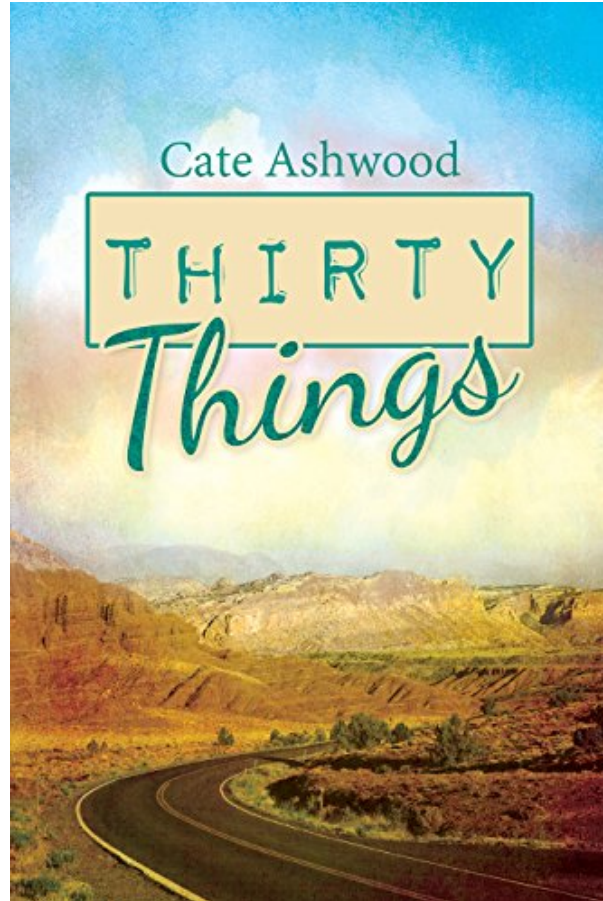
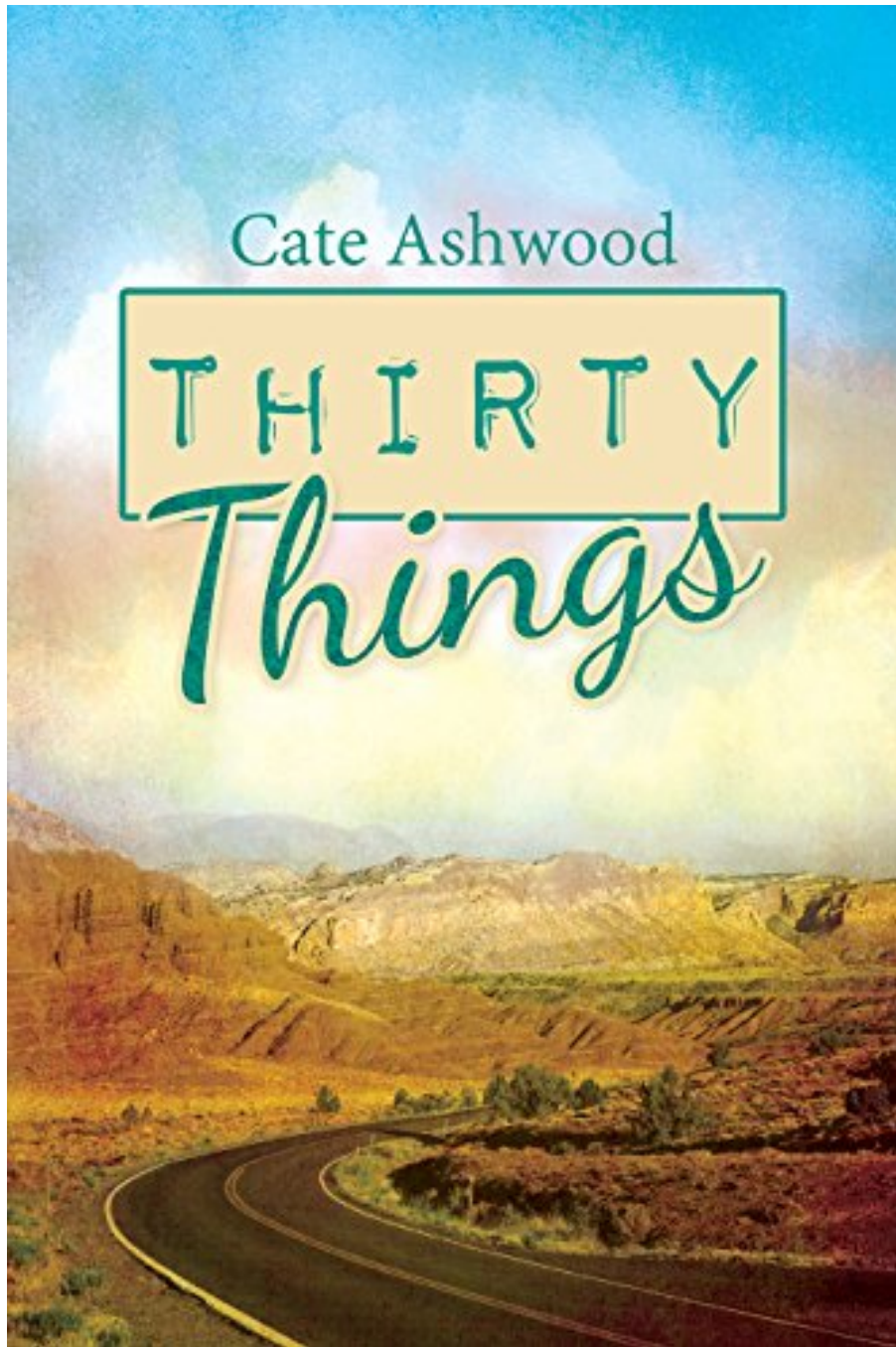


