

23 August - 6 September, 2018

THE LOVE THAT I HAVE

Reading Group Guide

ABOUT THE BOOK

Margot Baumann has left school to take up her sister's job in the mailroom of a large prison. But this is Germany in 1944, and the prison is Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Berlin.

Margot is shielded from the camp's brutality as she has no contact with prisoners. But she does handle their mail and, when given a cigarette lighter and told to burn the letters, she is horrified by the callous act she must carry out with her own hands. This is especially painful since her brother was taken prisoner at Stalingrad and her family have had no letters from him. So Margot steals a few letters, intending to send them in secret, only to find herself drawn to their heart-rending words of hope, of despair, and of love.

This is how Margot comes to know Dieter Kleinschmidt – through the beauty and the passion of his letters to a girlfriend. And since the girlfriend is also named Margot, it is like reading love letters written for her.

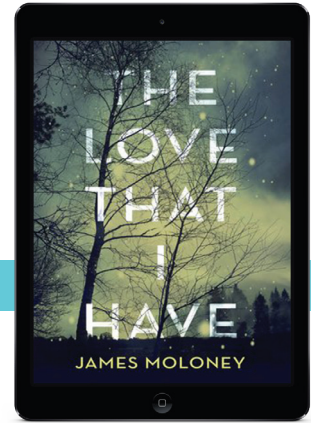
LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

Dear Fellow Reader,

There is no doubting the continuing interest in books set in the concentration camps during WW2 with Heather Morris' *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* an example of our desire to hear stories that remind us not only of the horrors of those camps and the appalling number of deaths, but also the extraordinary ability we have as humans to survive.

I too have always been drawn to books set during this period, and I will never forget the impact Anne Franks' *Diary of a Young Girl* had on me when read as a child. This was a book that showed me the kind of evil I never even imagined could exist – and it had happened only decades ago.

In James Moloney's extraordinary novel *The Love That I Have*, the protagonist, Margot Baumann, is the same age as Anne Frank's older sister Margot, and when I noted that



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James had dedicated his book to Margot Frank, I felt the most enormous connection with his book. And once I read the first powerful lines of the manuscript, 'For as long as I can remember, I've loved three things: the long summer holidays, my brother Walther and Adolf Hitler', I knew that, as Marcus Zusak did in *The Book Thief* and Anthony Doerr in *All the Light We Cannot See*, we were going to be drawn into the horrors of this war – that many of us are familiar with - but are made more horrific when seen through the eyes of an innocent.

And while there have been many books written about, and set, in concentration camps, I have never read about – or even thought about – the simple act of letter writing, and that essential need for human contact being denied to prisoners who are already suffering so much deprivation. And to burn – under orders – letters that don't belong to you is a command that any of us would find appalling, particularly during a time when 'we have received no word' meant literally that.

Margot's discovery of Dieter Kleinschmidt through his letters to his girlfriend, also called Margot, is a magical touch and it is hard not to be swept up in the romance and passion of first, intense love. But more than that, it is hard not to be astounded by Margot's bravery; bravery that sees her risk her own life as she resorts to lies, deception and blackmail in order to care for the man she so desperately loves.

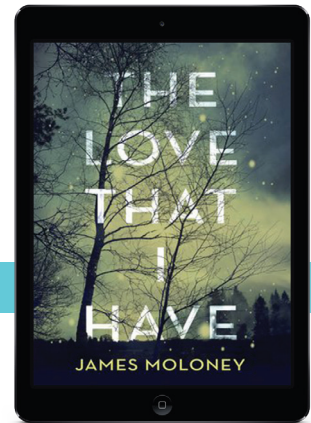
With all great love comes hope, and this magnificent book is imbued with the enduring love that sustains Margot and Dieter as they, and so many others like them, live through the final, dreadful stages of WW2 that saw thousands of people doing their best to make sense of the remnants of their lives.

The Love That I Have is one of the most powerful and remarkable books that I have had the privilege to publish. It is a book I am passionate about and one that I could not commend to you more highly.

I do hope you enjoy reading it.

With best wishes

Lisa Berryman
PUBLISHER



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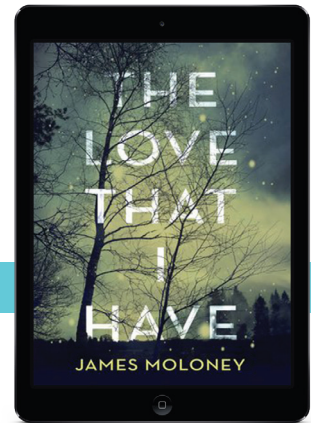
JAMES MOLONEY ON WRITING *THE LOVE THAT I HAVE*

Decades ago, when I was little older than the characters in this story, I spent a lazy Saturday afternoon watching Anthony Quinn portray a Romanian peasant deported to a German labour camp during WW2. Desperate for news of his beloved wife, he scrounges enough to buy paper and a stamp to let her know where he is, but in a brilliant piece of film-making, when he drops his letter through the mail slot, the camera switches to the other side of the wall in time to see a soldier tip the overflowing barrel of letters onto a bonfire. I sat up straight in my chair. Such cruelty! It seems laughable now, when so much worse was being done in concentration camps elsewhere, yet to extinguish those words of love and hope before they'd even left the camp seemed particularly callous. The images and emotions of that afternoon have stayed with me ever since. In *The Love That I Have*, I've finally turned them into a story of my own.

