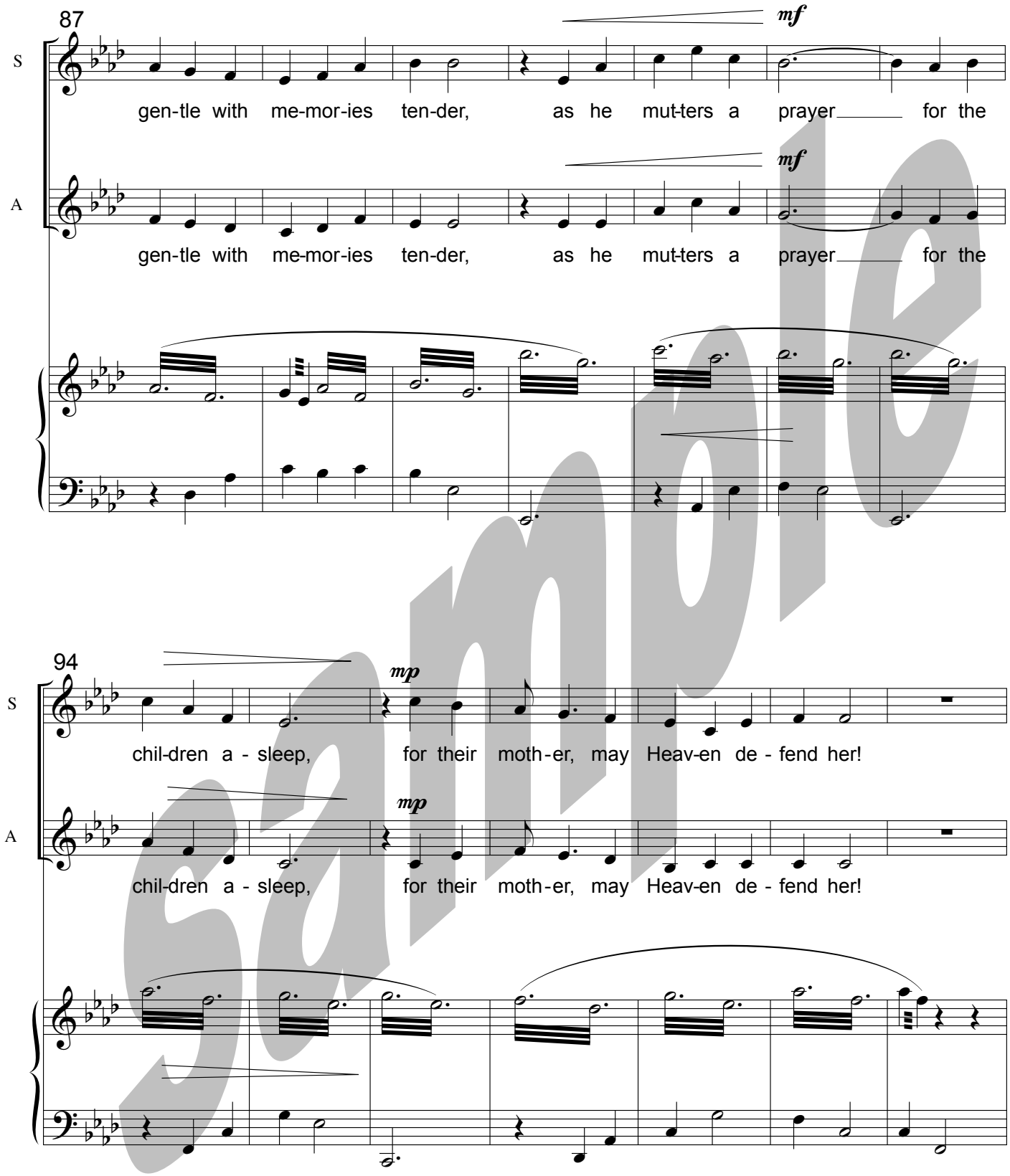

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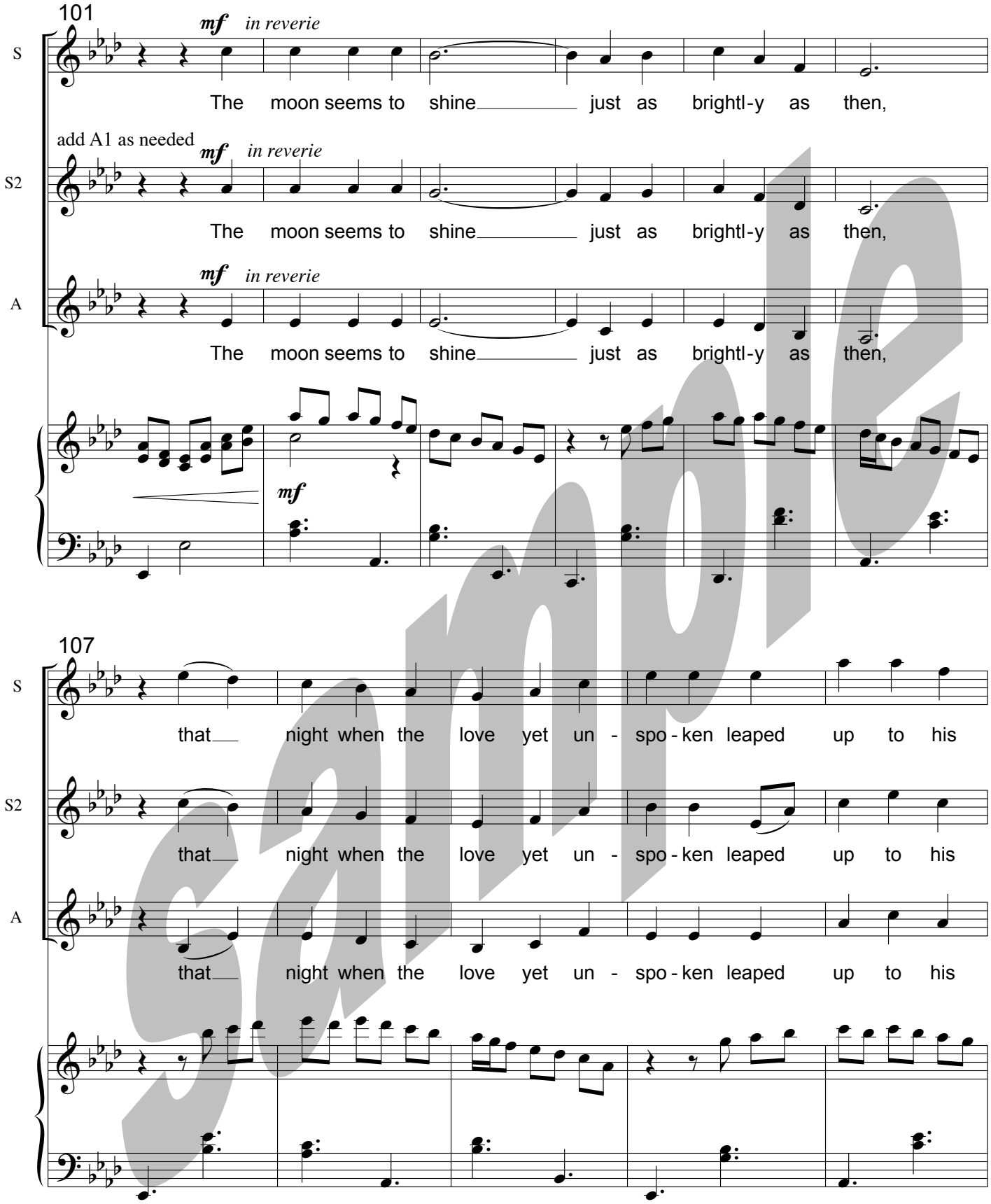

