Albert King & Stevie Ray Vaughan "(They Call It) Stormy Monday"

By Dave Rubin

In a blues dream come true, Albert King and Stevie Ray Vaughan participated in a recorded jam session in late 1983. Occurring shortly after Stevie's epochal stint with glam-rocker David Bowie on "Let's Dance," it ended up being the only time that the old and new masters combined their massive talents for posterity. "(They Call It) Stormy Monday," the T-Bone Walker slow-blues classic, gave both string-benders the chance to show their "Albert King licks." Along with Buddy Guy and Lonnie Mack, Albert was Stevie's biggest influence. Though King was sensitive to other guitarists copping his style, Stevie was so adept at it that Albert had no choice other than to smile benevolently on his prize protégé.

ALBERT KING'S TUNING

According to Steve Cropper (who checked it out firsthand) and recorded evidence, Albert King employed a highly unusual and idiosyncratic tuning. From low to high it ran C (yeow)– B–E–F♯–B–E. The advantages for him were many, including the ability to access choice blues scale notes in one position under his index finger, such as bending to the ♭3rd or major 3rd from the major 2nd (B in the key of A, for instance). In the interest of practicality, however, Albert's part has been notated in standard tuning. As Stevie ably demonstrated, it is entirely possible to duplicate King Albert's licks in standard tuning—you just have to work harder!

THE FORM

Albert and Stevie's version of "Stormy Monday" is a deconstructed version of Bobby "Blue" Bland's 1961 classic, slow 12-bar blues with standard I–IV–V changes. Albert handles all the vocals and the fills in verses 1, 2, and 4. Stevie fills in verse 3, which allows him to segue smartly into his solo. Remarkably, even his Strat sounds like Albert's "Lucy" (Gibson Flying V). Dig that both "kings of the blues" accompany each other with sliding 6th/9th chords, triple-stop dominant 7th voicings, and tasty single-note lines.

THE "ALBERT KING BOX"

The "Velvet Bulldozer" found a home in the extension position of the basic blues scale after he signed with Stax Records in 1966. He used it so extensively that guitarists have come to refer to it as the "Albert King box" [**Fig. 1**]. As opposed to the root position scale [**Fig. 2**], it does not lend itself to speedy runs, but does afford opportunities for exuberant string bending, especially on strings 1 and 2.

Be aware that both men employ the root and extension positions of the A blues scale. In addition, they also include the major 3rd (C♯) and bend to all kinds of other cool scale degrees (♭5ths, 6ths, ♭9ths, 9ths). Most significantly, they bend to the "true blue notes" (in between the ♭3rd and major 3rd and the ♭7th and major 7th) and amazing quarter-step tones throughout. The fact that Albert played the guitar upside down gave him added leverage and incentive to bend, as he pulled down on the strings, instead of pushing up.

GUITAR SOLO 1(STEVIE)

One would have to wonder if, deep down inside, Albert was really pleased to hear another guitarist ape his style so faithfully. At any rate, he had no choice in the matter, as Stevie was an expert. Note the descending sequence in measure 4 of the second solo chorus where he moves chromatically from the 4th (D), 3rd (C♯), ♭3rd (C), and 9th (B) while bending and vibratoing, achieving a high degree of musical tension and anticipation. Good blues is all about tension and resolution.

GUITAR SOLO 2 (ALBERT, STEVIE, ALBERT)

Albert takes one smoldering chorus before turning the reins over to Stevie again. He tosses out classic lick on top of classic lick, including a dandy on beat 1 in measure 9 with the F♯ (9th), B (5th), and D (♭7th, bent 1½ steps to the ♭9th!) notes.

His courage bolstered, Stevie steps out with authority for two sensational choruses. Reversing direction from the chromatic concept in his first solo, in measures 8, 9, and 10 of the second chorus he powers his way up from C to D with a variety of time-warping, tension-filled bends before resolving in the turnaround (measures 11 and 12) and handing the solo off to Albert.

Albert deftly takes the handoff and runs smoothly for another 12 bars, repeating the bends that Stevie used and were originally King's province. The baton is passed for the solos, and the symbolic torch to carry on Albert's legacy is passed as well.

Fig. 1

"Albert King box"
(Key of A)

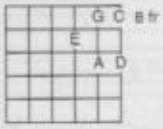
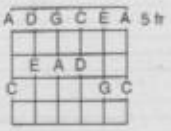


Fig. 2

A Minor Pentatonic



(THEY CALL IT) STORMY MONDAY
(STORMY MONDAY BLUES)
As Recorded by Albert King and Stevie Ray Vaughan
(From the Stax Recording IN SESSION)

The T-Bone Walker Collection (00690132, $19.95) in our Guitar Recorded Versions series features note-for-note transcriptions with tab for this song and 19 more tunes from this wildly influential blues legend. Order by calling 1-800-637-2852, or visiting www.musicdispatch.com.

Words and Music by T-Bone Walker

Transcribed by Adam Perlmutter

Tune down 1/2 step:
(low to high) E♭-A♭-D♭-G♭-B♭-E♭

Intro

Slow Blues ♩. = 60

**A7

*Gtr. 1 (slight dist.)

mf

*Albert King

**Chord symbols reflect basic harmony.

D7 A7

A. K.: Stevie, do you remember

D7

how we used to do "Stormy Monday"?

S. R. V.: I got you.

A7

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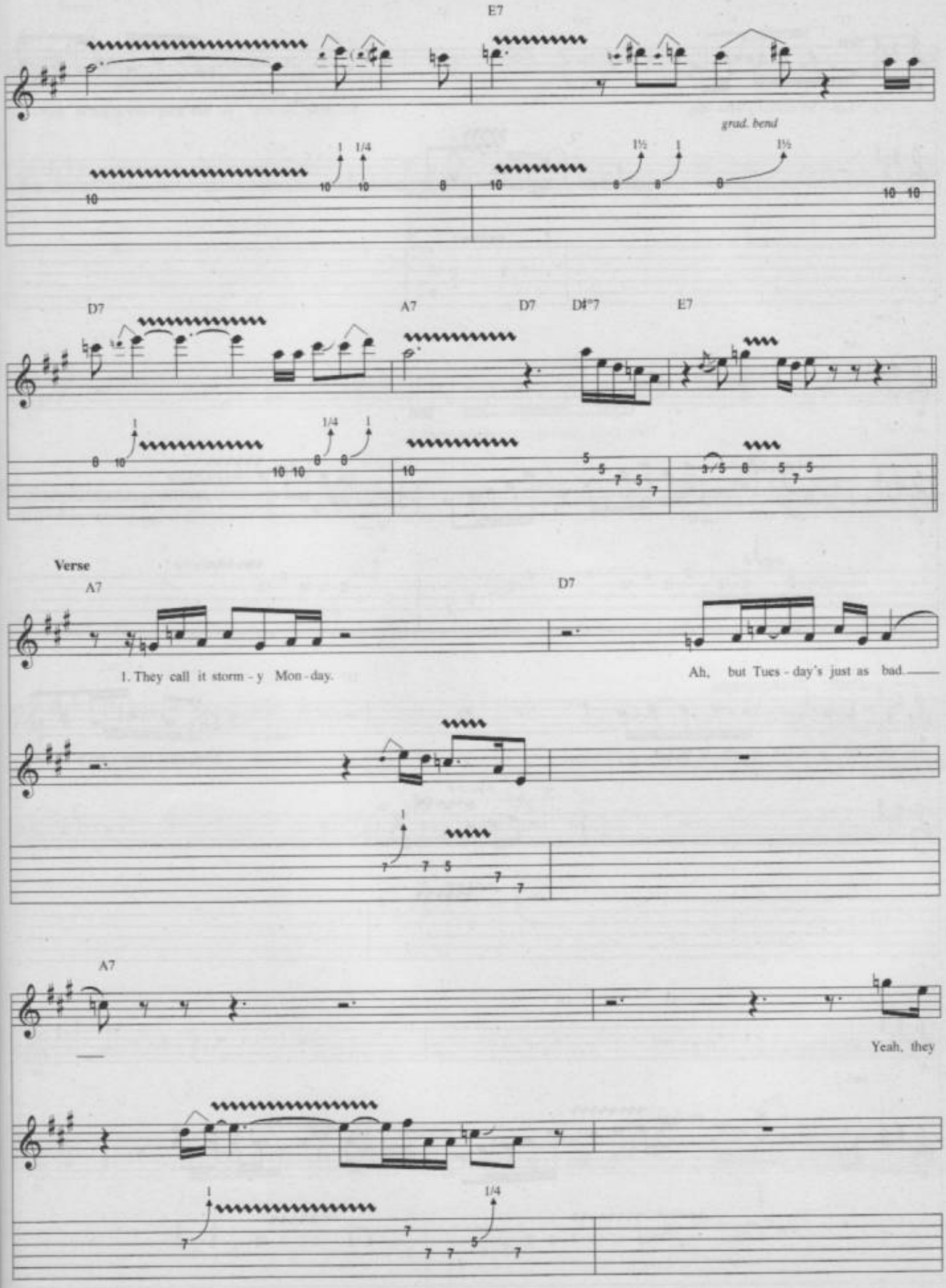

