The Rolling Stones "Love in Vain"

By Dave Rubin

Is Keith Richards the real bastard son of Robert Johnson? Disregarding for a moment the fact that Richards was born in 1943—five years after Johnson's demise in the Delta and way before artificial conception practices—the similarities are quite striking. Both musicians lived for bodily pleasures as well as the blues, and, but for the grace of God, "Keef" would have gone to join Robert by now.

"Love in Vain" was released in 1969 on *Let It Bleed*. The arrangement differs from the original 1937 version harmonically and has more of a country music than country blues feel. In addition, Jagger altered Johnson's lyric in verse 3 from "the blue light was my blues" to "the blue light was my baby." Ry Cooder claimed to have played the original slide licks only to have them erased and then duplicated by Richards, an offense not warranting punishment by poisoning, certainly, but indignant outrage nonetheless.

THE FORM

"Love in Vain" is a slow-change 12-bar blues. The V (F) chord is substituted for the IV (E♭) chord in measure 6, and the vi7 (Gm7) shares measure 10 with the IV chord. In the original, Johnson played a II chord in measure 9 and a V chord in measure 10, creating a hip II–V–I sequence when combined with the resolution to the tonic chord in measure 11.

UNPLUGGED

"Love in Vain" was recorded in between Brian Jones' sacking and the hiring of Mick Taylor, resulting in Keith handling both guitar parts. The use of a capo at the 3rd fret for the acoustic guitar part allowed Richards to employ simple folk chord fingerings to play in the clunky key of B♭.

TUNE TO OPEN G AND GIMME FIVE!

Somewhere around the time of *Beggars Banquet* in 1968, Keith started using open G tuning to produce his patented rhythm guitar style. It has since been in more hands than Madonna and is part of the required curriculum for aspiring rockers. Realizing that the 6th string (tuned to D) was interfering with his access to the root (5th string tuned to G), he removed the offender from his guitars, eventually having custom five-string axes made specifically for this purpose. In measures 5 and 6 of the first verse, Keith plays the 6ths and triads that are the signature sound of the tune. E♭/G♭ (root and ♭3rd) glissed to G/B♭ (3rd and 5th) in measure 5 creates a bluesy tension that resolves to an implied E♭ major. On beat 4 a 2nd-inversion E♭ triad is struck and glissed up to a 2nd-inversion F triad in measure 6. **Fig. 1** shows the location of the I, IV, and V chords, expressed both in 6ths and their related triads in the key of B♭. These shapes are especially valuable when playing slide in open G, as it is critical to follow the changes with the appropriate harmony. Be aware that you can accomplish exactly the same thing in standard tuning, as strings 2–4 are identical to open G.

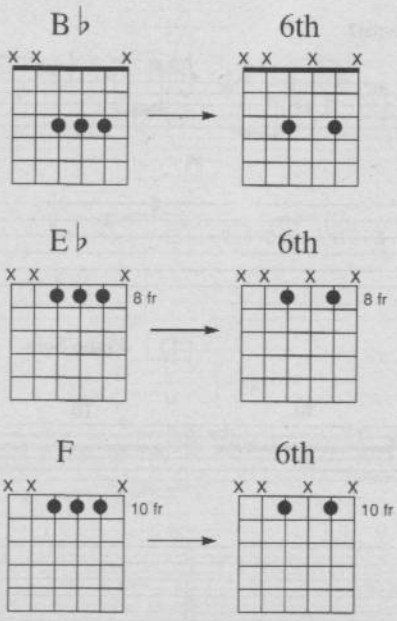
O SOLO ME-OH?

While Cooder picks the mandolin like a long-haired, latter-day Sleepy John Estes in the solo, Keith accompanies him with aplomb. Besides caressing 6ths with a honking tenor saxophone tone, he also nails choice single notes like the F and D (5th and 3rd of B♭), as well as the E♭ and C (♭7th and 5th of F) in measure 7. In measure 9 of the V (F) chord, he makes a rare foray to string 1 (tuned down to D) for the root (F), followed by the 6th (D) and some tangy suspended 4th (B♭) notes on string 3 at fret 15.

TONE ZONE

GUITAR 1: Flat-top acoustic
GUITAR 2: Solidbody electric
PICKUP/POSITION: Humbucker/Neck
GAIN: 8–9 on a small tube amp (without preamp distortion)
EQ: Bass/Mid/Treble: 7/7/6

Fig. 1



LOVE IN VAIN

As Recorded by the Rolling Stones

(From the Abkco Recording LET IT BLEED)

'60s Guitar Riffs (00699147, $7.95) in our Riff Notes series contains tab for this classic blues tune and 60 more must-know riffs from the rock era. Contact Music Dispatch to order (800-637-2852, *musicdispatch.com*).