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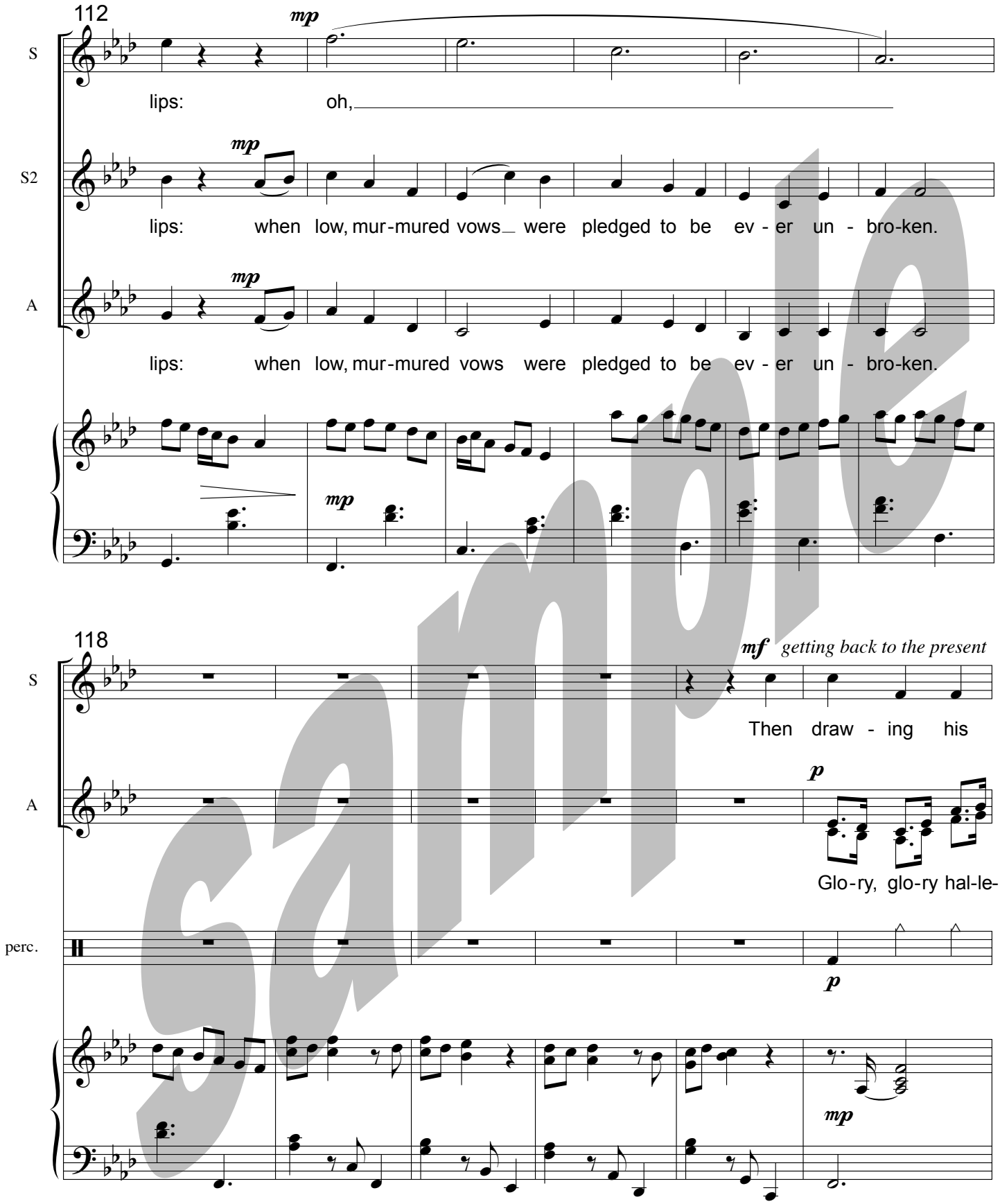