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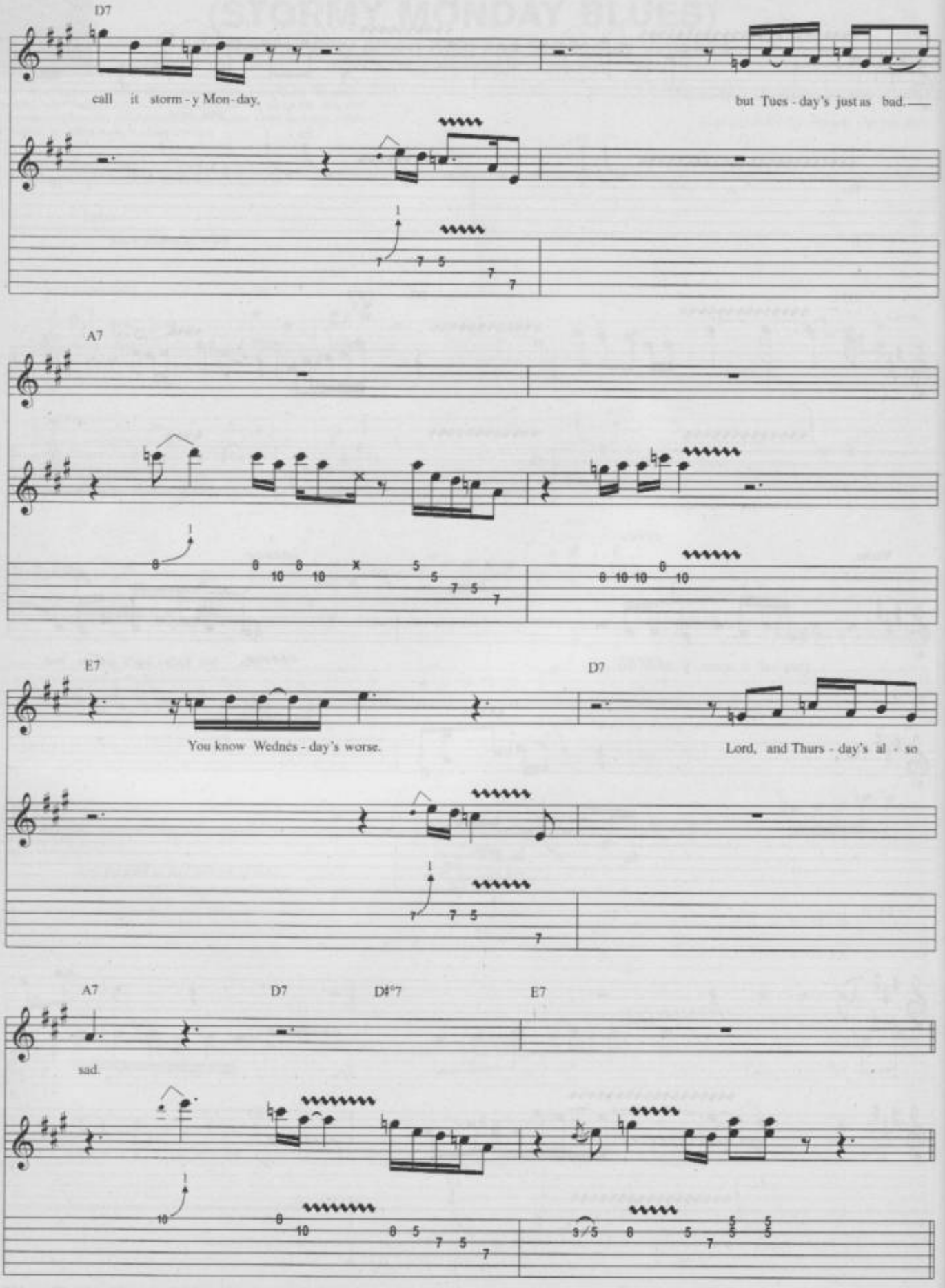

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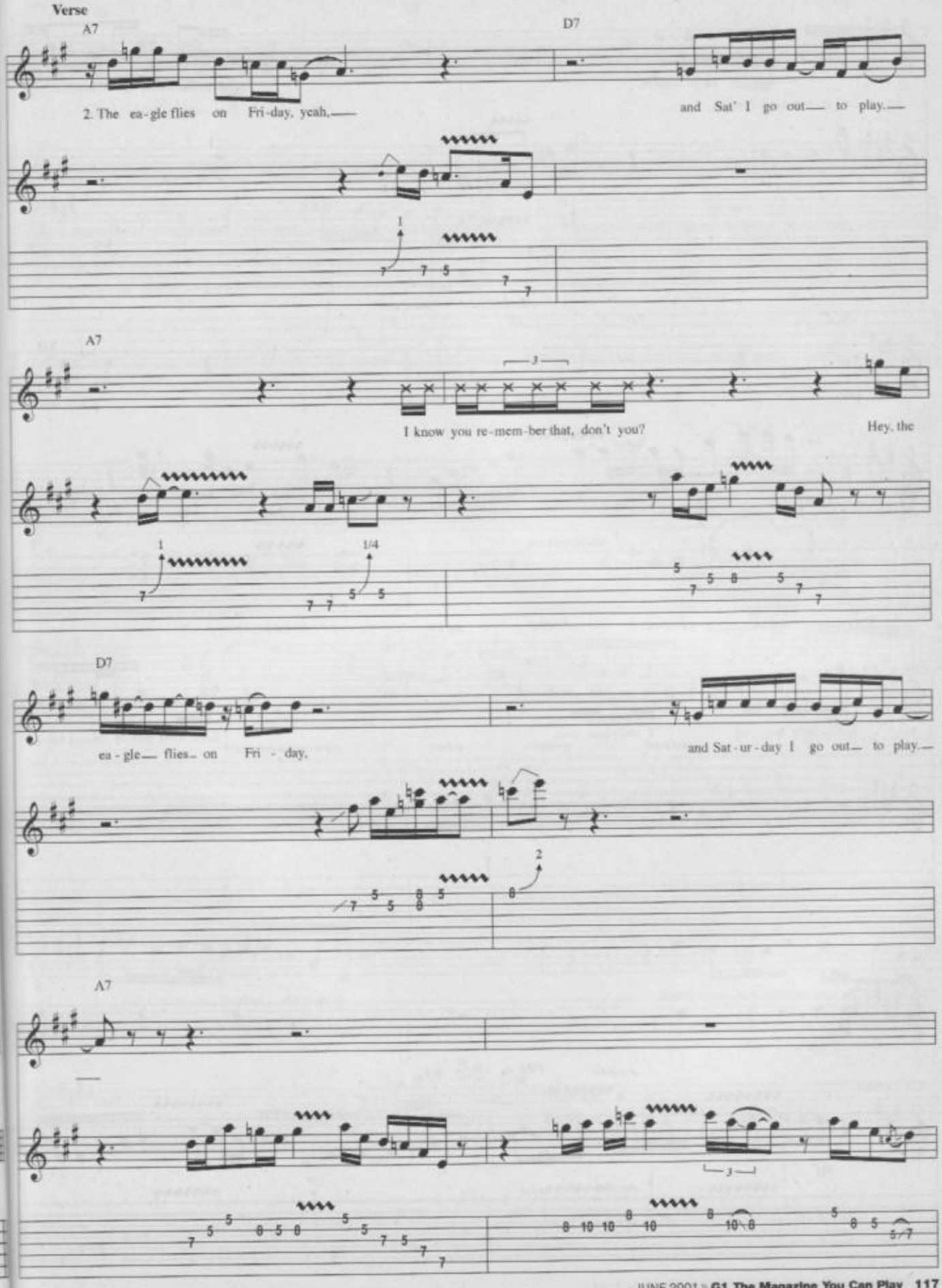

