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# Interview

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BOY NEXT DOOR

## Connor Storrie Didn't Think This Was Going to Work Out

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Connor Storrie, photographed by Tyler Kohlhoff.

For the last month, images of **Connor Storrie's** impressively globular buttocks have taken over the internet. But for the 25-year-old actor and star of *Heated Rivalry*, it wasn't until a few days ago, when an acquaintance likened HBO's runaway hit to the network's Sunday night tentpole, *The White Lotus*, that he began to process the magnitude of the show's popularity. "Okay," he recalled on a Zoom call last week, "this is not just the world gaslighting me." But it's easy to see why Storrie, who was waiting tables in Los Angeles not long before getting the part, was mistrusting of his sudden

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celebrity. *Heated Rivalry*, adapted from a smutty, seven-year-old romance novel by Rachel Reid, was shot in under 40 days for a Canadian streaming service most Americans had never heard of. They hadn't heard of Storrie and his co-star Hudson Williams either, though both emit the kind of raw charisma and easy confidence one finds less and less frequently in an age of TikTok stardom and algorithmic sludge.

That's to say nothing of their on-screen chemistry as a pair of world-class hockey players—think Crosby and Ovechkin if they were DL—engaged in a torrid, years-long love affair. As the acid-tongued Russian Ilya Rozanov, Storrie writhes with intensity, a Slavic foil to his halting Canadian counterpart Shane Hollander, brought to life by a dutifully sad-eyed Williams. “I feel like I got the character pretty instantly,” says Storrie. So too, it seems, has the show's spirited audience, whose responses have ranged from sweetly earnest to sexually depraved. Storrie, though, is game for all of it. “That element of entertainment and play,” he adds, “that's ultimately what makes you fall in love with these characters.” Ahead of the show's season finale, available to stream now, he joined us to reflect on overnight fame, the vagaries of the press circuit, and why he doesn't consider himself an “actor's actor.”

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JAKE NEVINS: Hey, Connor.

CONNOR STORRIE: What's up? Let me close my door real quick so we don't have any sound interruptions.

NEVINS: How are you doing?

STORRIE: I'm good. How are you doing?

NEVINS: I am good. I know you've been doing this quite a bit these last few weeks, so thank you for taking the time.

STORRIE: Oh my goodness. Of course.

NEVINS: I wanted to start by just inviting you to take a step back and reflect on the whirlwind of the last month, because your life has changed pretty dramatically. Have you had a chance to stop and smell the roses?

STORRIE: Well, I got back from Canada on the 30th of November. I spent a week there for a few premieres and a few

outings and press days. And, yeah, pretty much from the moment I got back, it's been go, go, go, go, go. Luckily for me, I love hard work. I love having a full schedule. I learned that in the month of November leading up to press, I was doing production on a feature film of mine. I did this really rough and ready iPhone feature, and that was the hardest I've ever worked in my entire life. So luckily, right before the busiest time of my life, I learned that I really enjoy that.

All of this has been so cool. It's been shocking because I'm a nihilist when it comes to how I think things are going to be received. There's so many things that get made, and online we have access to so many opinions that I fully prepared myself before anything happened. I mean, it sounds negative, but I really don't mean it as a negative thing. I actually think it's really beautiful and realistic and gives your work an unconditional love if you can go in accepting the worst case scenario like, "Guess what? I'm going to do it regardless." I was fully prepared for nothing to really come of this. It'd be a really beautiful moment for fans of the books, but it has since transcended that. Anything on top of that is a total blessing, cherry on top of the cake. And it just keeps getting bigger and bigger and bigger.





NEVINS: It sure does. I'm curious, can you identify the moment along this journey where you realized *Heated Rivalry* had found its audience? Where you thought, "Wow, this thing has legs"?

STORRIE: Well, it really didn't start to settle in until a few days ago.

NEVINS: Is that right?

STORRIE: I don't know where I was. What was I doing? I was at a photo shoot or something. It's all blending together at this point.

NEVINS: I bet.