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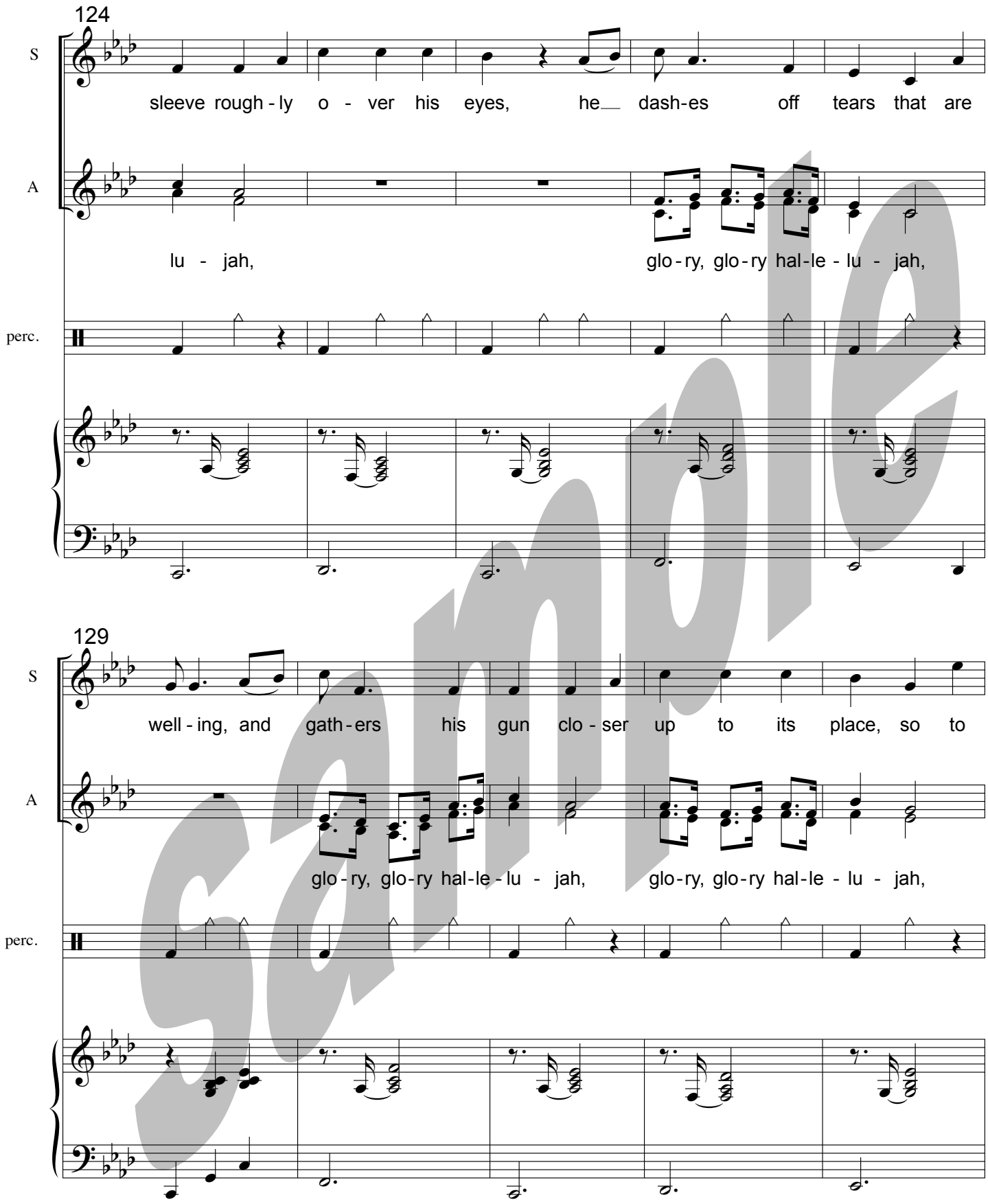

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