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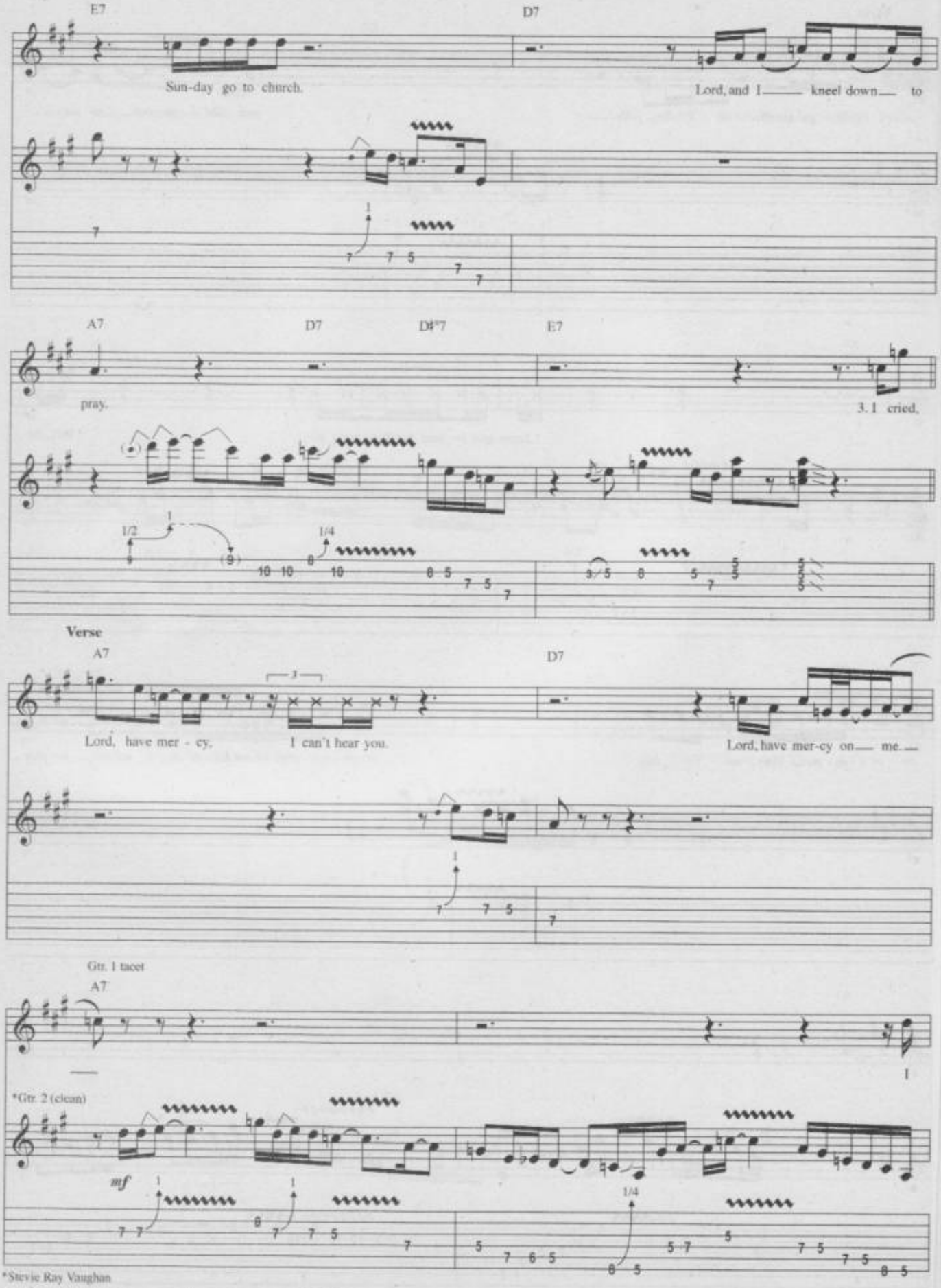

*Stevie Ray Vaughan

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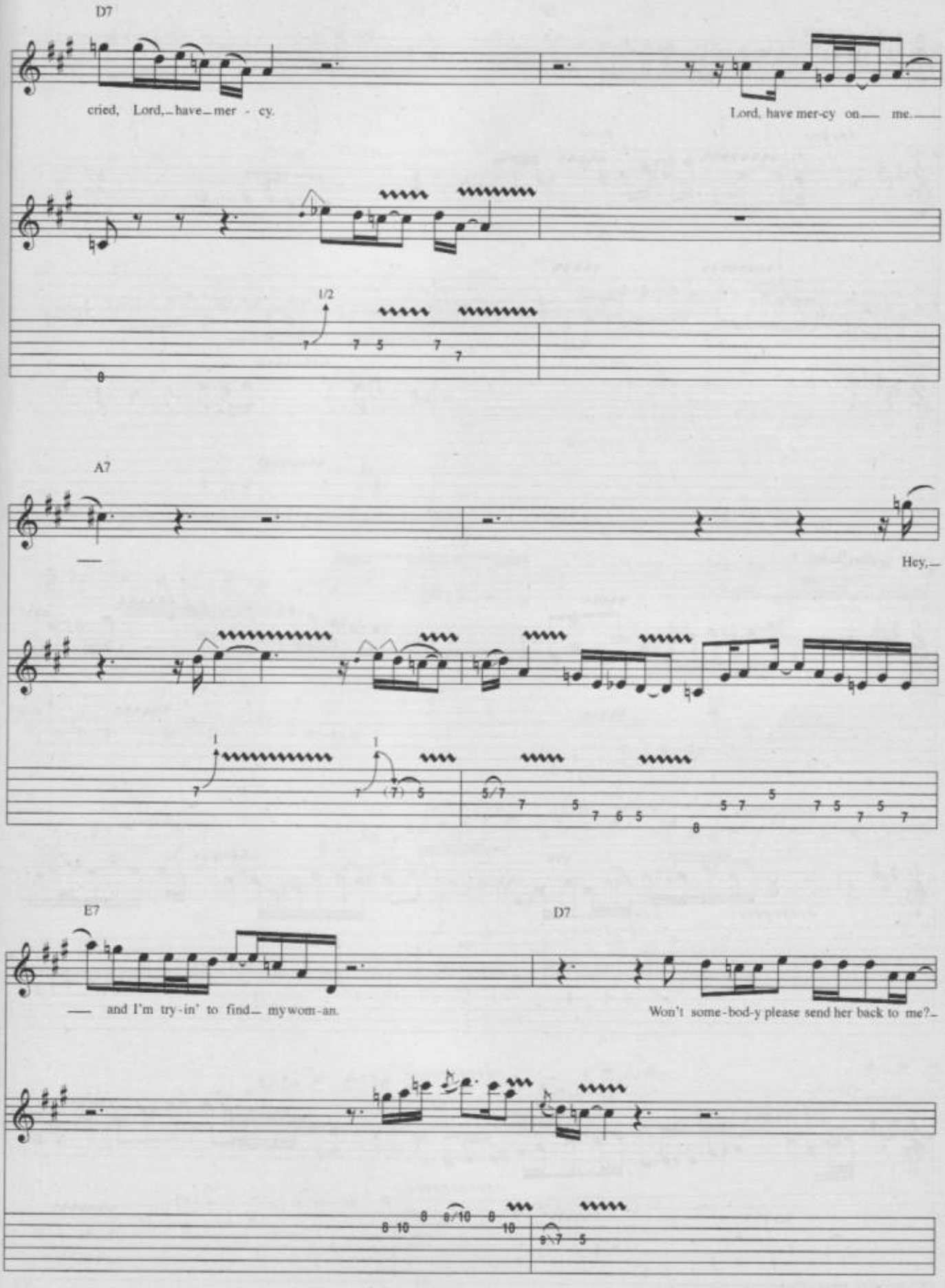

