One of the best-loved hymns in the Danish Hymn Book (Den danske salmebog) is ‘Min Jesus, lad mit hjerte få’ (No. 217), also because it has been sublimely set to music by Carl Nielsen, the tune originally composed in 1914, but first published in 1919 and not indicated as the sole melody suggested for the text until 2003.¹

I suggest we start no earlier than 1764, since as yet I have no evidence of earlier versions in any other language (the obvious place to look would be in German hymnals). For in that year Bjørn Christian Lund, strongly influenced by the Pietist movement and, in particular, the Moravian Brotherhood, published his collection of hymns Jesu Bruuds Glæde i hendes Immanuel og brudgom, which included a hymn of 31 verses ‘Naar jeg gethsemane her faaer’.² This hymn focuses entirely on the Mount of Olives (Gethsemane) as the place where Jesus took upon him the sins of the world and, in particular, those of each and every individual, thereby ensuing redemption for every sinner that repents. There is no depiction of Golgotha or the Resurrection in this hymn. It is a narrative of Christ’s suffering on behalf of the narrator. Christ’s torment, during which he shed ‘tears of blood’, mean that the narrator, whenever he glimpses Gethsamene here in earthly life, feels transported to a paradise:

When here Gethsemane my eyes
May glimpse, likewise its fruit,
I wander in a paradise
And smell life’s tender shoot.

In that fair garden I now see
A sign of import rare,
God’s Lamb that bears my sins for me,
A sight beyond compare.

After a detailed description of Christ’s sufferings, the narrator leads up to the last four verses with this prayer:

The only thing I’d have you give
Though undeserved to me
Is in that garden I might live
With you eternally.

That your now pitiable frame
Would new and lovely be,
And in my spirit I the same
Would fully get to see.

That every evening I could hear
Within my heart set free
Your screams of death, of tears and fear
Come from gethsemane.

¹ For the history of both text and music, see: http://www.kb.dk/da/nb/samling/ma/fokus/mdrsang/cnjesus.html
² For the entire text and an English translation of it, see: http://johnirons.blogspot.dk/2015/12/lunds-entire-hymn-in-english.html
That every night I’d lie apart
Upon your bloody arm,
That from your bloody sweat my heart
Was blessed, open, warm.

That soul and mind and fantasy
In every place and time
Did only float in, constantly,
Your bloody love sublime.

That every dawn I woke anew
With my heart’s gaze alway
On flowers bathed in your blood-sweat’s dew
That in the garden lay.

My soul on roses would proceed,
Be glad and whole as well,
On daily bread and manna feed
With you, Immanuel!

The scene is now set. The ‘blood, sweat and tears’ metaphors are all in place. And now come the final four stanzas:

O JEsu lad mit hierte faae
En saadan smag paa dig,
At nat og dag du blive maa
Min sial umistelig.

Da bliver naadens tiid og stund
Mig sød og angenem,
Til du mig kysser med din mund,
Og tager til dig hiem.

Mit hierte paa det sted du laae
I haven hvid og rød,
Hos dig sit sidste slag skal slaae,
Og hvile i dit skiød.

Jeg kommer som en synder frem
I din retfærdighed,
Da i det nye Jerusalem,
For din den blodig sveed.³

Seen in their original context, these four verses are the logical culmination of the whole hymn. Seen out of context, stanza 3, in particular, seems strangely incongruous.

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³ Oh Jesu mine, may my heart learn/for you to hunger so /that night and day my soul will yearn/you never to forgof!//Then mercy’s time and hour shall be/Most sweet and pleasant too,/Until one day your kiss takes me/From this life home to you.//Upon that place my heart you laid/In white-red garden blessed, /With you its final beat shall fade/And at your bosom rest.//And as a sinner I draw nigh,/To righteousness I’m led,/To your Jerusalem on high,/Saved by your bloody sweat.
The four last stanzas were printed, without any indication of the author in 1778 in *En lidø Samling af adskillige Vers og Sange til Opmuntring og Opgjørelse sammen-skrevet* (7. forbedrede oplag 1778). This passed unnoticed until 1915, when P. Severinsen, when chancing to read the hymnal from 1764, realised that the by then well-known and well-loved hymn ‘Min Jesus, lad mit hjerte få’ was not at all a hymn written by N.F.S. Grundtvig, as was often believed at the time.

Before Grundtvig came into the picture, the hymn had already reappeared in *Harpen, en Salmebog*, ed. Nils Johannes Holm (Christiania, 1829) as No. 208, but with a marked change of emphasis. The template has been reused, but the whole basic idea of the original poem has been scrapped, in order to make way for a different theology and a rounded poem.

There is no evidence that Grundtvig knew of any earlier versions, indeed, when his version is first published in 1846, as No. 18 (Old hymn) in *Psalmer til den stille Uge og Paasken*, eds. J.F. and R. Th. Fenger, it is specifically stated in the notes that this is ‘based on an oral tradition). The version of this ‘Easter Week’ hymn is fairly similar to the present-day one:

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Min Jesu, lad mit Hjerte faae
En saadan Smag paa dig,
At Nat og Dag du være maa
Min Sjæl umistelig!

Da bliver Naadens Tid og Stund
Mig sød og angenem,
Thi du mig kysser med din Mund
Og tager til dig hjem!

Mit Hjerte i den Grav, du laae,
Som opstod hvid og rød,
Lad, naar det aftner, Hvile faae
Og smile ad sin Død!