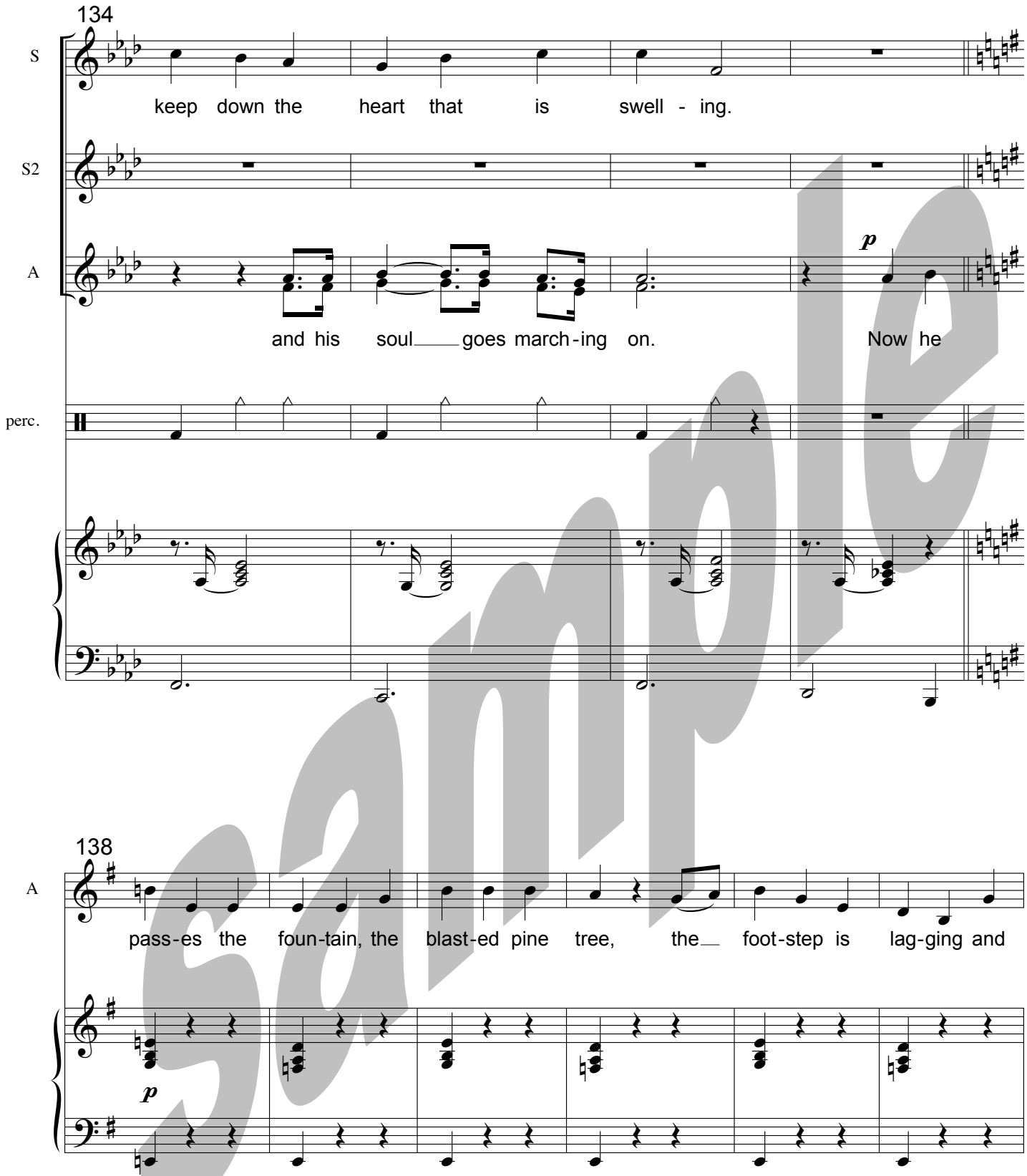

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