



## The Proof of Love

*Catherine Hall*

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## **The Proof of Love** Catherine Hall

A dazzling second novel from the author whose debut was compared to Sarah Waters and Daphne Du Maurier and won her tens of thousands of readers...

During the long, hot summer of 1976, a young Cambridge mathematician arrives in a remote village in the Lake District and takes on a job as a farm labourer. Painfully awkward and shy, Spencer Little is viewed with suspicion by the community and his only real friendship is with scruffy, clever ten-year-old Alice.

## **The Proof of Love Details**

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Author : Catherine Hall

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## From Reader Review The Proof of Love for online ebook

### Francesca says

2.5/5 stars

I was expecting a lot more. The first half is very atmospheric but the introduction to the main characters is not particularly deep; then there is an insta-romance that doesn't make much sense and it's used presumably to reveal the "secret from the past" (which was already quite clear) and the ending is abrupt while it could have been so much better.

The writing is good but I found the novel as a whole to be disproportionate: too heavy, but lacking psychological investigation, at the beginning and too quick in wrapping itself up.

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### Talitha says

4.5\*

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### Lindsay says

It's the long hot summer of 1976 in England, and Cambridge University mathematician Spencer Little comes to spend the holidays working as a farm labourer in the Lake District, after an indiscretion at University during the previous term (the nature of which is revealed to the reader later in the novel), leaves him wanting to get far away from academic life for awhile. Enquiring at the farm of brothers Hartley and Thomas Dodds, he is taken on there, and works with them voluntarily in exchange for lodgings in a hut on the fellside, befriending Hartley's young daughter Alice and his wife Mary. He plans to work hard during the days, and then study hard on his thesis, his mathematical proofs, in the evenings. He knows he has shown promise of being one of the best in his field, but he must make a breakthrough with his research to secure his future at the University. He is shy, lonely and quiet and keeps himself very much to himself. He gradually forms a sweet friendship with young Alice, with him encouraging her in her ambitions to be a ballet dancer and to learn about mathematics, and her being the most welcoming of those he meets in the Lakes, sharing her ideas and activities with him. She finds a figure she can trust in him, who supports her dreams and is kind to her, less harsh than her father. After an event during which Spencer proves to be a hero, he is welcomed more readily by the villagers, but as the summer moves on, and Spencer meets others, events and people conspire against the outsider, as the novel moves towards its conclusion.

This is a brilliant, atmospheric tale of loneliness, friendship, love, betrayal and tragedy. As well as being attracted by the storyline, I was also drawn to this novel in particular due to it being set predominantly in the Lake District. Beautifully and intelligently written, capturing everything from the rural setting in the Lakes, with those who have worked for generations on the land and are now struggling to make a living, to the fondness and friendship between Alice and Spencer, to the stifling summer heat and the pursuit of passion, and the suspicion, gossip and mistrust amongst the villagers of an outsider in their midst when events take a tragic turn. The book highlights the pure and logical nature of mathematical questions and answers, as opposed to the uncontrollable, heady nature of passionate love, the uncertainty of relationships, and the question of who we can and can't trust to stand by us. I loved this novel and couldn't put it down, though I

read it with a growing sense of foreboding. I found Spencer an intriguing character, disappearing from the world he knows and finding himself when living this unfamiliar life, and I was deeply moved by what happened to him. I kept thinking about the novel and the characters after I had finished it.

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### **Lotte Claridge says**

Simon at Savidge Reads recommended this on one of his vlogs and I ordered it the very same day I had seen the vlog. From the first page I was hooked. Catherine Hall's description of the landscape and of the people in this small village are so wonderful you truly feel you are there with them. Spencer the main character is a gentle odd ball with something to hide. Definitely not in touch with 1976 which is the setting of this novel. Alice, the young girl he befriends is so delightful with her constant questioning and observations of the world. The village holds more than it lets on in terms of characters and sometimes it carries you along in a cosy feel of country life, only to have that ripped away on the next page. I cried at the ending of this book, truly a wonderful reading experience

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### **Noelia Alonso says**

When I picked this up I didn't expect to love it this much. Even though it destroyed me.

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### **Sarah says**

This book sang to me. Growing up in rural Cumbria, the descriptions of the countryside, the landscape and the people just sang to a core of me that I didn't know I had. I always felt such an outsider and this book perfectly encapsulates the feeling of outsideness in a rural community. The pace of the book completely represents the weather, starts off slow and steamy and then picks up pace as the weather changes. Absolutely beautiful.

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### **Muddle head says**

1976 heat wave,  
Lake District, UK

Spencer Little is a 24 yr old Mathematician on a sabbatical from Cambridge, who finds himself in the countryside looking for *internship*. He ends up with the Dodds' farmhouse as a help staying put in their hut by the barn.

Alice Dodd is a 10yr old whose life is all about taking care of her pregnant dog Shadow, the hens that lay her eggs which she can sell to afford Ballet lessons.

Mary Dodd, the mother works tirelessly at the house, trying to provide for her daughter's needs and desires despite her husband's apathy.

Hartley Dodd, the father who inherits his dad's farm and stifles his own dreams probably to be a "farmer" expects his wife and daughter to give up their dreams as well and get used to the harsh reality of a farmer's life.

As the summer wears on, Spencer finds himself being accepted by the village, Hartley grows increasingly moody, Alice becomes inseparable from Spencer and Mary tries her best to keep the temperatures down. But all of this is just waiting to explode in a torrential rain (of emotions for the reader) as Spencer struggles to accept himself for what he is and still be loving Alice (and Mathy-matics).

Spencer-Alice relationship is one of the best i have ever read and imagined and for that alone one i'd recommend this book for everyone.