THIRTY THINGS BY CATE ASHWOOD



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THIRTY THINGS BY CATE ASHWOOD PDF

All their lives, Finn and Nate have been inseparable, sharing everything, and when a childhood accident left Finn broken, Nate stood by his side as all his other friends left. After all their years together, there's one secret Finn still hasn't revealed: he has been in love with Nate since they were eight years old. Hiding his feelings for twenty-one years—terrified of what might happen if Nate ever found out—has been difficult, but losing his best friend would be worse than living with a bad case of unrequited love. Unfortunately for Finn, Nate doesn't make it easy.

Nate believes there are some things that just have to be done before your thirtieth birthday. As a gift to Finn, he plans an adventure to check off a list of thirty things to experience before hitting that milestone. Starting in Crawfordsville, Indiana, they tour the country, trying new things and meeting interesting new people. Nate's having the time of his life, but he can tell Finn is holding something back. As the days count down, navigating the back roads suddenly seems easier than figuring out where their relationship is heading.

One thing's for certain. There will be no turning back.

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3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Different, Endearing and Beautiful

By Alan Arthur Katz

Oh lucky me. For those familiar with my reviews, you must be thinking: he's losing his mind, all those five-star reviews, one after another. But no, I've just gotten lucky. The last few books I've read were special, each unique in its own way, and that's extraordinary in a genre that often relies on formula instead of imagination.

At first glance, "Thirty Things" might strike you as just another formula book – the gay road trip. I've read more than a few of those. But, as always, first glances can be deceiving. This is a lovely journey, lovingly and beautifully written, a great experience for the characters, an even more rewarding one for the lucky reader.

Nate and Finn are roommates, best friends, and companions since they were both eight years old. Finn is gay and out, Nate appears to be relentlessly straight (if his regular conquests are any indication). Finn, however, is still a virgin. He has a problem, a major impediment to a rich and fulfilling sex life – he's been in love with Nate since he was thirteen years old, and no other man stacks up to him.

Finn has been extraordinarily careful in hiding his attraction and passion for Nate. He's just about to turn 30, and he's become so used to living an unrequited love that he can't even consider other possibilities. He's also deathly afraid that Nate will find out, because it might destroy the incredibly close friendship the two have

shared for most of their lives. His other great fear is Nate falling in love with one of the girls he beds. A serious relationship would not only make Finn a fifth wheel, but Nate would, inevitably, move out and move along. Finn isn't sure he could bear that.

