

# LOVE'S LANDSCAPES



Don't Read in the Closet 2014

## DANCE OF MEMORY

R.L. Robinson

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# Love's Landscapes

*An M/M Romance series*

## DANCE OF MEMORY

By **R.L. Robinson**

### Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love's Landscapes* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

### What Is Love's Landscapes?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love's Landscapes*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

### Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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## Photo Description

Two men, one young, the other older, are standing in a drawing room wearing period dress (18<sup>th</sup> century most likely). The older is handsome, while the younger appears to be contemplating something. Behind them, a painting on the wall is out of focus; suggestive of a person in bed, whether healthy or ill is a matter of interpretation.

## Story Letter

*Dear Author,*

*My name is Frederick, this picture isn't of me or someone I know, but this made me think. What if this would be what Hans and I would look like if we managed to escape together, or at least, managed to be together even with my hateful father breathing down on our necks? Would we have loved each other until the end of our lives? Would our bond be as strong that not even marriage to others would keep us apart? I do hope, dear author, that you would show me an alternate reality where we would have been happy, loving and as one.*

*(I was writing this thinking of Frederick the Great of Prussia and Hans Hermann von Katte. I am not sure if this request is allowed or not, but I would really love to see their happy ending, when they were separated by death, I felt it deep in my heart, so yes, I do hope for an alternate universe where they managed to be together. But please, no alternate universe where homosexuality can be expressed freely, since I want this universe to be as close as it is to ours. If this request is too much for you—being based on two real people, and one a king nonetheless—a story set in their time with a man named Frederick and Hans, but please, let Fritz be strawberry blond and Hans blond, that's their hair colour, with Fritz's eyes silverish-blue, for me. Sorry for that, I really just want an accurate one, if you may call them that.)*

*Sincerely,*

*Terra T*

## Story Info

**Genre:** historical, fantasy

**Tags:** royalty, sweet/no sex, homophobia, second chances, magic

**Word Count:** 4,539

# DANCE OF MEMORY

By **R.L. Robinson**

I write this at the end of my life, when my summer and even my autumn are long behind me. In truth, I have lived longer than I should have. Far longer than the person of whom I have not spoken since he was taken from me.

I will speak of him here and now because I must, because it was what I was told to do, but more on the reasons later.

As I look back on the span of my life, both when I sat the throne and the time before, I can think of few things which I regret. I made many mistakes. At the time their aspect did not reveal them as errors or lapses in judgment.

I am not my father; I moved from his shadow long ago. My achievements outshine his, and they call me The Great because of it. Still, I was not so great that I could stand against him when it mattered most.

The day I speak of, at Kustrin fortress, was, in many ways, the defining moment of my life. I lost a measure of my happiness and compassion that day. Though I did not mean to, I took it out on those I conquered.

My wife Elisabeth; what of her? I will not lie and say I loved her. I did my duty, but only as far as I was prepared or expected to. Being an emperor, I have a degree of leeway in such things.

Still, it was not her fault.

Now things are different, but for you to understand why I write this, you must first understand of what and whom it is I speak.

His name was Hans: Hans Hermann von Katte. We were friends and more than friends, if it be told truthfully.

I do not write here of base lust and desire. You might think me naïve in my old age, but I am not. I was under no illusions about how I felt towards him.

This is not a place for ideals about love, but that is what I think you may see. We cared for each other in the time we had, brief though it was.

\*\*\*\*

What to say of our first meeting? Anything I write will seem mediocre or anticlimactic compared to what you perhaps would wish to think.

All I can say is that we discovered each other through our mutual interests and private loves.

We appreciated poetry and the flute; both of us were young men. We learned the sword and how to ride; we were officers and cultured, as befitted men of our standing.

Such education for young men is something I fear will be lost in time. Already, I can see the age coming when technical skill will be held above appreciation of art and the subtleties it can reveal about life.

It would be a cliché to say our friendship grew from the first moment. Our acquaintance was, however, rapid. Spending days in each other's company has a way of helping such things.

He was older by eight years, and that was part of the attraction. He was different from those people I'd known before; growing up in Berlin shaped his attitude.

Long into the night, we would talk about that which interested us. His opinions always seemed, somehow, heightened, more refined compared to my own, and I was the son of an emperor.

With him, I could leave the orthodoxy of the court behind and see other possibilities from what my father taught me.

My father... I cannot write of this without writing of him.

History will judge him more than I ever could.

He was, and is, a bastard, as hard-nosed a puritan as any man I knew in my life. He was possessed of a unique vulgarity and singular temper. But, these were not the worst aspects of his character.