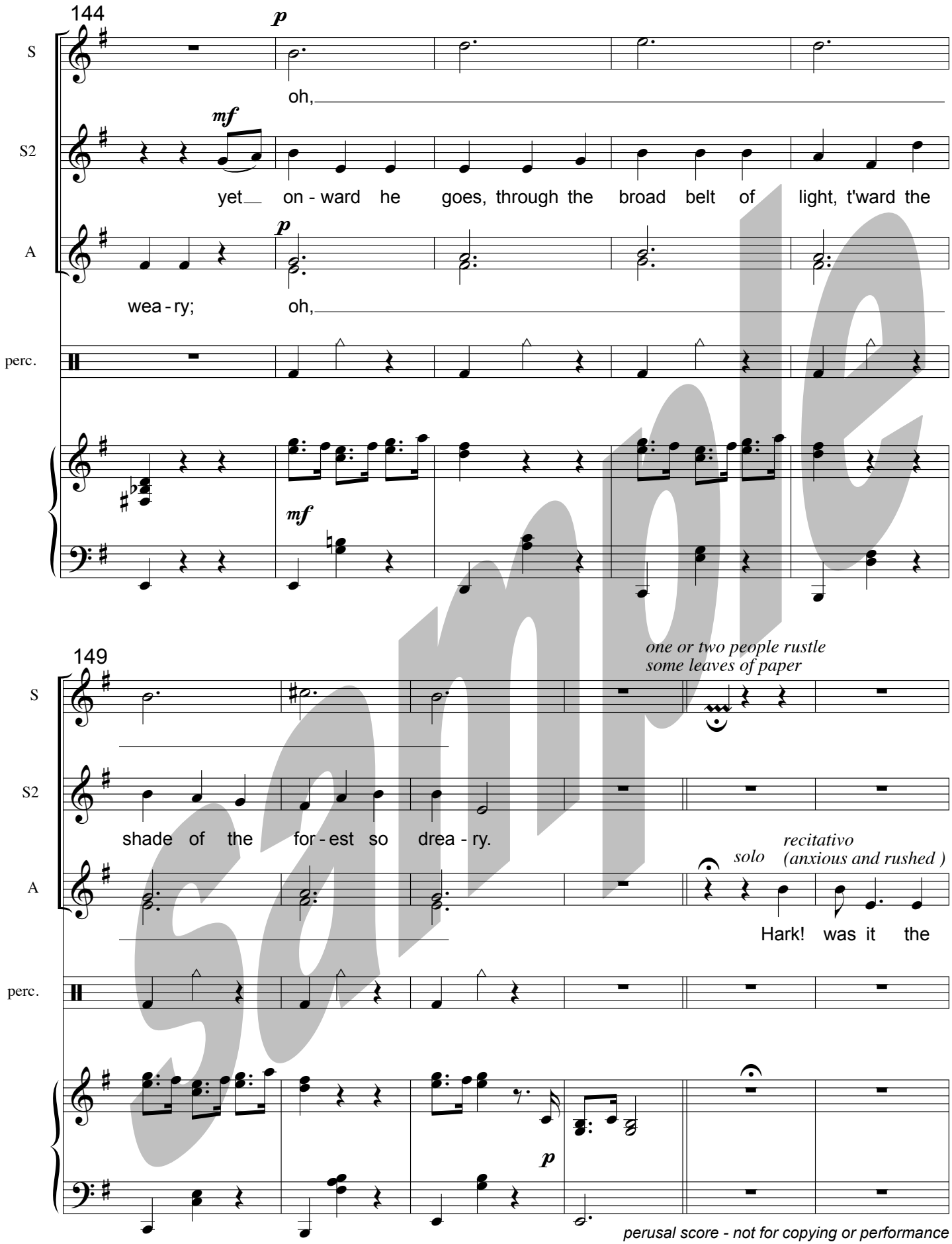

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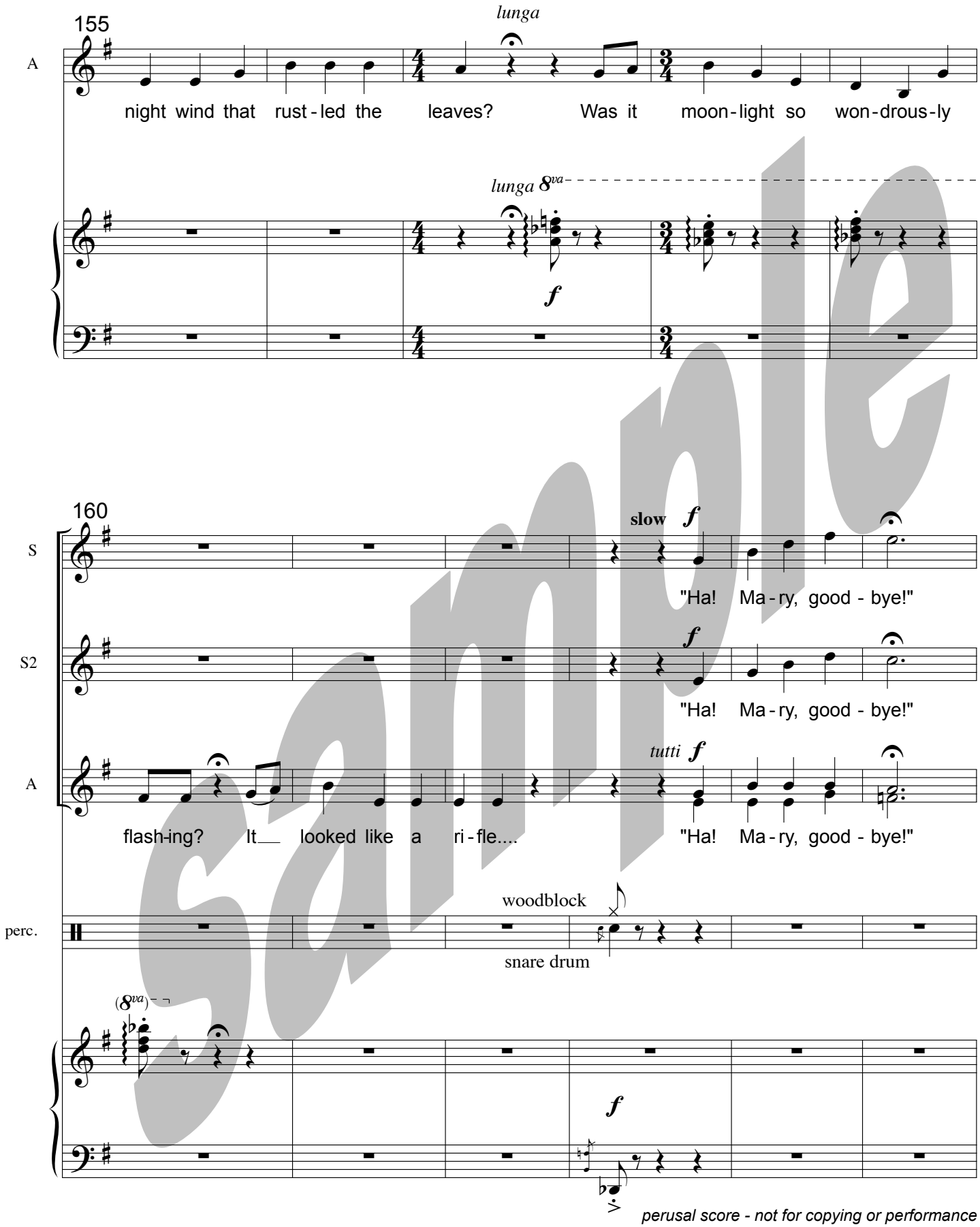

