



The Collector

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Neil Sandell

***HearSay Audio Arts Festival
6 April 2019***

The Collector

SFX: Rain

MUSIC. Camille Saint-Saens: Clarinet Sonata, Opus 167

[French lesson]

Professeur: *Démarreur... Auto radio.... Climatisation ...
Diesel.*

Neil: *Diesel.*

Prof: *Pare-brise.*

Neil: *Pare-brise.*

Prof: *Pare-brise.*

Neil: *Pare-brise.*

Prof: *Il y a risque de bruleur. Bruleur.*

Neil: *Bruleur. C'est difficile.*

Prof: *Mais non. Bruleur.*

Neil: *Bruleur.*

Neil: I've been living in France for five years now. I still struggle with the language.

Prof: *Functionnement*

Neil: *Function- fonctionnement*

Neil: The autumn rains are closing in now. The clouds hang low like shrouds. And I find my world has grown quiet. Quiet, but for the voices.

Answering machine: Next message...

Old Man: You be home when I call and answer no later than the second ring. Now, that's it. Oh, we're home.

Woman 1: Were you sorry that you did it? Or were you glad?

Woman 2: No, no, I'm not sorry. Why should I be?

MUSIC

Neil: So, you just sort of let things happen?

Mother: Yeah. You have no control over a lot of things. That's the way I feel.

Neil: I bet you didn't think I would turn out the way it did.

Mother: I thought you were going to be a rabbi at one point.

SFX: DOG GRUNTING

Neil: What's happening?

Wife: The pugs are play-bowing each other, sniffing each other's butts, making noise as normal. As you say it's the soundtrack of our life. And I'm grateful for it.

MUSIC, DOGS GRUNTING

Neil: I've been putting on headphones through over 30 years, making a living by recording people's words. Then, shaving them down to soundbites.

Man: Ahh, your father was very much involved in this wasn't he?

Eva: It's beautiful.

Jens: They drill holes into your skull --

John: I am an old man.

Jens: -- and your brain melts and disappears.

Jessica: What? Shut up. Really?

Neil: I collect voices. I've picked them up along the way, like finding a shell on the beach. But a lot of times they choose me. It's like coming home from the beach and you find the shell in your pocket. And you don't remember how it got there. But you look it over and you keep it. And you come to treasure it.

Mother: So much depends on each individual and their fate. Really.

Neil: Some are ghosts now. My mother. My dogs. Yet they're still alive when I listened to them. And they keep me company. All of them.

Jens: I will never be as fit and strong and lean and ready and young. Like now.

Neil: A voice is ephemeral. It has no body, no substance. It's like a wisp of smoke. But sometimes I feel like I can reach out and touch it, hold it in the palm of my hand and caress its smooth contours. Or its sharp edges.

John: Uh, I am an old man. I'm going to be 84 in July. And I never stopped working. And that's why probably I'm in pretty good health on the whole.

Neil: When you make a feature documentary, you spend days with some of the voices listening to them over and over again. At some point when you listen closely, it stops being about the words. It's about the way they say the words.

John: In July -

Neil: You listen closely, alert to the sounds that are not words.

Jess: Huh

Neil: And the spaces between the words.

Jess: Fifty...six?

Neil: Alert to what is hidden.

Wife: You know I'm not a particularly jealous wife but –

[LAUGHTER]

Neil: Alert to the laughter.

Alert for the silence.

MUSIC ENDS

Neil: I don't talk as much as I used to. I don't have many people to talk to. I came to France for the third act of my life and I love it here. But now, I see I took something for granted. The ease of just having a casual conversation. I can't do that here. My French isn't good enough. I came here for a fresh start. But boy, I didn't anticipate the solitude.

And so, in this quiet, in this absence of voices, I find myself drawing closer to the ones that I've collected. *[MUSIC]*
And if I listen closely, I lose myself.

Tara: I did not have anything to do, nobody to do anything with. I mean, by going to a store, at least you could -- it was a reason to put on clothing and leave the house.

Eva: I think it looks like if she just wanted to talk to you.

Clara: Don't you think?

Carmen: You can almost hear it in their voice.

SFX: RAIN

Neil: What am I doing? Is this supposed to be some elegy to days gone by? No, that's not it.

MUSIC

Neil: I think...

Clara: Don't you think?

Neil: I think I'm writing a love letter. Yeah. A love letter to the voices. Those voices that keep me warm as winter comes to my door.