Words and Music by Robert Johnson

Transcribed by Adam Perlmutter

Gtr. 1, Capo III
Gtr. 2, open G tuning:
(low to high) *-G-D-G-B-D

*6th string is removed

Intro

Slowly ♩. = 60

F
**(D)

Gm
(Em)

E♭
(C)

B♭
(G)

Gtr. 1 (acous.)

mf

let ring throughout

**Symbols in parentheses represent chord names respective to capoed guitar. Symbols above represent sounding chords. Capoed fret is "0" in tab.

Verse

F
(D)

B♭
(G)

1. Well, I fol - lowed her to the

Rhy. Fig. 1

B♭7
(G7)

sta - tion with a suit - case in my hand.

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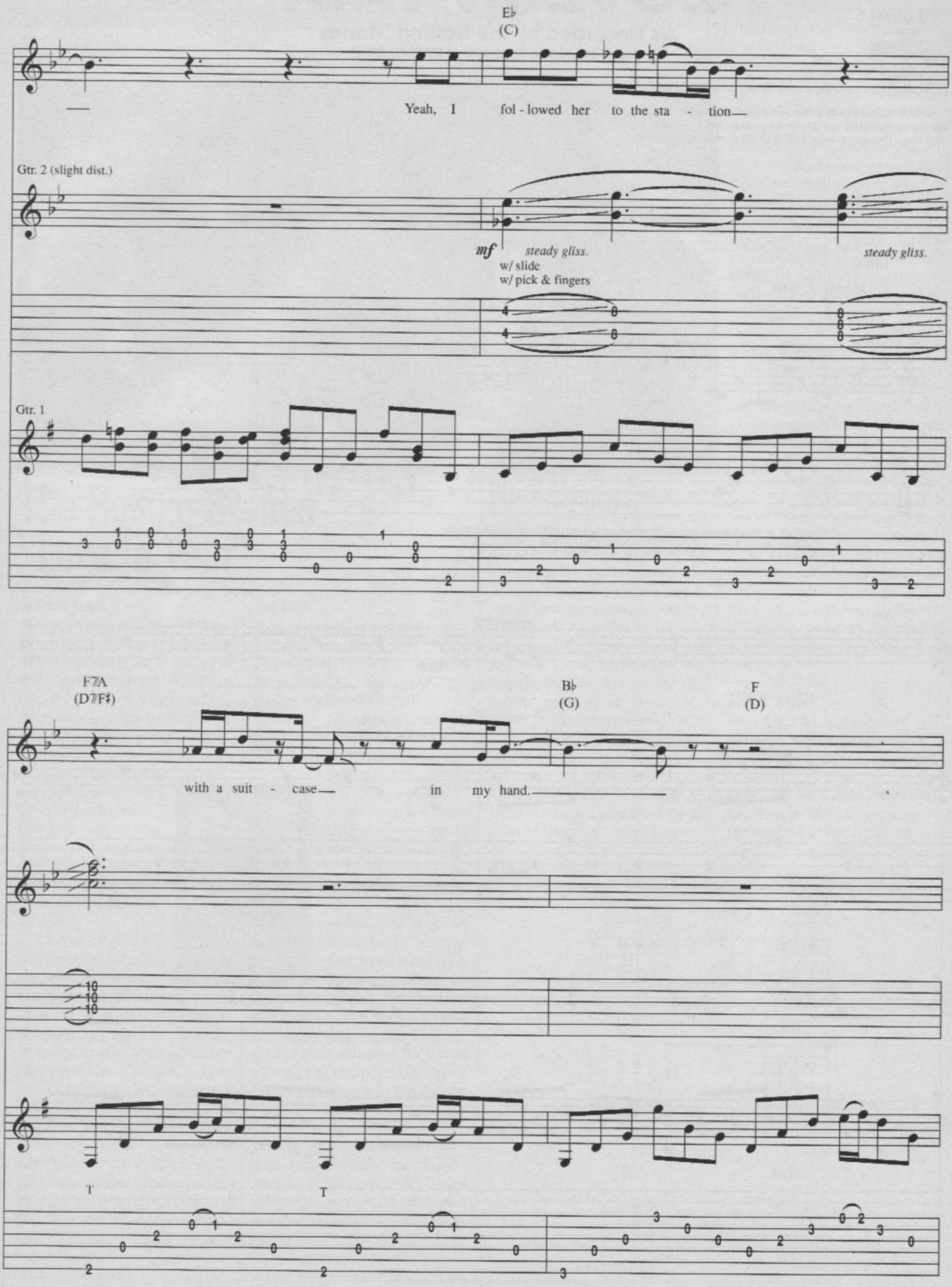
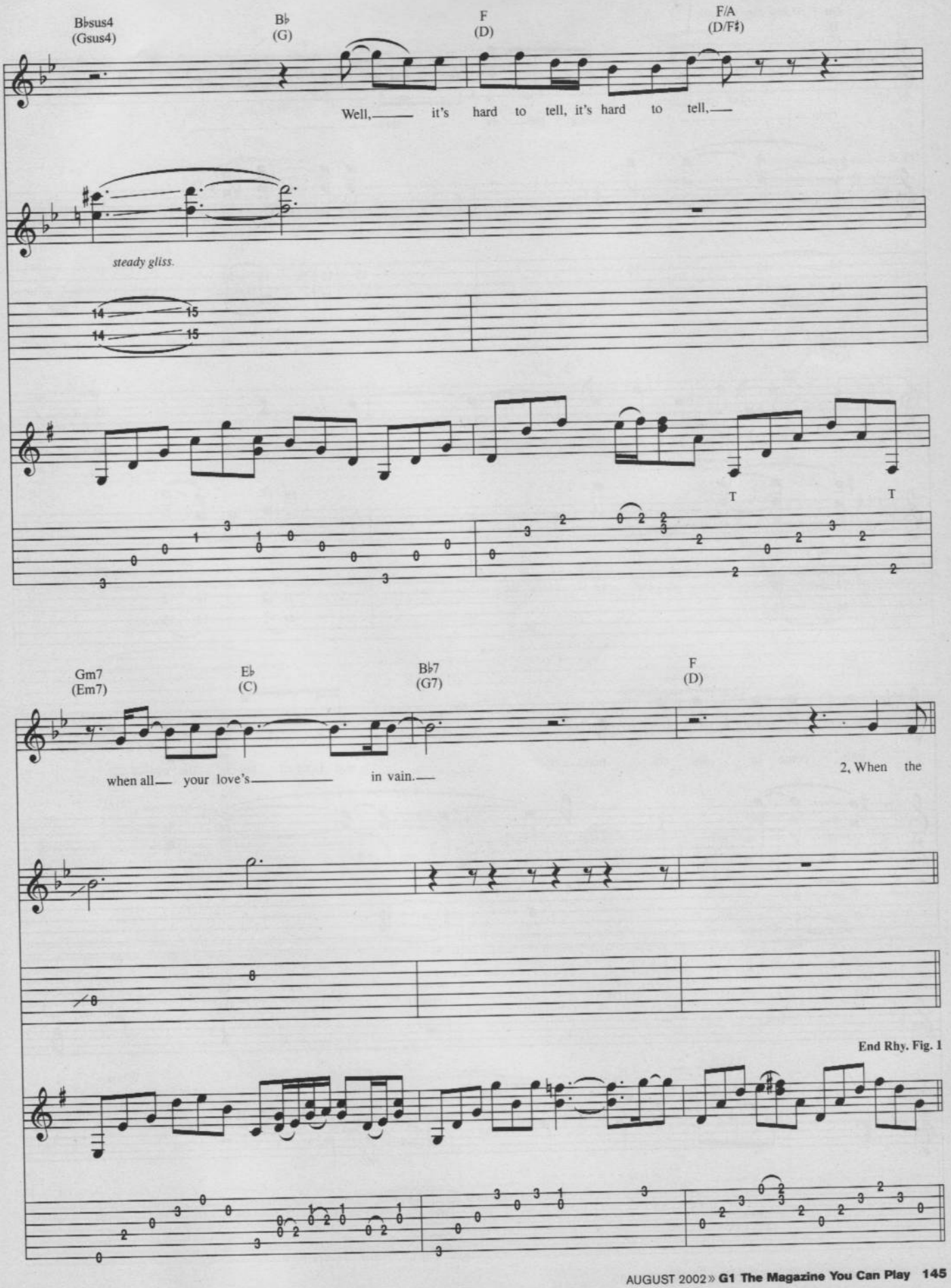
Love in Vain


E♭
(C)
Yeah, I fol - lowed her to the sta - tion—
Gtr. 2 (slight dist.)
mf steady gliss.
w/ slide
w/ pick & fingers
steady gliss.
Gtr. 1
F7/A
(D7/F♯)
B♭
(G)
F
(D)
with a suit - case— in my hand.—
T
T