He scorned education and was so deeply pious he held theatres to be dens of iniquity.

At times, I question the right of some to rule simply because of birth. Accident doesn't come into it in my mind.

I endured him. There is no other way to describe my childhood and adolescence.

What bearing did his reforms have on me? Very little, for I would've traded every change he made in our country for a man who could love me, instead of the tyrant I suffered.



Perhaps I sought this in Hans. An older man who could appreciate me, and in whom I could confide and trust and share the things I held most dear. I am no student of the mind nor would ever claim to make sense of the thoughts which daily beset us.

In truth, it seems debased to think I would supplant my father. He and Hans cannot be compared.

Our first night together was spent lying in the stables. There were few enough places we could find true privacy.

I can imagine what might be going through your mind, but there was nothing sordid between us. We simply rested in each other's arms and listened to the rain pattering on the wooden tiles.

"What are you thinking?" It was often how Hans started a conversation.

In the beginning, I would say "nothing" until he pointed out that there was no such thing as nothing. Our minds are incapable of comprehending an empty room. To do so requires that we place ourselves inside it.

"Only that I am content. I don't have to think about anything when I am with you."

I think that was what he truly gave to me, and the one thing I have never been able to find since... not truly at least.

In such moments we would talk about everything and, sometimes, nothing at all.

At other times, I could feel the shadows pressing in against us, with the certain knowledge that we were walking the finest of lines. Which is not to say I thought our time together would ever end. When you are young, tomorrow can seem very far away.

\*\*\*\*

"Still learning well enough from those fucking prigs?" My father was in a good mood, evidenced by only a single vulgarity.

"Well enough, Father."

We were alone together at dinner; the last servant dismissed with barely a wave from the old man.

"What about that young fellow... what's his name?"

"Hans."

“Von Katte?”

I nodded and forked a piece of undercooked beef into my mouth. “Just show it the flame,” was my father’s usual order to the cooks.

“Prancer from Berlin.” My father had the same opinion of city folk as he did those who attended the theatre. To him, they were in the same class of potential deviants and practitioners of immorality. “Spending a lot of time with him, I hear.”

“He’s schooling me.” Best to cloak a lie in truth. “He’s older by some years, and we have much in common.”

There was a heavy silence, which usually presaged one of my father’s vulgarity-laced tirades. Instead, when I looked up from my plate, I found him staring at me. His gaze fixed me in place, as well as if I were a piece of meat on his plate.

“Remember what you are.” His voice was ice, cutting through the warmth of the room. “He is not your equal. He never can be.”

I didn’t need reminding.

I do not claim to be a brave man, but I was raised to rule and held a sword from a young age, as befits all boys of noble birth. Raised to rule by a man who took pains to break me down whenever he got the chance.

I forgot my courage.

I wanted to tell him the truth, or rather the irrational part of my mind did. To do so would’ve meant death for Hans, perhaps worse, for there are worse ways of dying. My father was not a forgiving man.

I wanted to walk away from the table, for whatever show of defiance it would’ve been.

Of course, I did neither of these things.

“Yes, Father.”

He offered a grunt by way of acknowledgment, and we passed the rest of the meal in silence. I remember the fire did nothing to heat the room afterwards.

\*\*\*\*

That night I slept badly. My father’s presence seemed to weigh heavily in the palace. Every creak and groan of a beam, every distant voice, which was likely only servants, brought him to my mind.

In my memory, he still looms large. A figure of fear and loathing I have never succeeded in casting off.

When we remember, we dance with phantoms and things half forgotten or only partly remembered in our mind. Yet my father is no shade, though dead these many years he may be.

Like a wolf prowling at the edge of a darkened clearing, he waits for me. Ready to come forward when I am weary enough to drop my guard.

Truly, you see now that emperors are no different from commoners. Fear is something we both share, leveling us in standing more than most realize.

Fear is also a great motivator, both for actions all too rational and actions most ill-conceived.

Lying in bed that night, my chest tight and my breathing labored, I believe, was when I took my first true step towards all that was to follow. Be under no illusion; it was my doing, though at the time it made perfect sense.

I have striven every day of my life to right the wrong I committed, and while the time when I may set it right is fast approaching, I must first tell you how it came to pass. Likely, you know the story, but indulge an old man.

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“You can’t mean it!” Hans held my forearm harder than I expected. I thought he meant to pull me off my feet or else strike me. “We swore an oath! You’re heir to the bloody throne!”

