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Literary

The Emancipating Death of a Boring Engineer
Michel Bruneau
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This is certainly one way to go out: “My casket shall be filled to the rim with 2005 Saint-Émilion.” But in Michel Bruneau’s *The Emancipating Death of a Boring Engineer* that is only the beginning of the requests from recently (and mysteriously) deceased Keene Mason. His ex-wife, Carmina, named as his only next of kin, is charged with carrying out his last wishes.

Turns out this will be much bigger than picking out songs for a funeral service. Carmina and Keene haven’t spoken in over a decade, and his last wishes are conveyed through a series of letters read by his lawyer. Or will be once she agrees to the terms, which involve gathering “a few objects I need to cradle in my coffin before departing this world for good.” In return for her time and energy, Carmina will receive a large sum of money to donate to the charity of her choice.

In the end, forced by the circumstances of her role as a director of placements at a non-profit group home with dwindling resources, Carmina agrees to Keene’s treasure hunt. Her bosses insist she bring Sig, a twelve-year-old pyromaniac and resident at the group home. Most recently, Sig was kicked out of his foster home for attempting to set fire to a cat. So, understandably, he is not her first choice for a companion on this journey that will take them across countries and oceans, into basements and police stations.

Bruneau’s writing is strongest when the real stories of Keene’s life are unfurling, when Carmina and Sig are collecting the objects for his coffin. So while Sig inches his way toward a strange new maturity, Carmina discovers the history of a husband she never really knew. And Justin, the lawyer Keene hired to execute his will, is falling in love with Carmina. It’s a love triangle of the strangest kind.

As the novel winds to a close there are more losses and more gains; more risks and more surprises. If you can survive Keene's long-winded letters (Sig did, though barely), you might find yourself charmed by a so-called boring engineer.

Michel Bruneau is also the author of *Shaken Allegiences*.

Hope Mills