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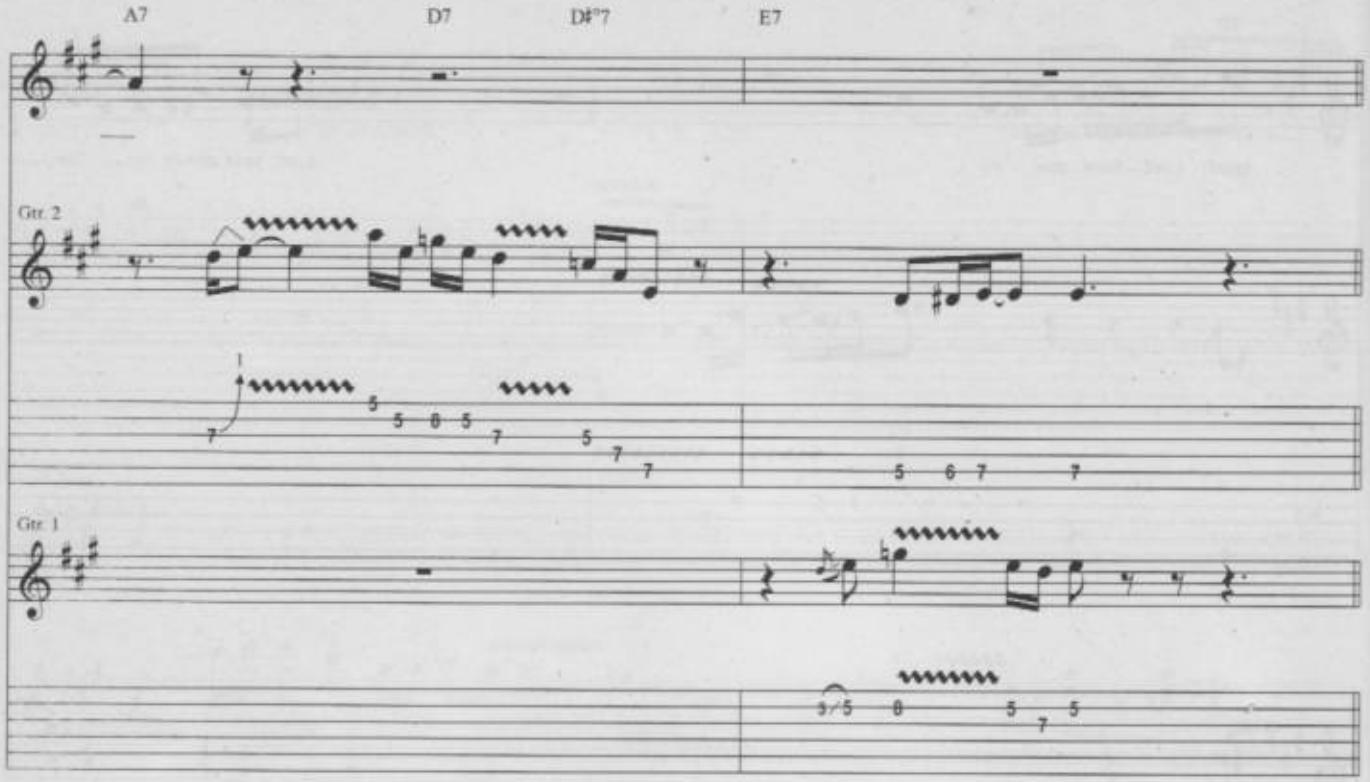
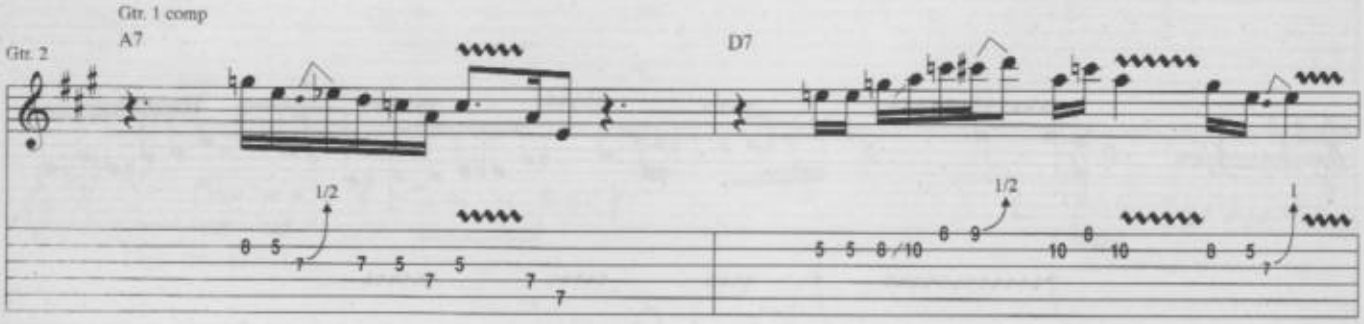
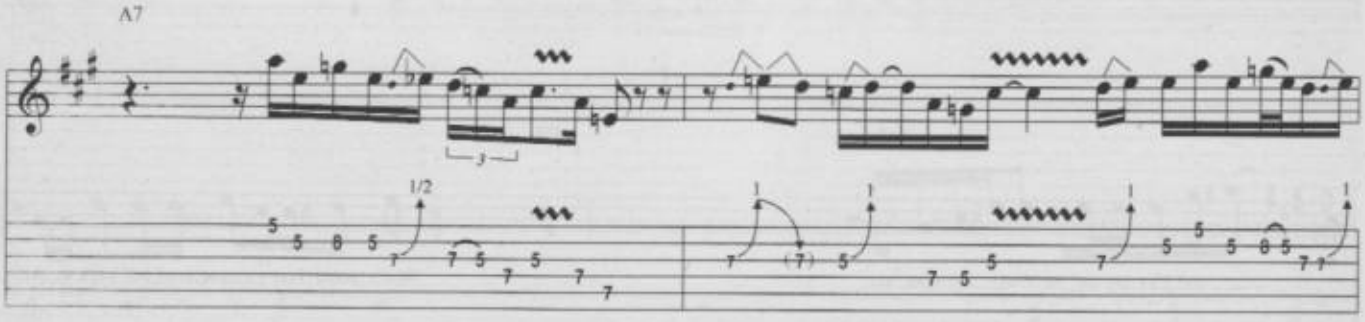
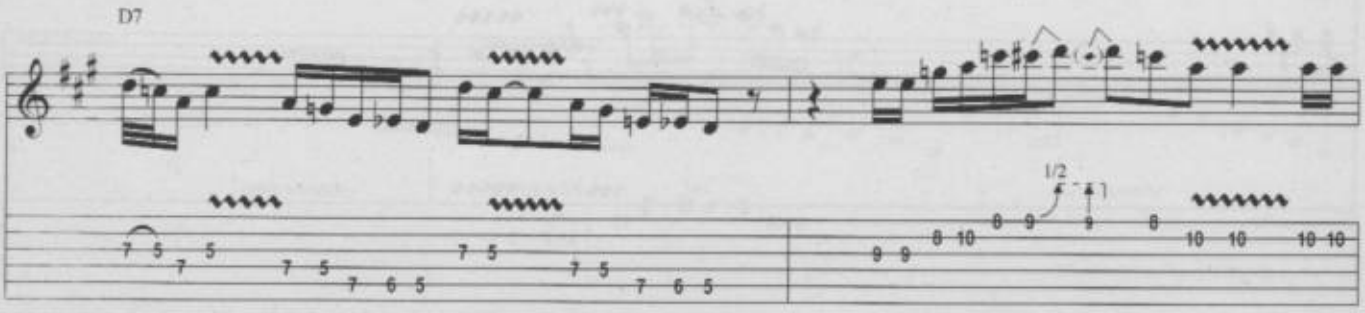


Guitar Solo







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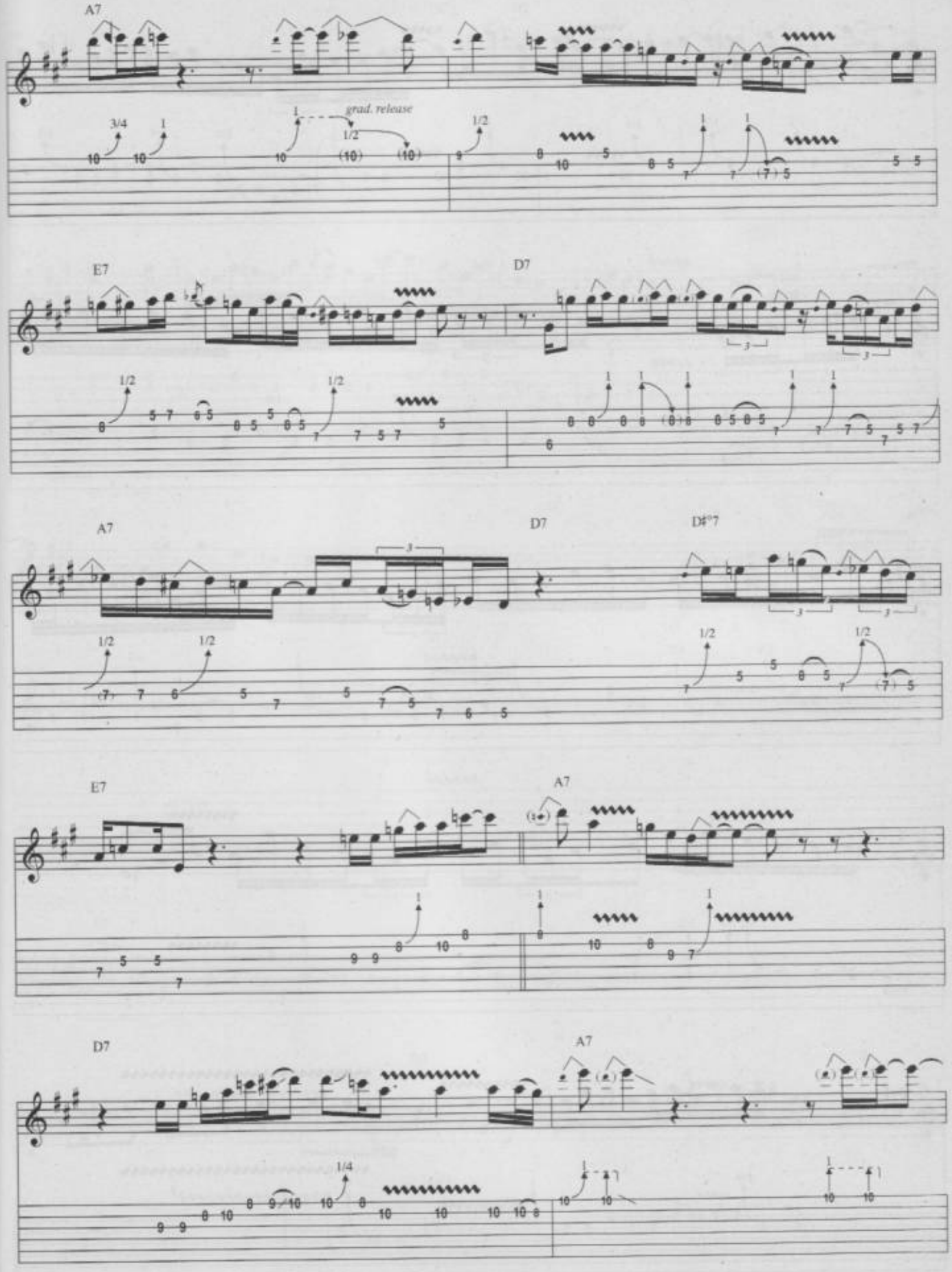