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### **les points cardinaux says**

I really enjoyed the first 200 hundred pages but the last 100 hundred pages were a let down. I guess I expected more. Overall this was a very immersive and quick read that unfortunately left me unsatisfied.

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### **Karen Mace says**

This is an extremely understated and beautifully written book following Spencer Little as he has left Cambridge trying to put the events of the past term behind him, and he arrives in a tiny, rural village in the Lake District. He finds work and accommodation on a local farm and soon has struck up a sweet friendship with the farmers' young daughter, Alice.

As the story unfolds we learn more of the reasons why he left Cambridge, and also exploring the actions of the rural community especially life for the farmers' family whom he rules over with an iron road, and normally in a drunken stupor.

You can't help but fall in love with little Alice as she is such a sweet and endearing character, and Spencer is soon put in conflict when he has to make some tough choices.

A beautiful story with both heartwarming and heartbreaking moments

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### **Christine Parkinson says**

It was OK .... a bit about nothing really. Easy enough to read but lacking on the story front.

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### **David Hebblethwaite says**

In 1976, a Cambridge mathematician named Spencer Little travels to the Lake District for the summer, intending to work on the proof that will secure him a fellowship. He takes a job on the farm of Hartley and Mary Dodds, and finds a friend in their ten-year-old daughter Alice. It takes a while for the locals to warm to

Spencer, but they do when he rescues Alice from a fire. Even then, however, life doesn't begin to run smoothly, because Spencer gets caught up in the tensions between Alice and her father; the secret he left behind in Cambridge still haunts him; and he gains a new secret to keep when he falls in love in Cumbria.

Catherine Hall does two things particularly well in *The Proof of Love*, which combine to create the spine of the novel. The first of these is to evoke the rawness of life in her setting (with effectively precise description) and the way it has literally left its mark on the inhabitants (including Spencer, who starts off far more used to focusing on his mind than his body, and is made physically capable and stronger by the farm work). The second is to dramatise the conflict between different ways of life, as represented by the characters. This is not a straightforward case of intellectualism versus physicality; it's more about showing how the farming lifestyle has taken over the Dodds family. Hartley reveals that he had the intelligence to go to university, but that path was closed off from him because he was required to inherit the farm; in his turn, he refuses to allow Alice to do anything that might open up new possibilities for her life -- and the friction this causes is only exacerbated by the arrival of Spencer, who is emblematic of precisely such a different kind of life. (Spencer, of course, finds his own kind of freedom in the very life from which Alice dreams of escaping, thus highlighting the complexity of the situation.)

As the final page approaches, the sense increases that things are going to end badly. Hall deftly builds tension of the kind that comes from seeing the pieces of the story falling, but not knowing where they will land—and where they do land has both an inevitability and a final twist. *The Proof of Love* is tough on its characters, but rewarding for its readers.

(This review first appeared on Fiction Uncovered.)

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### **Debbie says**

This is a story of love versus logic and ultimately denial and betrayals.

It starts with the arrival, on a bicycle, of Spencer, a young Cambridge maths postgrad, in Cumbria during the 1976 summer heatwave. Spencer is surrounded by mystery, who are you - why are you here, standing out like a sore thumb in a northern farming / village community.

Spencer swaps life in Cambridge for an unpaid farming job and, despite being shy and withdrawn, soon becomes entangled in local life, making an unlikely friend of the farmer's 11 year old daughter and also with the village eccentric.

The characters evolve well and descriptions of farming life are gritty rather than romanticised. Behind the events the mystery of Spencer's past hangs over him as he becomes more and more involved with the farming and village community.

The Proof of Love is Catherine Hall's second book, her first Days of Grace is being added to my reading list.

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### **Priya Bhakta says**

I read somewhere once that every book has a perfect reader. I think for this book that might be me. I love this book so much that when I did finish it I couldn't move for a while whilst I processed what had happened. I've carried this book in my head and my heart ever since that first time and it seems to get better with each read.

Some people might think not much happens because Hall's style is sparse, not a word is wasted, but those that she does use are packed full of emotion. The Lake District in a heatwave is ripe ground for telling stories. I fell for Spencer and Alice straightaway and found myself sucked into their world.

I don't want to give too much away about the story because it is a slow unfolding. But I will say that it's beautiful, it's heartbreaking, it's utterly exquisite and I couldn't recommend it more.

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### **Sue says**

There are very few times you come across a book that makes you go "Wow" big time. This is one of those. I can't believe I waited so long to read this gem of a book. Taking place in my very favorite places in the whole wide world. Just a spot on book in every way!

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### **Joanne says**

I really loved this book. It's one of those books that gets under your skin and you can completely lose yourself in - I couldn't wait to go to bed so I could pick it up again, and I found myself having to reach for a chapter or two (or three or four) during the night if I woke.

Set in 1976, it is the story of Spencer Little, a mathematician from Cambridge University, who feels the need to escape from Cambridge during the summer break to try to work out a maths proof for a fellowship he is working towards, and to leave behind the whisperings following a 'situation' that occurred towards the end of term.

He cycles to the Lake District and stumbles across a farm where he stops to ask for work, and he spends the summer working simply for his food and board, while spending his evenings working on his maths proof. A shy man, with a stutter, he slowly becomes involved in rural life, despite attempts to remain anonymous, and makes friends with the 10-year old farmer's daughter, Alice, and a local eccentric, and becomes a hero when saving Alice from a fire on the hills.

As the heat intensifies, so does the pace of the story as we learn about the events which pushed him to leave Cambridge, and it builds towards its tragic conclusion. It's a story of love, betrayal, loneliness, friendship and tragedy. It's a sad but supremely beautiful book.

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