Love in Vain


B♭sus4
(Gsus4)
B♭
(G)
F
(D)
F/A
(D/F♯)
Well,— it's hard to tell, it's hard to tell,—
steady gliss.
14 15
14 15
T
T
Gm7
(Em7)
E♭
(C)
B♭7
(G7)
F
(D)
when all— your love's— in vain.—
2. When the
End Rhy. Fig. 1

Love in Vain

Verse

Gtr. 1: w/ Rhy. Fig. 1 (simile)

B♭
(G)

train come in the sta - tion,

Gtr. 2

14 15 15
14 15

15 15 15 13
15 15 15 13

B♭7
(G7)

I looked her in the eye. Well, the

steady gliss.

14 15 15
14 15

14/15 14 15
14/15 14 15

E♭
(C)

F7/A
(D7/F♯)

train come in the sta - tion, and Ilooked her in the eye.

7 8 8
7 8 8

8 10
8 10

B♭
(G)

F
(D)

B♭sus4
(Gsus4)

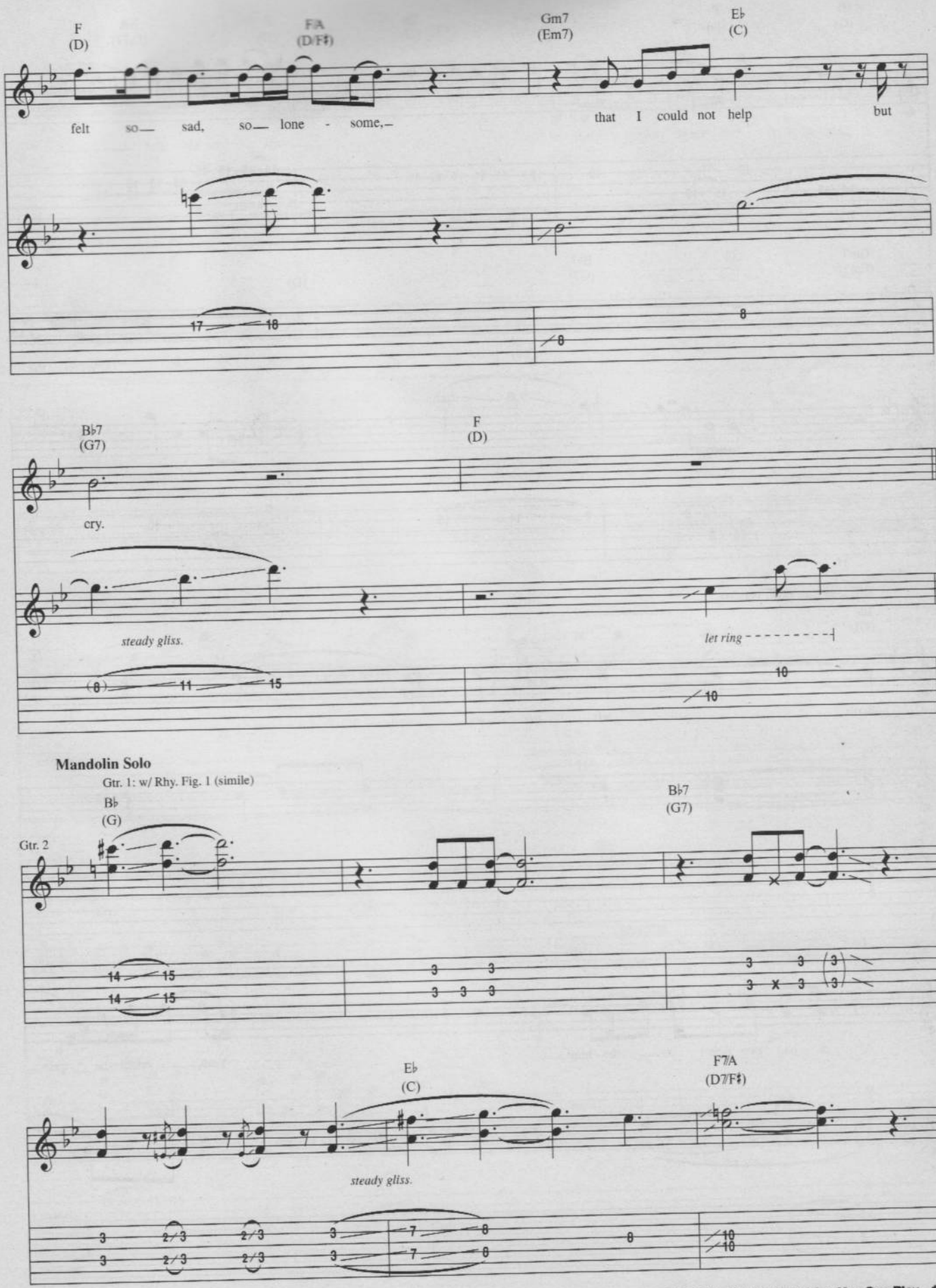
B♭
(G)