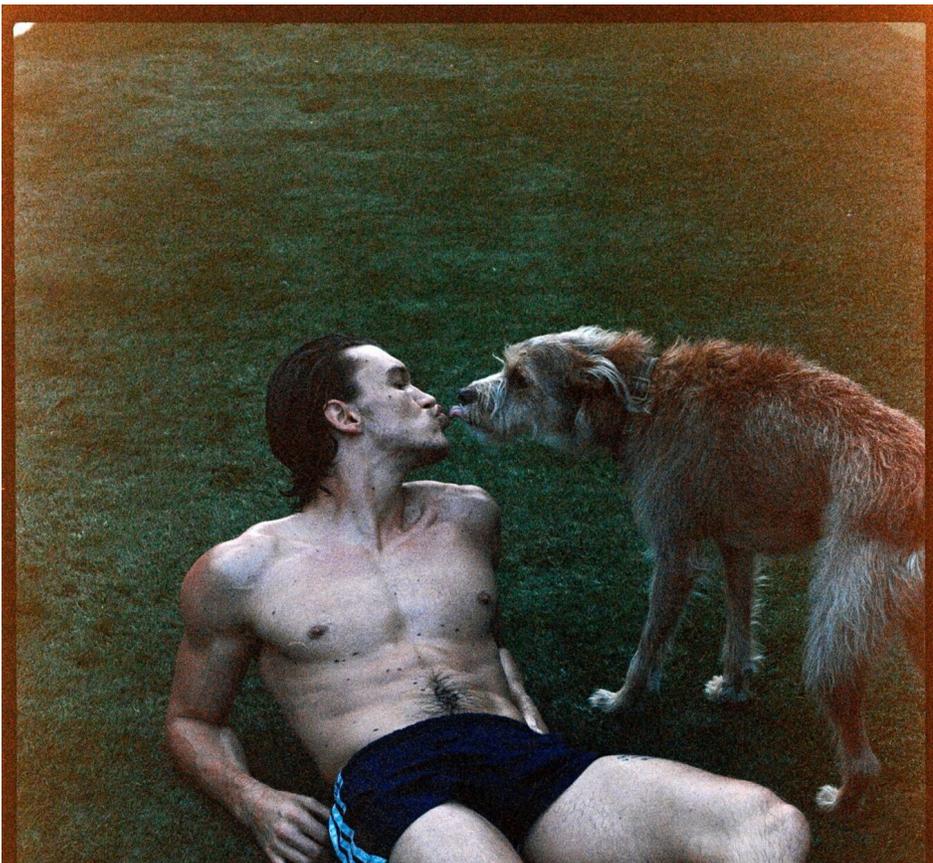
STORRIE: Someone was talking and they were like, "I haven't heard people talk about a show like this since *The White Lotus* first came out." I got to *White Lotus* a little bit later, but at the time, I just remember hearing about it from all angles and seeing stuff about it online like crazy. But for someone to make comparisons to things outside of it, and then to see the show being number one on HBO Max, it's like, "Okay, this is not just the world gaslighting me."

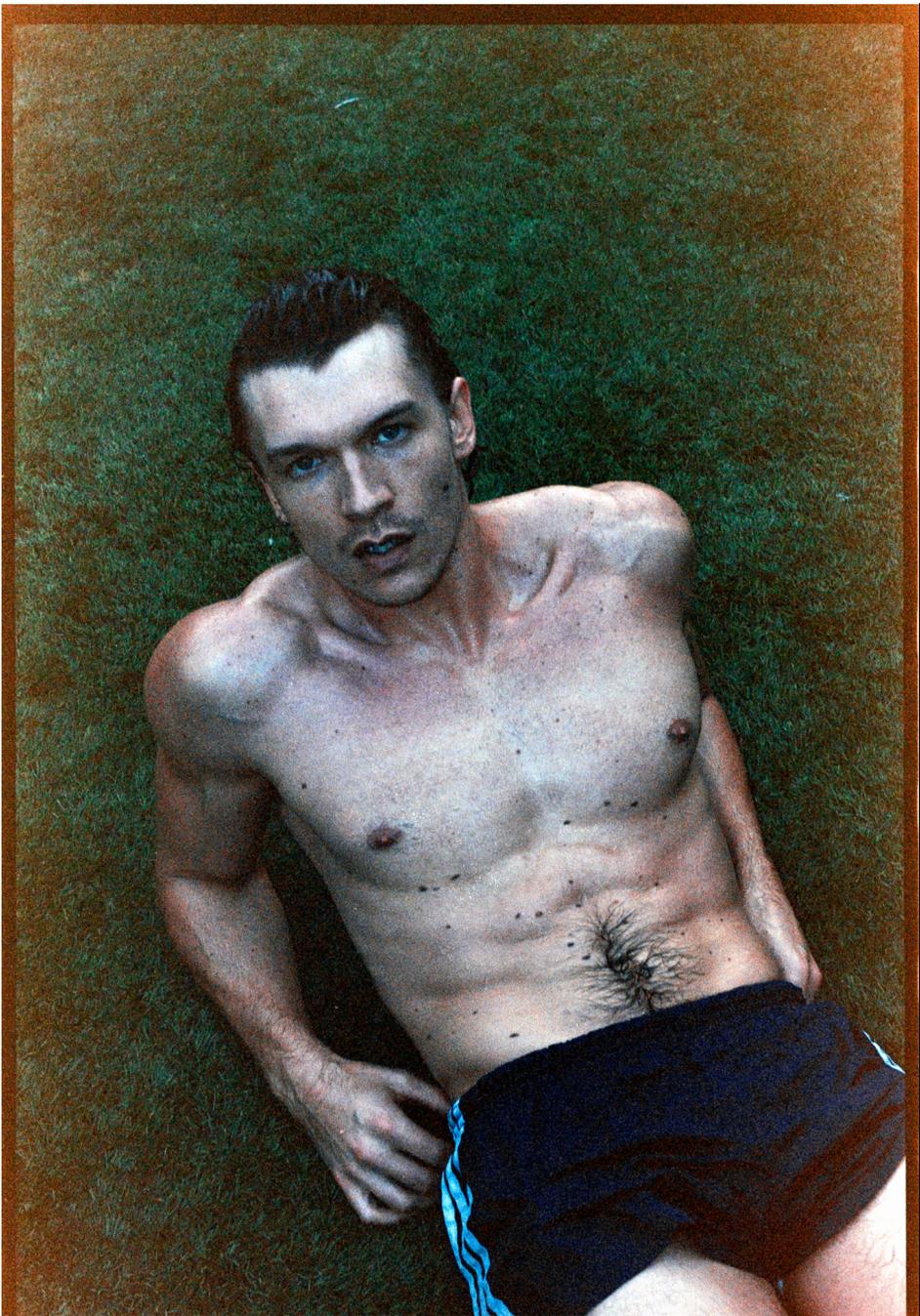
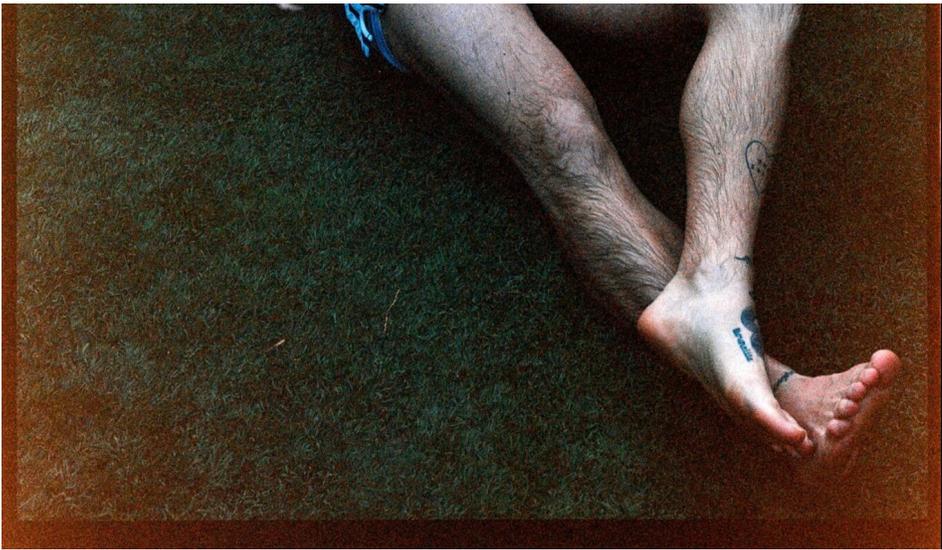
NEVINS: Well, it's proof positive that there's a really hungry audience for these kinds of stories, and that LGBTQ folks will come out in droves to see themselves and their experiences reflected in mainstream entertainment. You mentioned that you're not terribly optimistic about the prospects of your own projects, so I'm curious to what extent that reception surprised you.