For the last two weeks, Nate has been secretive, which is totally out of character. The two men always share everything. Finally, Finn demands to know what's going on, and Nate relents. He's been putting together Finn's birthday gift – a road trip across the country with a list of 30 things to do before turning thirty. He's accumulated a bucket list of all the things he knows that Finn always wanted to do, but never found the time or the confidence to tackle. Oh yes, Finn has a bit of a disability. When they were kids, Finn fell out of a tree in Nate's yard and got run over by a car as he dropped out of the sky right in front of a hapless driver who couldn't avoid him. The accident crushed his pelvis and part of his legs. He's undergone years of therapy, but he still walks with a limp and has trouble remaining standing when he's fatigued or he's overexerted himself. Nate is always there to catch him, encouraging his independence, but watching his back to make sure he's OK. That's one of the reasons that Finn works from the small house he shares with Nate. He loves his work as a book editor, and can do it from anywhere. No need to commute to an office or wend his way through a cubicle farm.

As luck would have it, Nate is a published author. He too works from home. They are a matched pair except, of course, in the romance department.

The birthday road trip is scheduled to last a month, and at each stop, Nate gives Finn an envelope containing the “dare” for the day. Some of them are just lovely events, like horseback riding, sleeping in a tree house (at a lovely resort built 25 feet above the ground), watching a meteor shower, attending his first rock concert or taking his first trip to Disneyland.

Others are real challenges to help Finn face down his fears, such as bungee-jumping over a thousand-foot gorge in Colorado or touring the Portland coast in a glass-bottomed helicopter. Finn accepts all the challenges because of his absolute trust in Nate, and gets to experience so many things that he might never have had the courage or ambition to try, were he to try them alone.

That constitutes the bulk of the book. It is truly a travelogue, with lush descriptions of some of the most beautiful and quirkiest places in America, plus glimpses of the evolving relationship between the two men.

About a third of the way through the trip, the inevitable happens: Nate cuddles up with Finn in bed, and later plants the most passionate but tender kiss on him. It rocks Finn's world. He's sure he's dreaming, but doesn't want to wake up. This is all he ever wanted his whole life, and the reality is infinitely better than his dreams

Of course, into even the loveliest lives, a little angst must fall, and the cause of it is Finn's confusion. It sure feels like Nate loves him. But just a couple of weeks ago, Nate was straight. Is this just a “vacation fling”, or a “pity thing”, or just some elaborate “experiment”? He is haunted by the possibility that the day this road trip ends, Nate goes back to dating girls and Finn will have to find a way to live with a shattered heart.

Fortunately for us, he's wrong. He should have trusted Nate. It's one of those old “communication” issues wherein both men had passionate feelings for each other, but neither would mention it in fear of killing their perfect friendship.

I won't give it away, but trust me, there is a happily-ever-after to be had in “Thirty Things”, and you'll probably guess it before Nate gets to the last envelope at the last stop.

That doesn't matter. Like the road trip, the pleasure of "Thirty Things" is in the journey, not the goal. And with a writer as adept as Cate Ashwood, getting there isn't half the fun, it's most of it. Her brilliant descriptions evoke vivid and memorable settings. Her dialogue is both credible and charming. The men are both so endearing - without a hint of malice or self-absorption - that you'll love them both from the very first page. You'll root for these authentic, sincere, talented men. You'll share their love. You'll cheer for them at every stop along the way. And, don't worry; this road trip is not exactly chaste. As it turns out, Ms. Ashwood is also really good at writing hot (but tasteful and romantic) sex. To be honest, there's nothing I could find in "Thirty Things" that she didn't do well.

If you want to read a sincere, beautifully-written and beautiful book, this is the one to read. Ms. Ashwood is an amazingly gifted writer. Kudos.

Alan is also a reviewer for the Sinfully Addicted blog...