Whoa, I

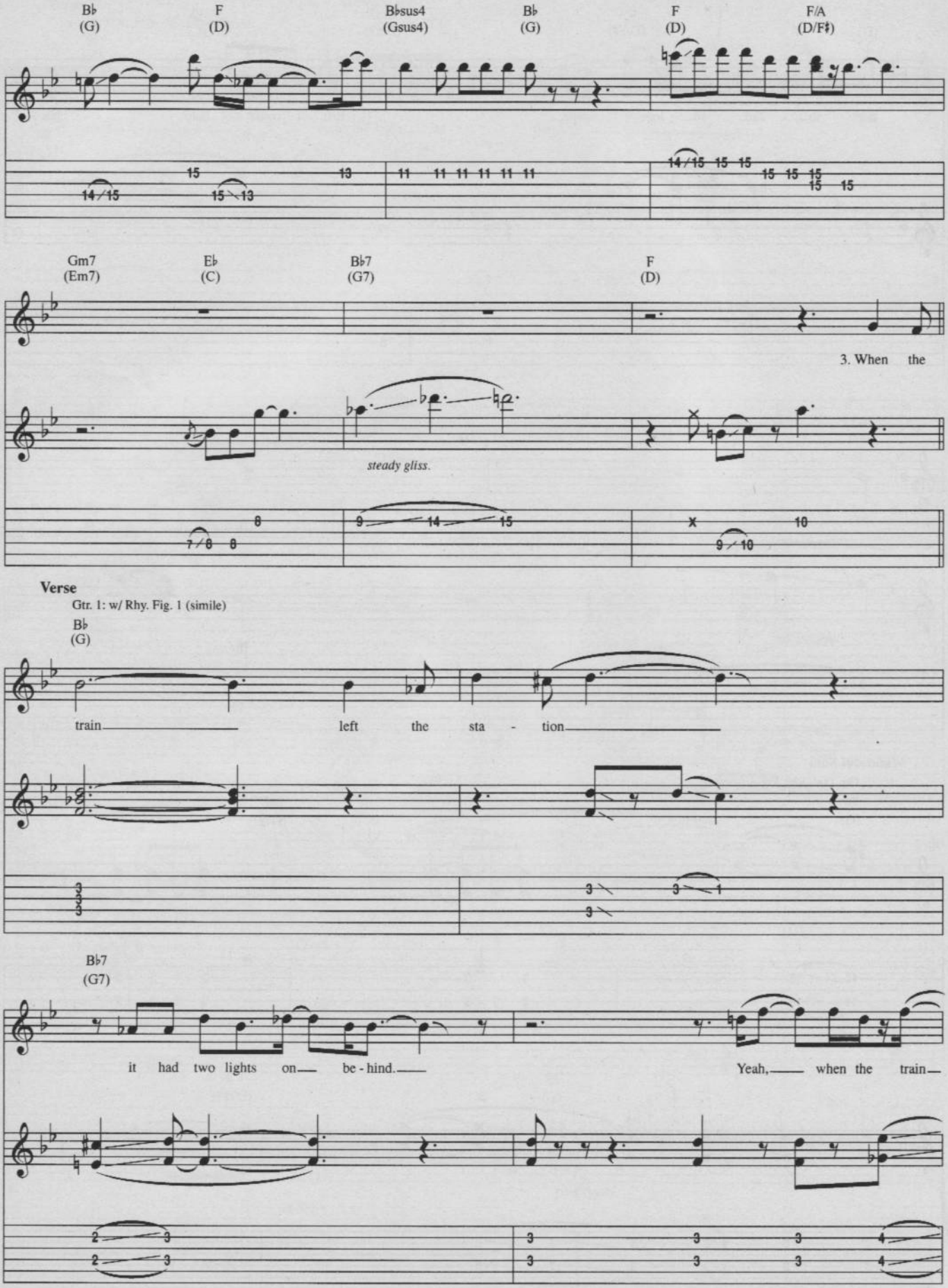
let ring - - - - - - - -

15 13
14 15 13

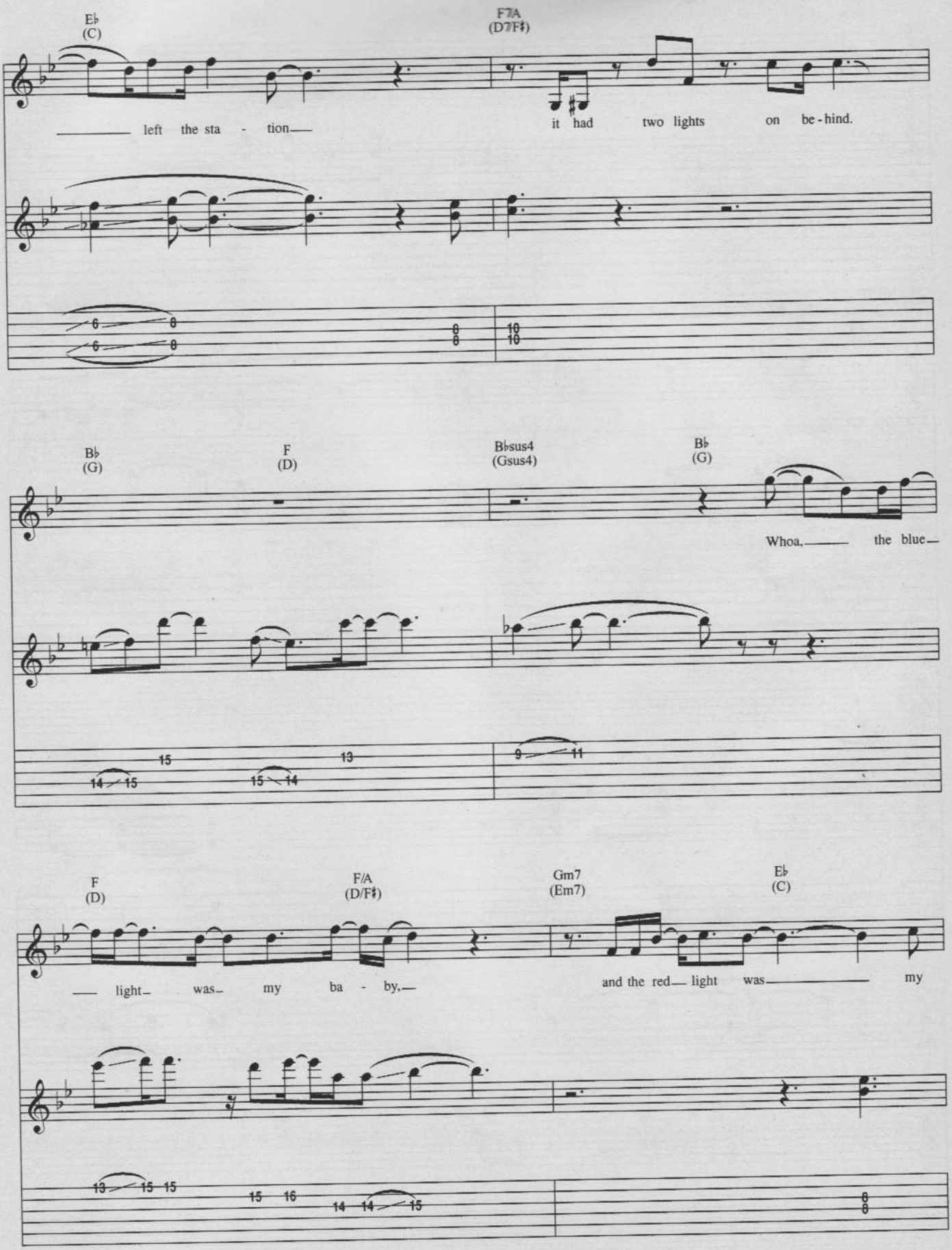
10 11


F
(D)
F/A
(D/F♯)
Gm7
(Em7)
E♭
(C)
felt so— sad, so— lone - some,–
that I could not help
but
B♭7
(G7)
F
(D)
cry.
steady gliss.
let ring
Mandolin Solo
Gtr. 1: w/ Rhy. Fig. 1 (simile)
B♭
(G)
Gtr. 2
B♭7
(G7)
E♭
(C)
F7/A
(D7/F♯)
steady gliss.

