



## The Queering: The Life and Death of Brooke Skipstone

### Brooke Skipstone

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*The Queering is a riveting novel in which an older lesbian makes a delayed choice to shout out the truth, no matter the consequences.*

A seventy-year-old closeted lesbian writer faces her past in Brooke Skipstone's intense, decades-spanning LGBTQ+ novel *The Queering*—a book about love, courage, and solidarity.

Taylor keeps a low profile in rural Alaska, where bigotry and misogyny make any hint of queerness dangerous. The 1974 murder of her lover made her fearful of coming out; she entered into a loveless marriage and worked as a high school teacher. But keeping her sexuality secret led to years of grief and loneliness. She found some release in writing queer novels under a pen name—and in remembering her ebullient first love. One of her novels makes an impact with her student, Grace.

But when Grace's father, who is a violent, homophobic white supremacist leader, recognizes Taylor as the author of Grace's favorite book, Taylor's safety is threatened. Fearing the "queering" of America, Grace's father leads a campaign against her—and against her vision of freedom, authenticity, and a safety for queer teenagers. Further, the man responsible for Taylor's first love's death has been released and is seeking retribution against her for her testimony against him. Desperate to tell the truth about her past before she is killed, Taylor writes her memoir, telling the story of her early relationship in the hope of generating understanding.

The book's treatment of LGBTQ+ and adult issues is forthright and respectful. Whether depicting the playful, all-consuming, joyful experience of young love or the blossoming of mature love seasoned by loss and memories, the narrative reveals a "profound warmth and tenderness where a simple touch or kiss was no longer a prelude to a more manic ecstasy but the core itself." All lovemaking, ranging from sensual touch to wild, exuberant passion, is honored, and the contrast between such love and those who would kill to end it is stark.

The cast is developed in rich terms, with people understood both in terms of their hidden and sometimes irrational fears and their actions. Both the book's villains and the women and girls they go against are treated in full; in the case of the latter, love, respect, and bravery bridge generational gaps. Taylor, Grace, and others are captured with humanity: their only transgression is having loved those of their own genders. Their exchanges drive the novel forward; they are moving conversations that explore the heights and depths of human emotions with clarity. And the book's pace is consistent, increasing in speed and intensity as events move Taylor toward an inevitable, terrifying confrontation.

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KRISTINE MORRIS (December 13, 2022)

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