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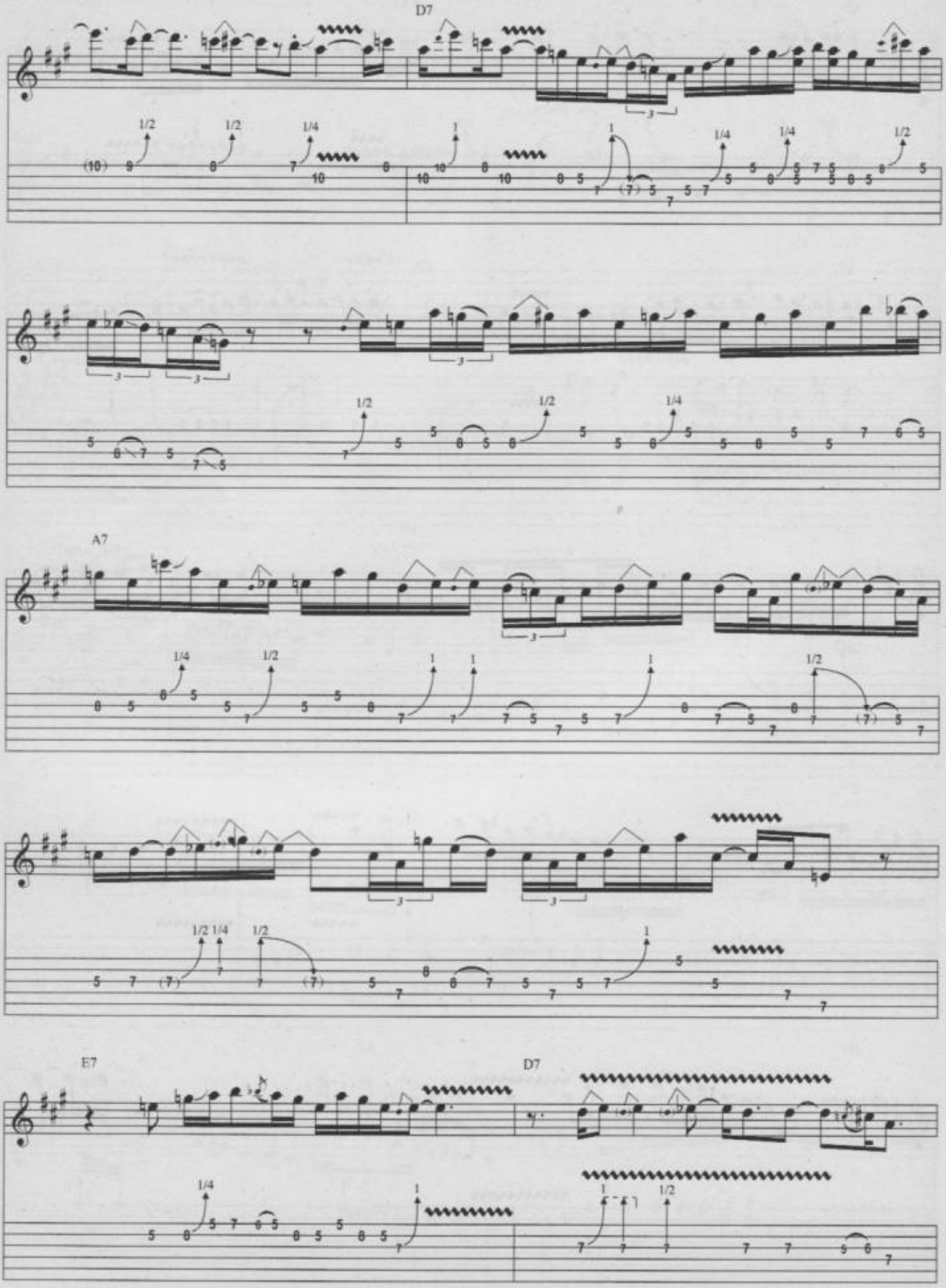

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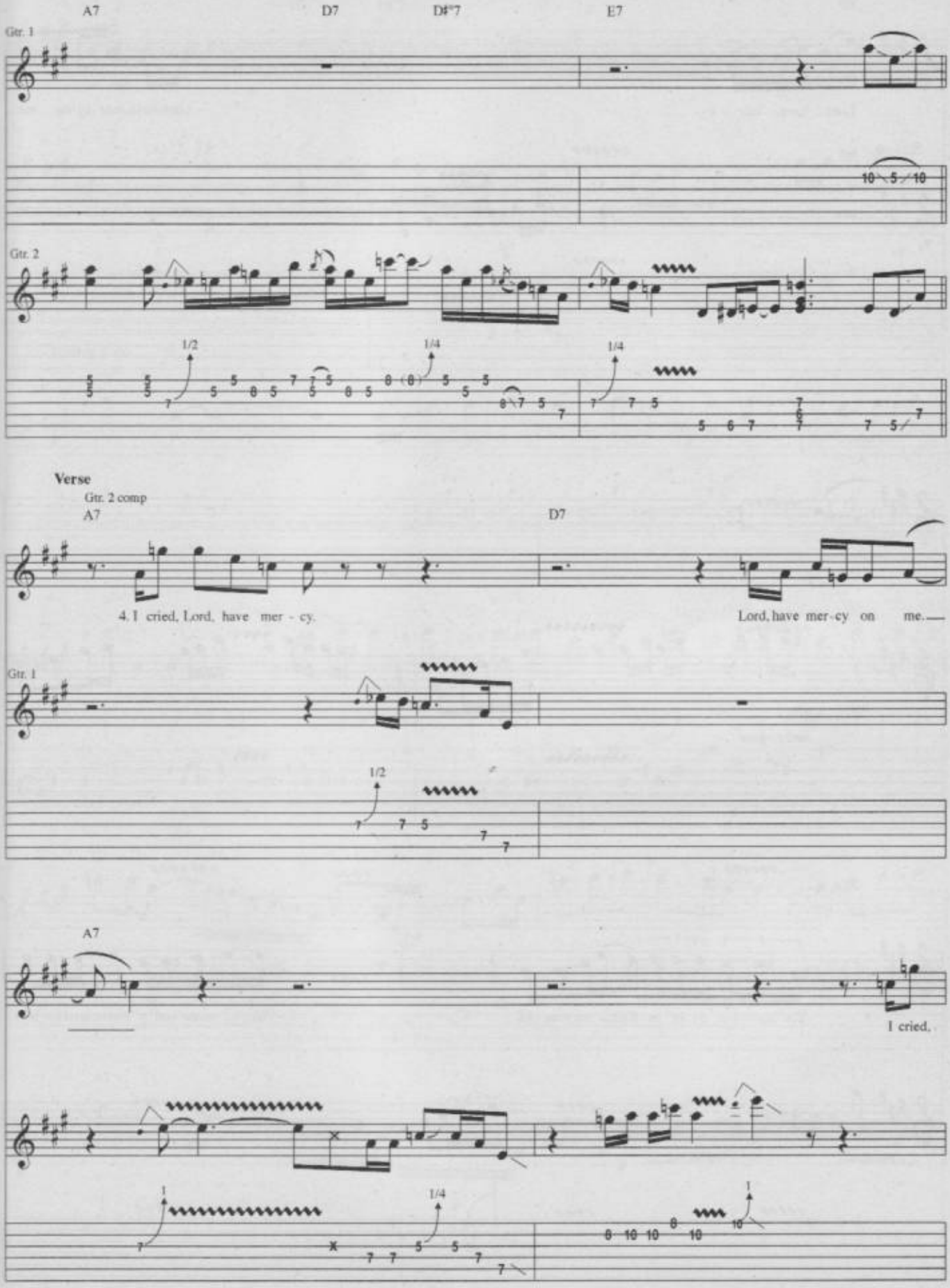