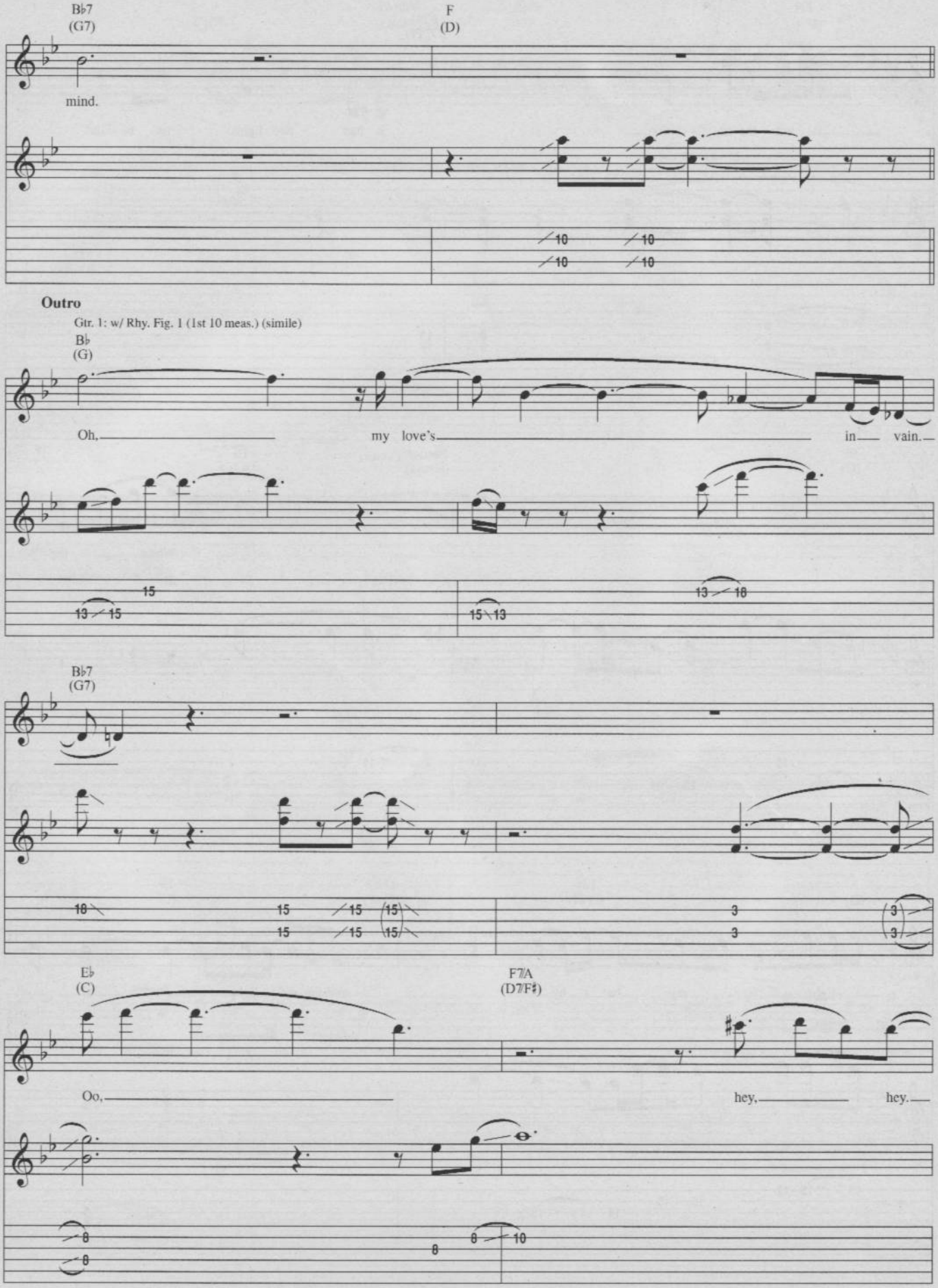
Love in Vain


B♭ (G)
F (D)
B♭sus4 (Gsus4)
B♭ (G)
F (D)
F/A (D/F♯)
Gm7 (Em7)
E♭ (C)
B♭7 (G7)
F (D)
3. When the
steady gliss.
Verse
Gtr. 1: w/ Rhy. Fig. 1 (simile)
B♭ (G)
train left the sta - tion
B♭7 (G7)
it had two lights on be - hind.
Yeah, when the train