Før saa mig arme Synder hjem,
Med din Retfærdighed,
Til dit det ny Jerusalem,
Til al din Herlighed!
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The first printed version of the last four verses in 1778

Grundtvig has ‘tweaked’ a couple of things in the first two stanzas, marking them in the pencil text he used, probably written by C.J. Brandt. But when it comes to the last two, he decides he must make drastic changes. Apart from line 10, which it is difficult to make

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4 p. 118. The melody is listed as *Velsigne os, o God vor etc.*
5 For more information, see Malling, Dansk Salme Historie, Vol. III, pp. 366-367.
6 O Jesu, lad mit Hjerte faae/En saadan Smag paa dig,/At Nat og Dag du blive maae/min Sjæl umistelig!/Saa skal jeg med Taalmodighed/Min Vej her vandre frem,/Til du mig tager bort i Fred/Og henter til dig hjem./Lad mig i Troen paa din Død/da ud af Verden gaace;/Du, Frelsers! i min sidste Nød,/For Sjælens Øie staae./Naar i Guds nye Jerusalem/Oprinder Gledens Aar./Jeg kommer som en synder frem./Helbreed ved dine Saar.
7 Changes marked in italics.
8 See Grundtvigs Sang Værk, Vol. IV, p. 147, where the following is noted for hymn 152. The new last two verses written out in full by Grundtvig, with the old ones placed in brackets.
sense of, since the original ‘garden’ no longer is a theme of the hymn, the hymn is immediately recognisable as the one in the Danish Hymn Book. ‘Jesu’ still has to become ‘Jesus’, and ‘Thi’ will eventually revert to ‘Til’, but lines 6 and 8 change to ‘Mig sød og lystelig’ and ‘Og tager hjem til dig’ (which would have rhymed at the time) in Rørdam’s *Anden Tillæg til Evangelisk-christelig Psalmebog*, printed in 1871, alterations which, according to Malling, are probably Grundtvig’s. Despite this, these alterations are not present in *Kirke-Aaret i Salme-Sang ved Nik. Fred. Sev. Grundtvig* (1873), No. 22, although they are to be found in *Tillæg til Salmebog for Kirke- og Hus-Andagt*, published in same year, 1873. This supplement also has the important shift in line 10 to ‘Til Paaskemorgen rød’. Grundtvig’s earlier version continues to be used for quite some considerable time.

There would, then appear to be a fairly fluid situation during this period, since Landstad in his *Kirkesalmebog* (1870) also published his own version as No. 442, in a section for Whit Monday.\(^9\)

Malling concludes by citing Aastrup’s version in *Salmer* (1941), which is a fine example of how to kill a hymn stone dead.\(^{10}\) Grundtvig’s version, which I must confess I first viewed as a plagiarism until I found evidence to the contrary, is consistent with a tradition, though clearly, in terms of language and metaphor, not his own work. Aastrup’s version I regard as a travesty. P Severinsen suggests a combination of Lund vv. 1, 5, 13, 14, 18, 28, 29, 31,\(^{11}\) which means that Lund’s poem acquires a new status as a shorter poem in its own right.

In conclusion, here is the 2003 version, and a possible translation of it:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Min Jesus, lad mit hjerte få} & \quad \text{Oh Jesu mine, may my heart learn} \\
\text{en sådan smag på dig,} & \quad \text{for you to hunger so} \\
\text{at nat og dag du være må} & \quad \text{that night and day my soul will yearn} \\
\text{min sjæl umistelig!} & \quad \text{you never to forgo!} \\
\text{Da bliver nådens tid og stund} & \quad \text{Then mercy’s time and hour shall be} \\
\text{mig sød og lystelig,} & \quad \text{most sweet and joyous too,} \\
\text{til du mig kysser med din mund} & \quad \text{until one day your kiss takes me} \\
\text{og tager hjem til dig.} & \quad \text{from this life home to you.} \\
\text{Mit hjerte i den grav, du lå} & \quad \text{In that same grave where you did bide} \\
\text{til påskemorgen rød,} & \quad \text{till Easter morn’s first breath,} \\
\text{lad, når det aftner, hvile få} & \quad \text{may my heart rest at eventide} \\
\text{og smile ad sin død!} & \quad \text{and smile at its own death!} \\
\text{Før så mig arme synder hjem} & \quad \text{Then take me home, poor sinner I,} \\
\text{med din retfærdighed} & \quad \text{in righteousness and love} \\
\text{til dit det ny Jerusalem,} & \quad \text{to your Jerusalem on high,} \\
\text{til al din herlighed!} & \quad \text{to glory up above!}
\end{align*}
\]

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\(^9\) Min Jesu, lad mit hjerte få/En sådan smag på dig,/At Dag og Nat du være må/min Sjæl umistelig!/Da skrider Naadens Tid og Stund/Saa sød og salig frem,/Thi du mig kysser med din Mund,/Og tager til dig hjem./Mit Hjerte i den Grav, du laa/Knust af min Synde-Nød,/Lad naar det kvelder, hvile få,/Og smile af sin Død!/Før saa mig arme Synder hjem/Med din Retfærdighed/Til dit det ny Jerusalem,/Til al din Herlighed!

\(^{10}\) Malling, op. cit., p. 367. My thanks to Liselotte Larsen from Grundtvig-Biblioteket for this information, ibid. note 11.

\(^{11}\) See *Dansk Kirketidende* 1916, pp. 275-282