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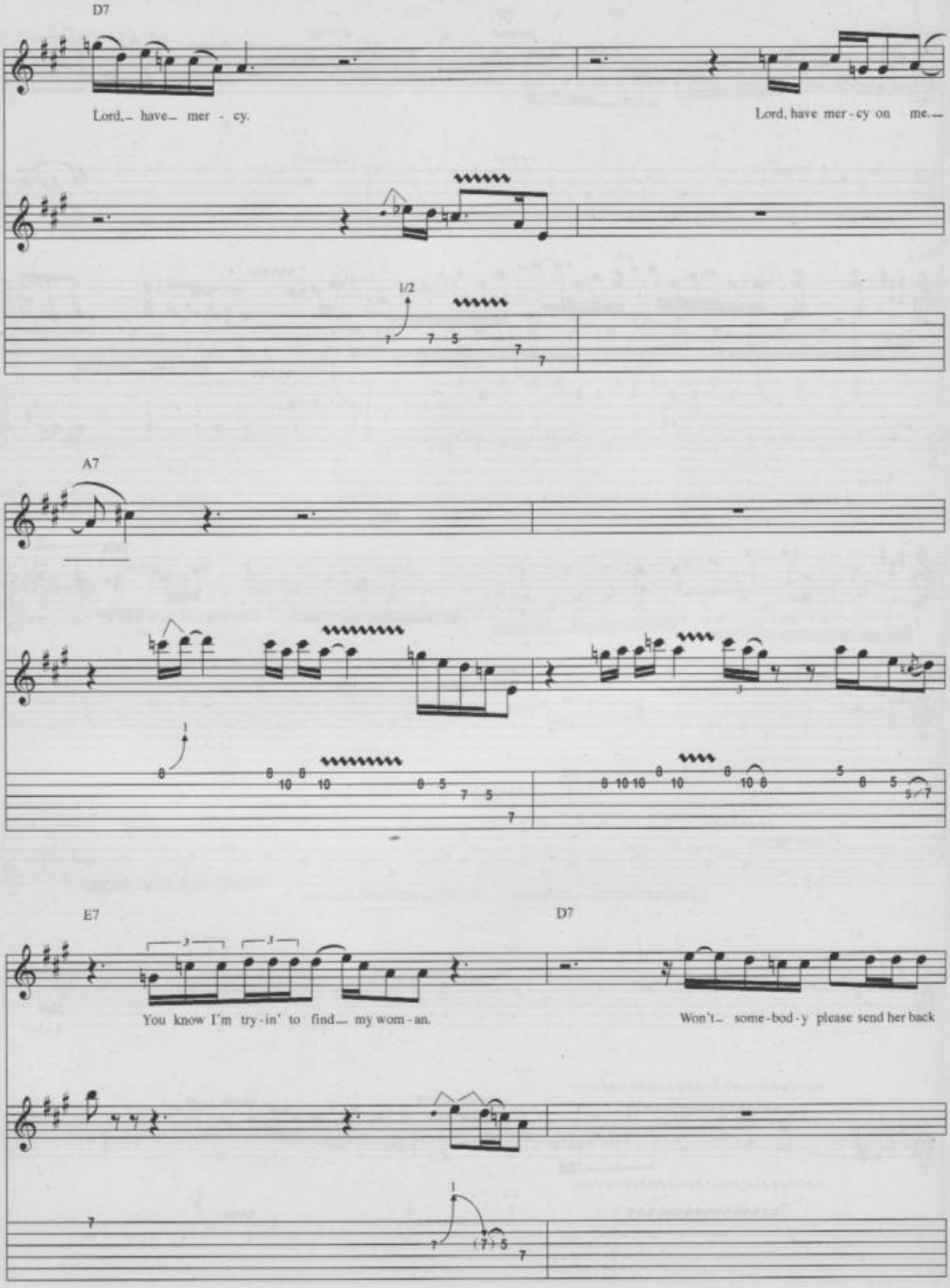

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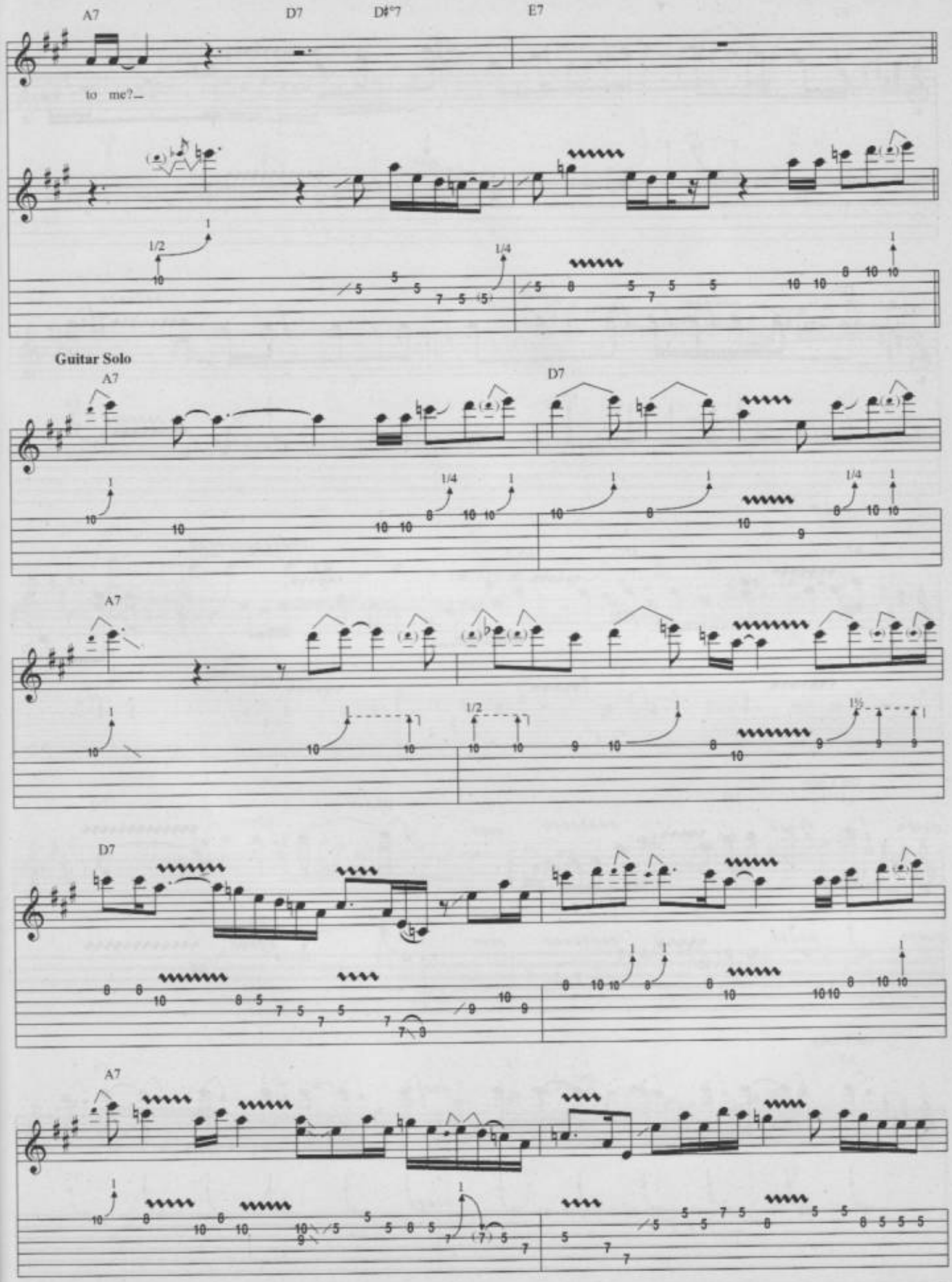