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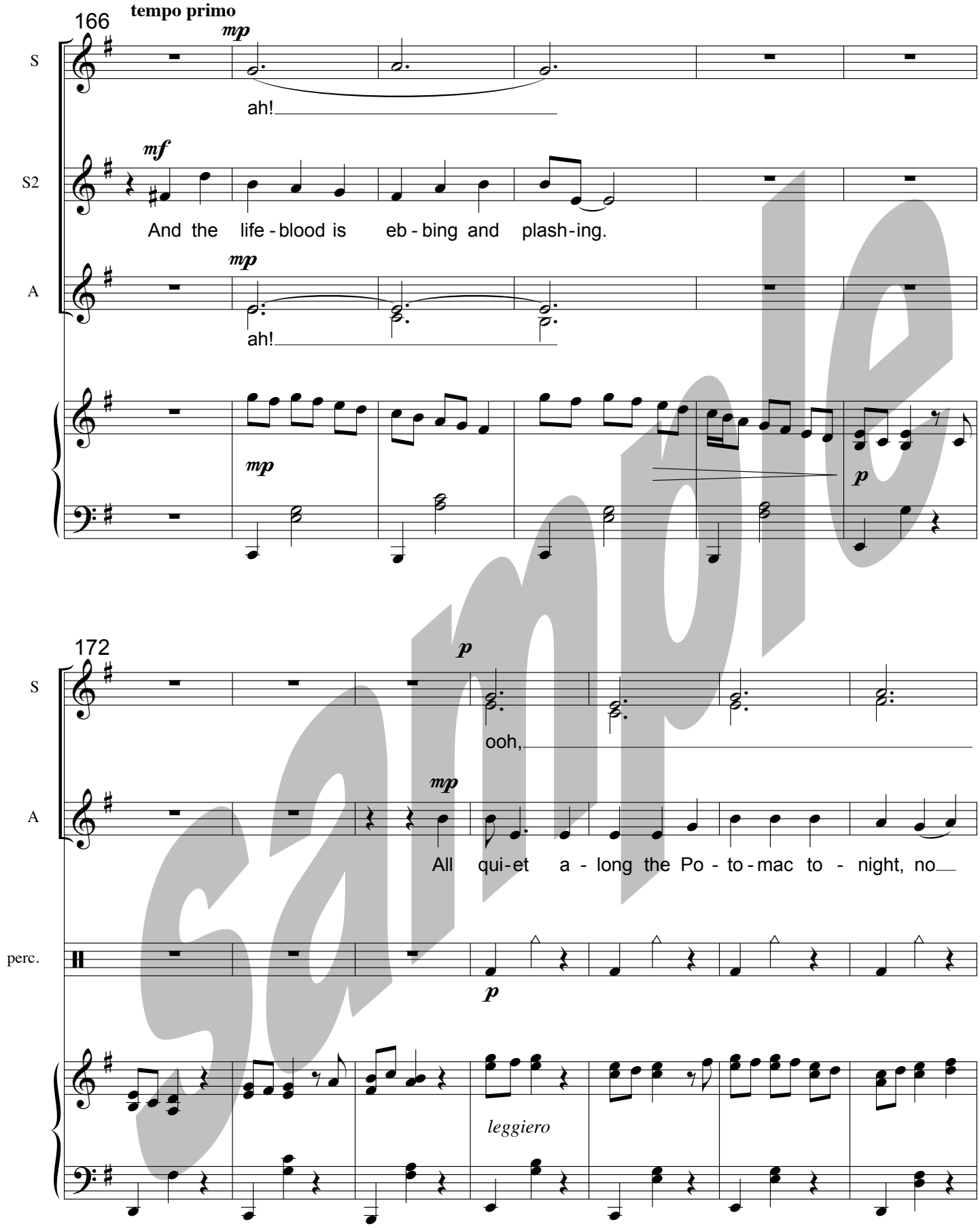