“Keep your damned voice down,” I hissed, leveraging myself against his grip to move closer. I could smell him. Both fresh from a day in the saddle, we smelled of horse, leather, and oil. Somehow, he was sweeter to my nostrils.

“You know what this will mean.” There was no question here, only a statement. “You can’t mean it, you can’t.”

He was loyal, more so than I. Where I was loyal to him, he was loyal to my father, but not in the way you might think.

Hans was loyal to the idea of the crown and emperor. For him, it didn’t matter if there was a tyrant or a benefactor on that fucking chair.

It’s something in Prussian character I respect and despise. Our greatest strength and weakness, and I fear it will haunt us down the ages.

“Do you want to continue like this?” I slipped free of his grasp and spread my arms. “Hiding in this way? Being careful of what we say, and how we act?”

“You think it will change if we flee?”

I was being naïve to think it would. But, as exiles, I wanted to believe we would be afforded a degree of understanding. Male companionship, after all, is not something to think strange. In London, it would be our mask. Likely, the English would turn a blind eye, as they were wont to do when it came to men of note.

It helped that the English king was my uncle.

“Otherwise, he will always hover over us,” I said, taking his hands in mine. “It won’t change when I take the throne.”

“As emperor, you can do what you want. Who would raise a question against you?”

“That’s not the point... it’s not what I want.”

We continued in this way for the best part of the evening and night. Each time, Hans came back again and again to notions of loyalty and honor and duty. Just the kind of puritan ideals my father would cling to.

Finally, I turned to him.

“You are what I want... Would that my line crumble to dust on my death, and our nation fall into ruin. So long as I was with you, none of it would matter.” I meant every word, as conceited and dramatic as it sounds decades later.

I was younger then, and what man doesn’t mean every word he says when they are said through the heady wine of love and affection. History is full of such young fools, and I was no different.

Something, something worn brittle by hours of arguing broke behind his eyes.

There is loyalty to an idea and then there is loyalty to a person. The two can be, but often are not, one and the same.

Hans knew I meant what I said, and, I think, this kind of personal loyalty wasn’t something he’d encountered.

It was the sort you might find on a battlefield or between a husband and wife. The sort that ought to exist between a father and son or any of a host of other examples one would care to name.

“How?”

I smiled and pressed my forehead to his.

“The retinue will go to Mannheim soon, within the fortnight. I should have a chance then to slip away.” We both knew he would be in Potsdam, a separation neither of us looked forward to. “I have servants I can trust to carry letters to you.”

I find it a curious thing how men of honor and supposed courage can believe they may take on the force of a crown and throne and somehow hope to prevail. The fairytales are full of examples of men triumphing against impossible odds. Fostered by notions of strength of arms and martial courage, men may believe any scheme so conceived is winnable.

Life is not like fairytales. It is a far darker thing than most people would care to admit, and I would walk in stranger, and mayhap darker, places before this story was done.

Soon, soon you will see and understand.

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What to say of what followed?

It is written that I was caught at Mannheim. What is not written is how they took the letter which implicated Hans.

When they showed it to me, the blood on the paper was still wet in places. I want to think the man I sent with it tried to fight, but, like as not, he had no chance at all.

We were delivered to Kustrin. An imposing enough fortress to hold two young men accused of treason.

My father leveled the charge from afar, unwilling, I am told, to even look upon me.

Treason, a shameful word in any light, and even love cannot totally wash it out.

They took Hans's head; that was it.

My father spared me. I am sure for a number of reasons, not the least of which was me living where my lover was dead. There are, you see, far worse things than dying.

\*\*\*\*

I shed tears when my father died, but only because it was expected of me.

Most of my reign has been taken up by war; that use of energy best directed for something good siphoned into the service of something destructive. I make no apologies for it, but it is here where I stepped into strange company indeed.

In so doing, I was given a chance, but only a single chance, to regain what I lost. What I sacrificed.

\*\*\*\*

At Kunersdorf, I almost fell in with a band of Cossacks intent on my capture or death. In the moment, either possibility seemed likely.

Riding hard, I threw off their pursuit and found myself alone in a quiet part of the countryside.

It has often struck me that even in the midst of a war there are places in the world where absolutely nothing is happening. Such was the place I found myself, a field stilled, as though in the eye of a storm.

Cresting its small slope, I saw a hut of the kind a shepherd might use to tend his flock. No animals were present, likely swallowed by the war, but faint smoke drifted from the chimney.

Borrowing from Charlemagne, I walked my horse towards it, deciding that playing to a disguise was safer than barging in and demanding of whoever was inside. Emperor or not, I was alone here for the time being, and, without followers, I am simply a man and nothing more.