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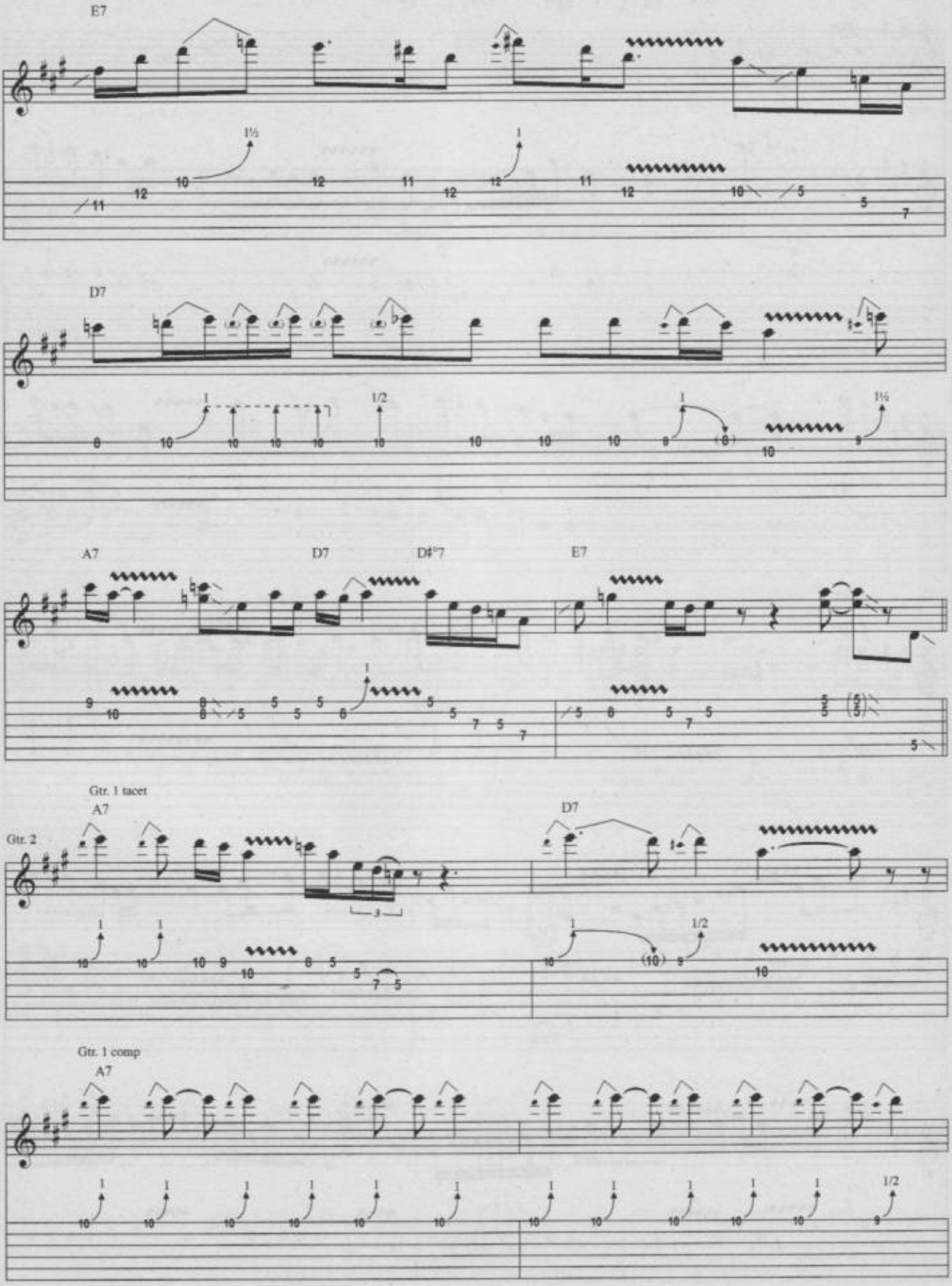

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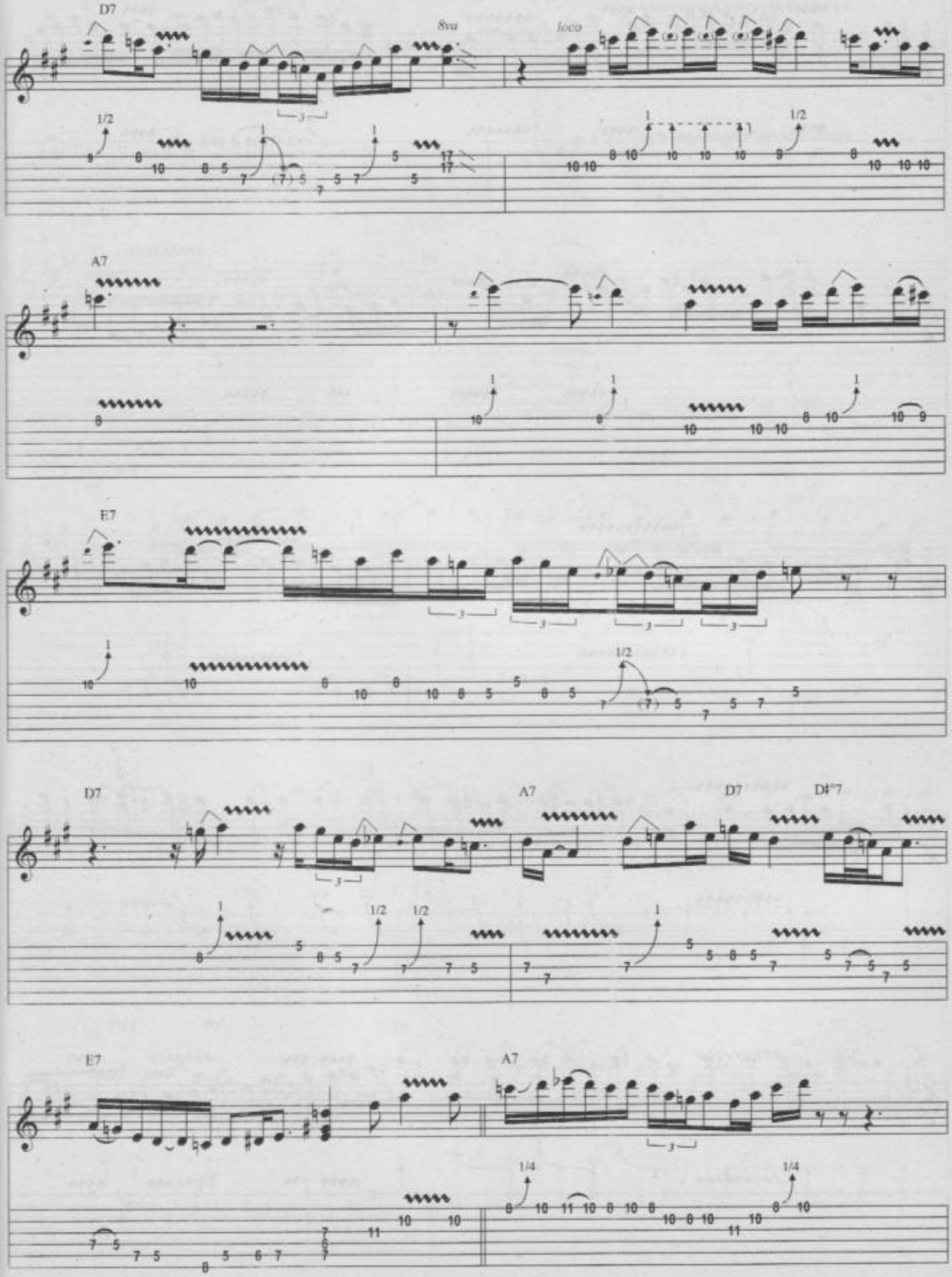

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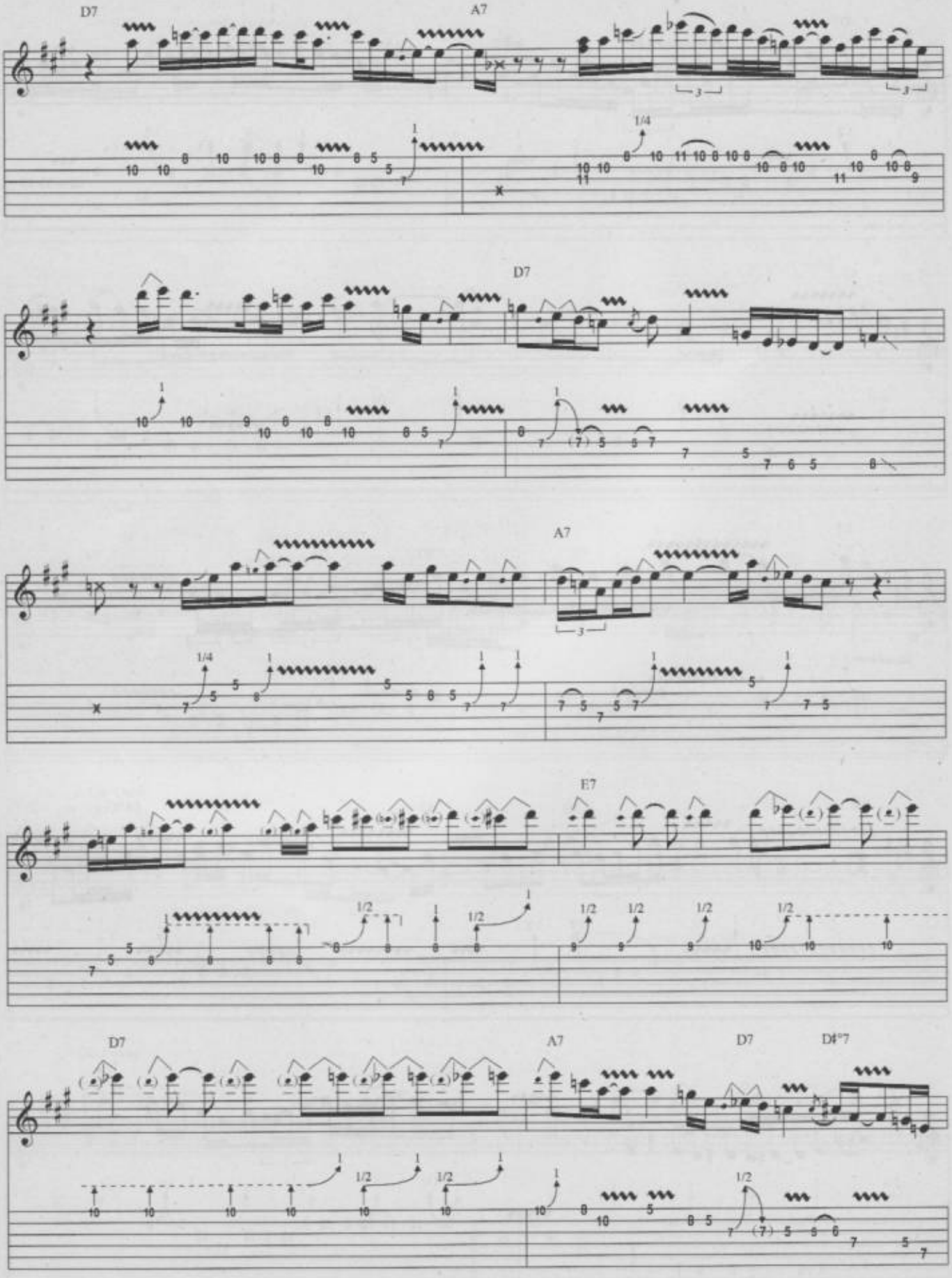