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

This was a sweet story, but not particularly interesting or engaging

By KC

This was a sweet story, but not particularly interesting or engaging. I found myself skimming a lot, which at the price is unfortunate. The cliché "show don't tell" comes to mind - the main character Finn's narration was basically just a list of what they do on their road trip and it was pretty boring. I didn't really feel chemistry between the characters, who also felt one-dimensional. We were told they were best friends and then in love, but I didn't really feel it. The plot itself was boring, as the only conflict is Finn questioning Nate's feelings, which isn't particularly engaging because the reader isn't really given any reason to doubt the HEA. In fact, you can pretty much see where it's going from halfway through the book. I was also disappointed in how little dialogue was dedicated between the characters discussing Nate's sexuality. These best best friends - guys, did you know they're best friends? the author is going to tell you again every other page just in case - are almost 30, and yet Nate's never hinted at being anything other than straight to his gay best friend? Nate just says he's been "gay or bi" forever and thinking about Finn romantically for "a long time" but they never really have an actual conversation that tells that story. To me that's the more interesting, even romantic, part - or would have been. How did Nate begin to develop romantic and sexual feelings for his friend? How did he first feel about it, how did his feelings change over time? How did that change his vision for himself? The book can be narrated by Finn and still expose these aspects of Nate's development. Especially considering how insecure Finn feels about it, and that there is no other conflict to occupy the author, you'd think there would be more weight to the storyline. Finn's disability was also poorly researched and executed - there wasn't really consistency in how he was impacted by various activities, not a lot of backstory around how his daily life was impacted by constant pain management other than that he had pain to manage...it's hard to explain, but the author was telling us he had a disability, it was mentioned a lot, but I just couldn't really picture it. Like how does Finn walk? Does he have a constant limp or is it more just an uneven gait? How does his movement change as he tires or is in more pain? Just another "show don't tell" moment, I think. All in all, it wasn't a bad read. There were some interesting parts to the road trip and Ashwood did a good job describing their various adventures. Ultimately I wouldn't buy it again, I wish I'd read it through Kindle Unlimited instead.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Thirty Things by Cate Ashwood

By Lena Grey

"You were my best friend, and I didn't know, that you were in love with me, but it never showed. But I in turn had feelings too. Feelings of love, only for you. Turning to lovers, after being friends, both afraid our friendship would end." — "Friends in Love!" ~ chastidy

For years Nate and Finn, of 'Thirty Things' by Cate Ashwood, have behaved as a couple, just without the sex. They've always taken care of each other. They live together, share household responsibilities, meals, almost everything is done with the other in mind, particularly in Nate's case. He's tried his best to make things easier for Finn whether it be buying a low truck so Finn will have easy access, to giving him a piggy back ride when he gets too tired to walk. It's obvious that they truly love each other, just not in the way they both wish they could. Thank goodness Nate decides to change that.

There are many things Nate and Finn have talked about but haven't done, and Nate decides it's high time they tried them. He plans an elaborate road trip with several stops and activities around the country and writes a list of thirty things to do before they turn thirty; some are simple and others are complicated, but all are amazing. Nate puts each in a separate envelope for Finn to open, one each day. Finn is overwhelmed by Nate's generosity and can't wait to get started. Some things on the list are really enjoyable, like gambling in Las Vegas; and others, like bungee jumping, terrify Finn, but even with that, he trusts Nate so implicitly that he goes along with whatever Nate has planned with little argument.

As if the trip weren't magical enough, Finn's biggest surprise is when Nate kisses him; really kisses him. Instead of being happy, Finn is totally befuddled. He starts speculating on what the kiss means and becomes anxious and a bit paranoid. Is Nate joking? Does he really share Finn's feelings? Since when is Nate gay? Is this just happening during the trip? What happens when they get back home? As has been Finn's pattern for their whole life when it comes to his feelings for Nate, he can't bring himself to talk to Nate about his fears and concerns. He buries them like he always has, leaving Nate to speculate on what's wrong. As much as Finn wants to believe that what he's dreamed of for years is finally happening, it's hard for him to let go and enjoy it. When Finn finally tells Nate how he's feeling, Nate tries even harder to prove he's sincere.

Reading this endearing friends-to-lovers story is like visiting a comfortable place where I could feel safe and happy. It's a down-to-earth experience rather than a great challenge necessitating a lot of deep thinking. There's very little angst. The trip involves lots of wonderful scenery; with exotic, frightening, challenging, and simply touching parts. Nate and Finn fit together so well that it made my heart hurt, but in a good way, giving me that warm and fuzzy feeling that a book this special often does. If you are a hopeless romantic like me, you may love this story. Thanks, Cate, for the lovely story and informative journey.

Originally reviewed at Rainbow Book Reviews.

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