Hitching my horse to the ragged stump of a tree, I doffed my hat and went inside.

The figure hunched over the small fire pit was swathed in rags, which hid its face. I could not tell if it was a man or a woman, and it did not stir at the sound of my approach.

“Your pardon, would you mind if I shared your fire and rested a while?”

“You are welcome,” he said. His voice was gravelly, as though he’d smoked his fill a long time ago. “It’s not often I have royalty as guests,” he pulled back his hood exposing a face which was immediately forgettable. “You’ll have to excuse the state of my affairs.”

I stayed where I was, unwilling, or unable, to back out the way I came.

“You have nothing to fear from me.”

“You’ll excuse me if I have another opinion, since I didn’t announce who I was.”

“Few things are hidden to me.” He gestured to an empty space near the fire. “Please, I haven’t much time.”

I did as I was bid and came forward, going to my haunches as I approached the fire. Curiosity overtook me, and I decided, if this was some trick or ploy, I would see it for what it was.

“You have not spoken his name in many years, have you?”

I knew he meant Hans, and it was the first time his name reached as far as my throat, though the shock of what he said stilled it there.

“Who are you?”

“Someone you have been looking for, though you, perhaps, never knew it.”

“That’s no kind of answer.”

“It’s the only one I feel able to give.” He dug into the folds of his rags and produced a small leather pouch. “What if I told you there was a way you could go back; change things, and have them as they were, mayhap, meant to be?”

“I’d say you were a liar and a charlatan.”

He shrugged. “I’ve been called worse in my time.” He tossed the bag at my feet. “In there is the key to what you want, but there are limits.”

“You take me for a fool, Sir?”

“On the contrary, I take you for a rational man.”

“There’s nothing rational in what you’re babbling about.” In such rare moments, I can hear my father’s voice in my own. “I’ve half a mind to have you flogged for such presumption.”

“Do you accept that there are things in this world you cannot explain, things which defy easy logic?”

“Of course.”

“Then you are a rational man, after all.”

My hand lifted the pouch of its own volition, and, even today, I cannot say why, because I still do not know if I believed him.

“Take all three when the time is right, and you will have what you want.”

“More like to poison me.”

He offered another shrug. “Do as you will, I only show you the door. You are the one who must walk through it.”

I took my leave soon thereafter and returned to the vanguard of the army.

When next we passed by the field, the hut was empty, and the fire pit long since cold.

\*\*\*\*

That same man stands before me now, and I still do not know if I believe him. He has not changed in all the years from then to now, and his face is still forgettable.

He tells me I must take them now, and I cannot say if he is real or simply illusion.

I never told you about the grief I felt the day Hans died, because it went beyond simple feeling.

I did not cry or wail or beat my fists bloody against the walls of my cell. Instead, something broke inside me. I felt it in my chest, and the wound has remained there ever since, more painful than any dealt on the battlefield.

It is in my mind too, this pain; a secondary result from such an injury.

If I am to do it, he says it must be now.

I fear the three dark oblongs in front of me and what they represent. The man, the Seer, has explained as best he can.

He speaks about time and how there is never enough, except what we are given and even this is not suitable.

I hold them in the palm of my hand.

It is time.

\*\*\*\*

*My Dear Sir,*

*It does pain me to be the bearer of most unhappy news. Our Emperor, Frederick the Second, has come to the end of his life, which, as you know, was a long and fruitful one. Truly, I feel his like will seldom be seen again.*



*As you were His Majesty's personal friend on your, now famous, flight to England, which led to the deposition of his unkind and malicious father, and, thereafter, did remain his most loyal and close friend, it is only right that you should be informed.*

*I know His Majesty would want you, Sir, above all others to be present at his funeral ceremony. In accordance with your standing among his circle of friends, a place of utmost honor has been set aside for you. I am sure you will be able to bring some measure of happy remembrance to so sad an occasion with memories of the happy years you spent in each other's company from your time as young men until today.*

*Truly, your friendship with our late Emperor was a thing of sublime beauty, and the happiness you brought to each other through the span of your lives was often a source of great comfort to those of us who served him.*

*I remain your most obedient servant...*

**The End**

## **Author Bio**

*R.L. Robinson was born in the north-east of Scotland and found he enjoyed writing from an early age. After studying English and Linguistics at university, he sold his first story and in the same year embarked on a career as a language teacher.*

*He currently divides his time between teaching in Eastern Europe and his home on the Scottish coast.*

## **Contact & Media Info**

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