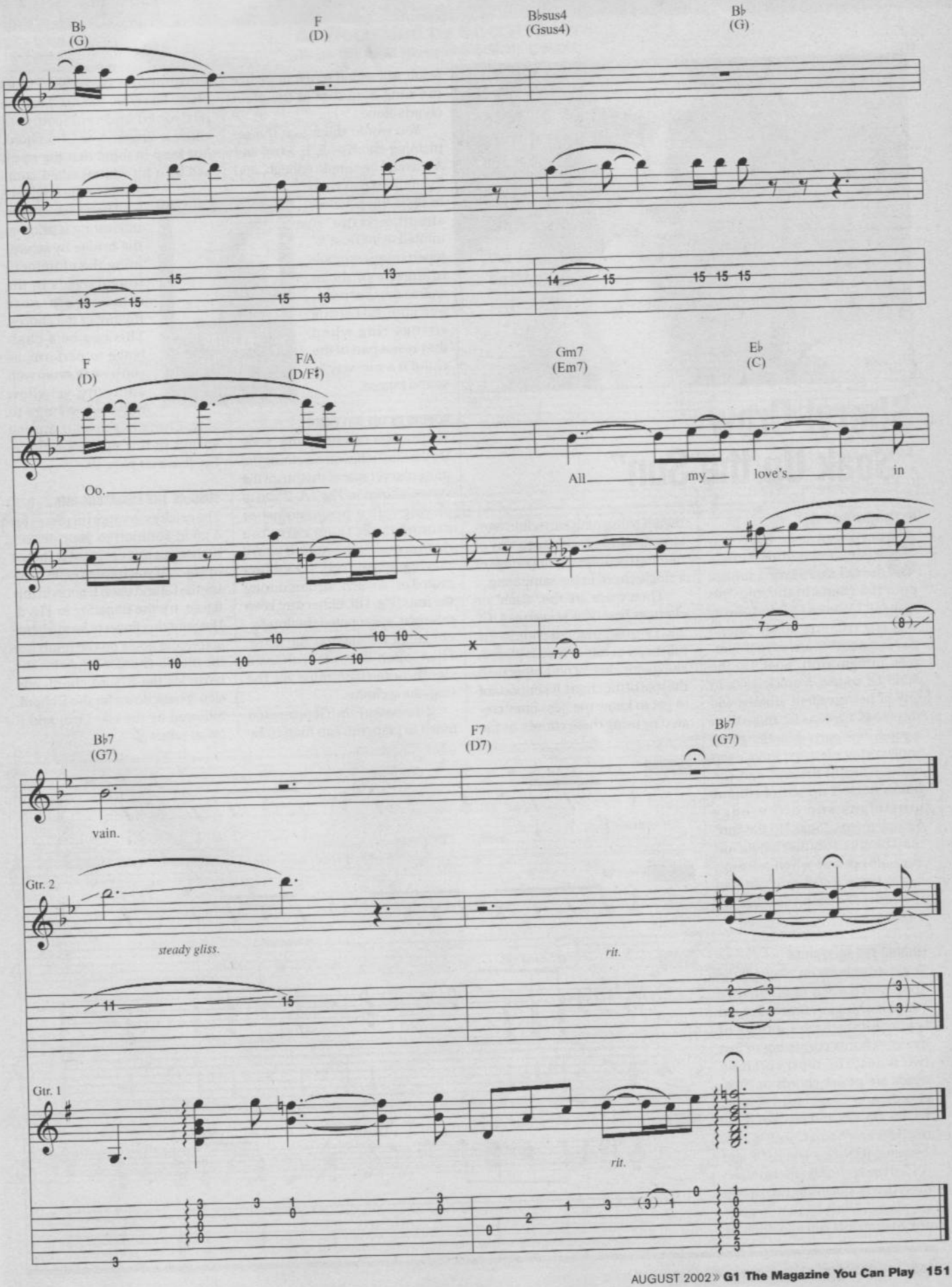
Love in Vain


E♭
(C)
F7A
(D7F♯)
left the sta - tion
it had two lights on be - hind.
B♭
(G)
F
(D)
B♭sus4
(Gsus4)
B♭
(G)
Whoa, the blue
F
(D)
F/A
(D/F♯)
Gm7
(Em7)
E♭
(C)
light was my ba - by,
and the red light was my

Love in Vain


B♭7
(G7)
F
(D)
mind.
Outro
Gtr. 1: w/ Rhy. Fig. 1 (1st 10 meas.) (simile)
B♭
(G)
Oh,
my love's
in
vain.
B♭7
(G7)
E♭
(C)
F7/A
(D7/F♯)
Oo,
hey,
hey.
Gtr. 2
Gtr. 1

Love in Vain


B♭ (G)
F (D)
B♭sus4 (Gsus4)
B♭ (G)
F (D)
F/A (D/F♯)
Gm7 (Em7)
E♭ (C)
Oo.
All my love's in
B♭7 (G7)
F7 (D7)
B♭7 (G7)
vain.
Gtr. 2
steady gliss.
rit.
Gtr. 1
rit.