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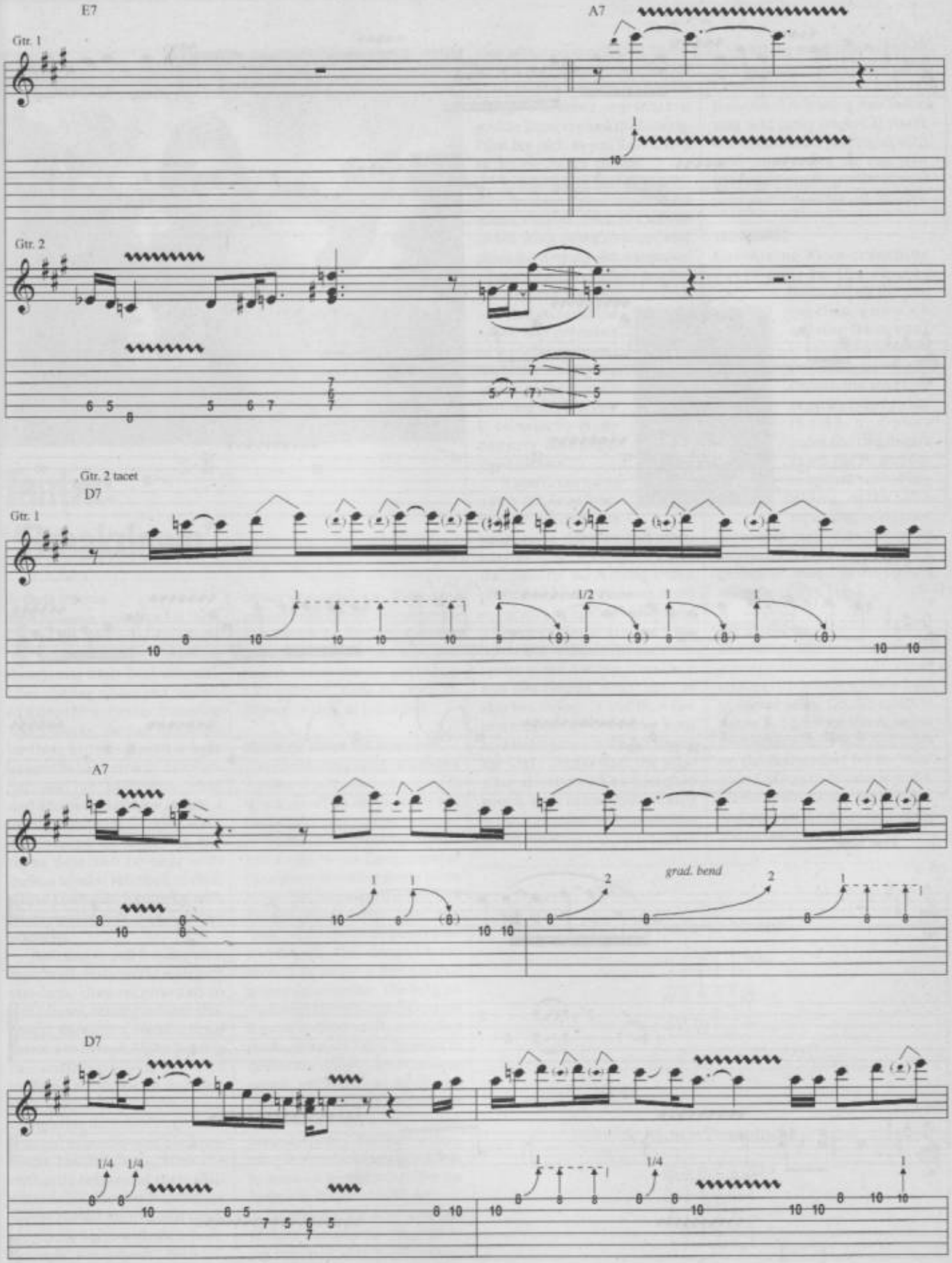
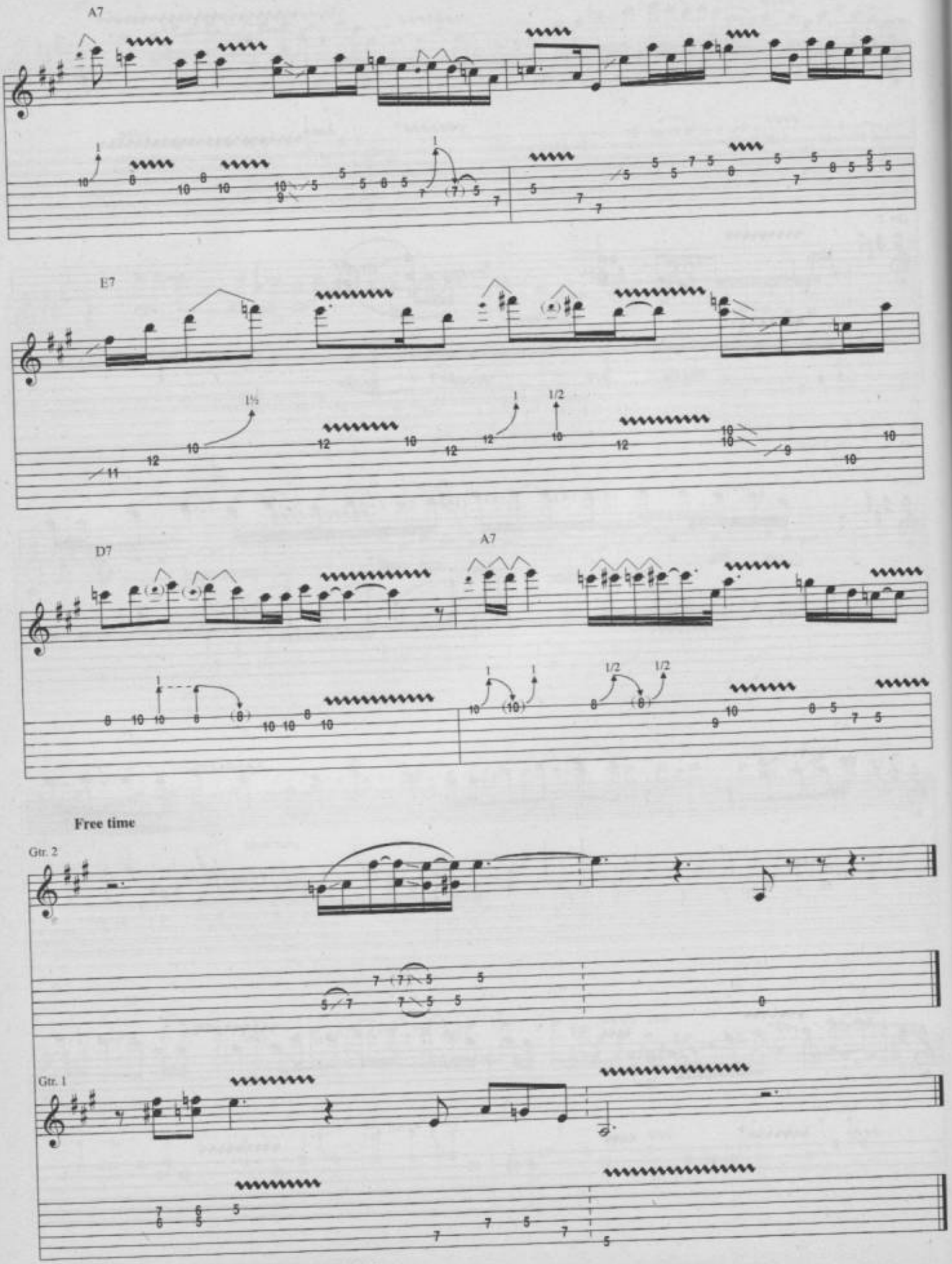
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