I was moved, too, by the experience of my mother who died not long before I started *The Love That I Have*. A teenager in England at the start of the war, she too fell in love during wartime, only for her fiancé to be killed just weeks before the German surrender. Later, she struck up a friendship with a German POW assigned to work near her home. His letters to her upon returning to Germany are still in our possession. They cannot hide the love he clearly felt for her.

My novels to date have been mainly aimed at the young adult audience, and while it is more raw in topic and setting, the central storyline in *The Love That I Have* allowed me to focus on all that I consider universal to adolescence – the naïve optimism and the vulnerability of those transitioning from innocence to experience. Once I saw how a love story would sit perfectly at the centre of the tale, I knew I had a powerful novel on my hands.

There are thousands of books and movies about the suffering of Europe's Jews. It rightly overwhelms all other stories of that period. Yet there were other stories worthy of the telling. The most harrowing part of my research was discovering the ferocious treatment metered out to all and any groups whom the Nazis disapproved of – priests and protestors, homosexuals, communists, even Jehovah's Witnesses. They weren't marked for the gas chamber, but instead worked to death in camps like Sachsenhausen. It seemed right that my prisoner, Dieter, should come from among their ranks.



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In naming my protagonist/narrator, I stumbled on just what I needed. Everyone knows the story of Anne Frank, which I'd revisited when inventing the Lipsky family. Few are aware that her older sister, Margot, experienced the same years in hiding and the same fate in Bergen-Belsen. An exact contemporary of Margot Baumann, *The Love That I Have* is dedicated to her.

Initially, I didn't have a love story so firmly in mind. I began with a young woman who is as disturbed by the callous act assigned to her as I had been when watching that film long ago. I wanted to find out what she would do. In that sense, Margot is me. It seemed inevitable that she would read some of the prisoners' letters. That threw up the idea that she might become attracted to one prisoner in particular. Is it possible to fall in love with a man purely through his words on a page? And how urgent could that love become, especially when I found my Margot growing stronger as a person with every chapter? I was equally horrified by what the invading Russians did to German civilians in the final days of the war, a story no one cared about at the time. If the love between Margot and Dieter is both heart-warming and heart-breaking, it's because Germany in 1945 left few lovers unscathed by sacrifice and loss.

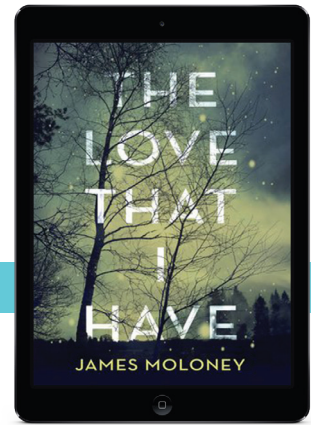


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In a career spanning three decades, James Moloney has delved fearlessly and with the deepest compassion into what it means to be human. His many novels have brought him a Victorian Premier's Prize and a Book of the Year Award from the Children's Book Council of Australia among other literary honours. Lovers of grand adventure continue to be enthralled by his Book of Lies trilogy and the Silvermay Sagas. In *The Love That I Have*, he turns his eye on humanity's darkest chapter, searching for light and hope amid the ashes.

REVIEWS

'James Moloney's latest novel, *The Love That I Have*, is a heartbreaking, harrowing and deeply hopeful story that delves into the horrifying realities faced by hundreds of thousands of prisoners interned in concentration camps during World War II. Teenager Margot's job in the mailroom of Sachsenhausen concentration camp on the outskirts of



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her town opens her eyes to the horrors of the war and exposes her to the realities of what is being done to the occupants of the overcrowded camps – whether they be Jewish, prisoners of war, Jehovah’s Witnesses or anyone who has opposed the Third Reich. Margot begins to read and rescue the prisoners’ letters she has been ordered to burn, and the letters of one particular prisoner capture Margot’s heart, and set her on a dangerous path of blackmail, deception and love. *The Love That I Have* takes the reader into the depths of Germany’s despair in the dying years of World War II, and the lengths that people would go to in order to hold onto – and deliver – hope to those who need it most.’

READING GROUP QUESTIONS

- 1 Was it justifiable for Margot to write to Dieter as if she were the Margot from his letters? Explore her reasons for doing so and consider if you could ever do something like this.
- 2 As Margot’s awareness grows, her relationship with her mother becomes strained. Discuss how they both reacted to the situation they found themselves in.
- 3 Margot and Dieter never discussed their history with their children. Why do you think this was? Would you do the same?
- 4 What can we learn from this novel that informs our own actions in the present day?
- 5 How does reading and writing improve empathy?
- 6 How might the novel have been different if it was written entirely in letters?