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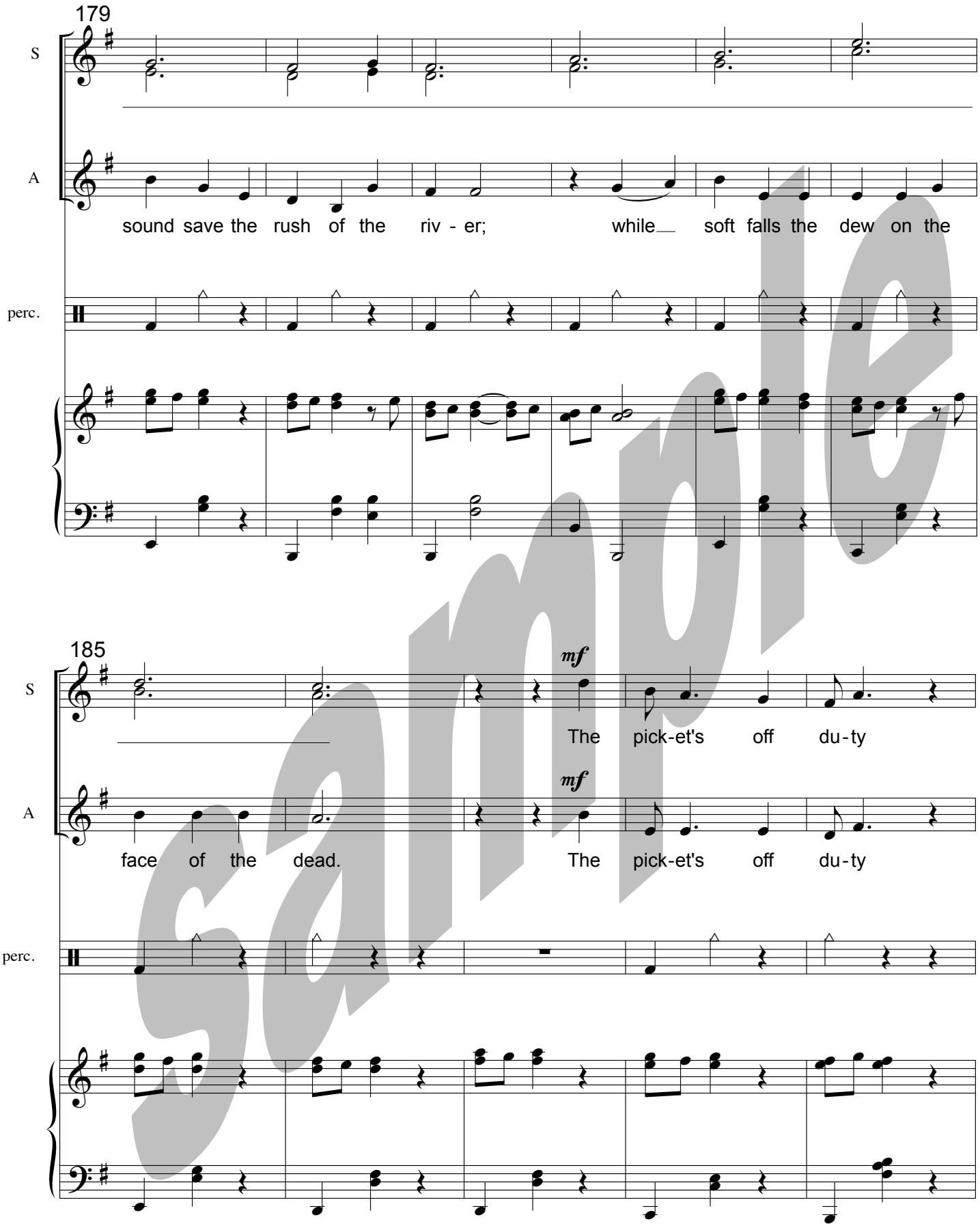

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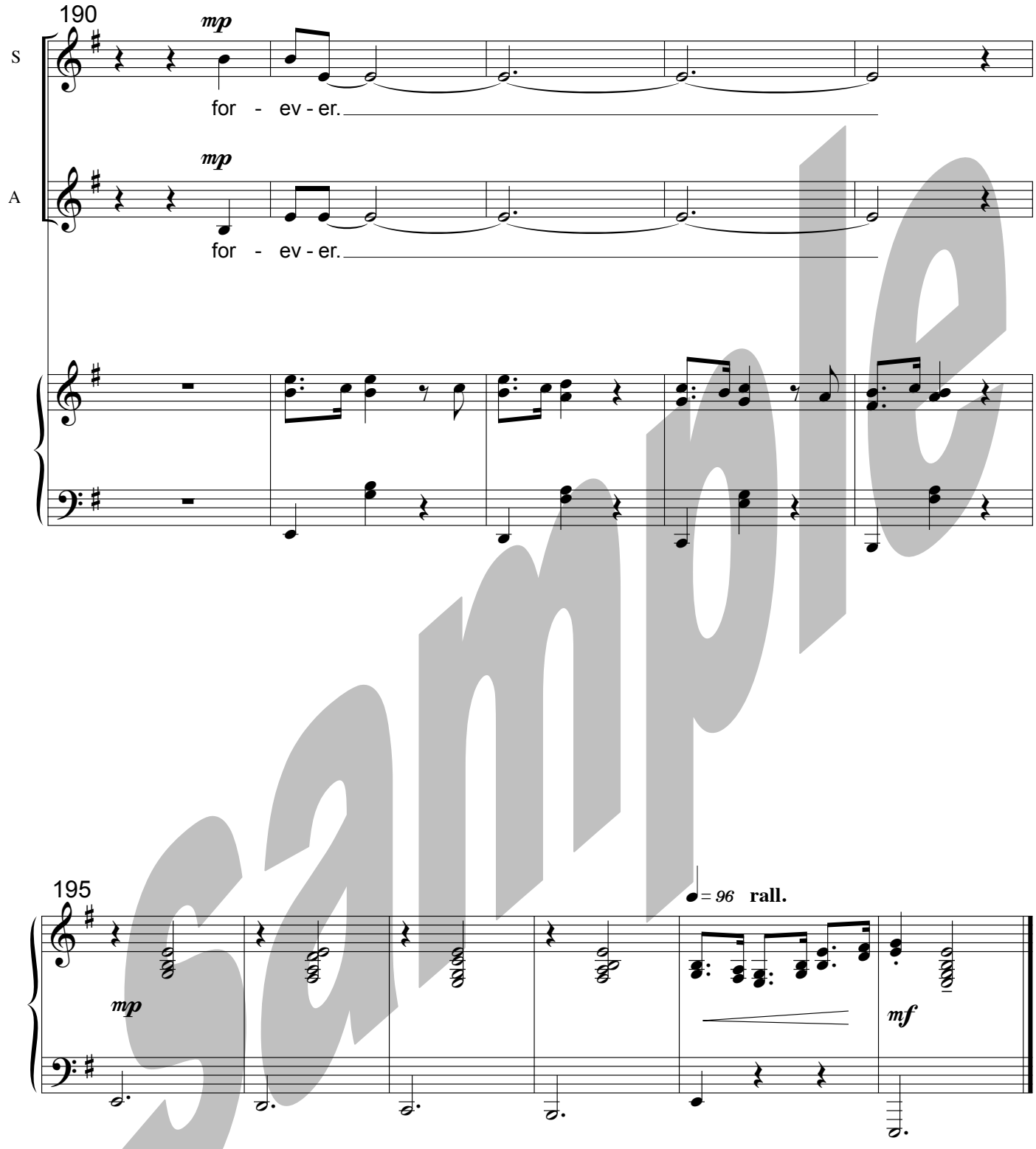

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