STORRIE: I think it's really important to be intentional with the audiences that you are playing for, that you're

representing, and knowing Jacob [Tierney] being a gay man and spearheading this entire thing, there's just a natural trickle-down effect that happens where it feels like you're honoring something that's really real and really important to a lot of people. But my biggest focus from the jump was the book, because if that's the source material, my job is to honor that through Jacob's lens. I mean, so many queer people obviously feel loved and seen by that book.

I mean, the response has been great. I get so many messages from people, more specifically tons of queer people, people that feel really seen by Ilya and feel visible and validated as a bisexual and really resonate with that story. I remember someone had a book signing and this man, a trans man, was so physically moved by the story. And neither of our characters are trans, but I think that just shows that this transcends to anyone that feels that sense of otherness. So, yeah, I just wanted to honor the books, and I know that the books are so loved. But I also want to point out that, although it's very important, it's also just fun and entertaining, which makes it so much more accessible to people. Because that element of fun, entertainment, play, that's ultimately what makes you fall in love with these characters and really see them as people.







*Shorts Sylist's Own*

**NEVINS:** The show also made me think about the near-total absence of openly gay men in professional sports, which is something I've written about a bit. Did that come up in your preparation for the role at all?

**STORRIE:** I think Ilya and Shane have very different approaches. I always say that they're coming from opposite sides of the same coin. Even though Ilya isn't openly bisexual with the world, he doesn't have any personal qualms when it comes to that. So I think him not being out definitely has to do with the sports culture of it all, but also his Russian background and his family dynamics, where that's definitely not allowed. I don't feel like there's a denial of his truth in the way that there is for Shane or some of the other characters in the series. But that friction of expressing yourself, being out and proud and going against the grain within professional sports, becomes more important in the other books as the story develops.

**NEVINS:** When you read the books, were there any scenes or moments you'd earmarked and were particularly excited to bring to the camera?



*Sweatshirt and Boxers ERL Tank Top, Shorts, Socks, and Shoes Stylist's Own*

**STORRIE:** To be honest with you, I was so distracted with trying to perfect the Russian and not look like a complete toddler on skates. [Laughs] If I didn't have those two really physical things to battle, I would've had a lot of time to sit

and get nervous about everything. I feel like I got the character pretty instantly. I believed in his circumstances without almost any effort, and I just trusted Hudson so much. It's so easy to act when you know where you're coming from and you believe the person opposite you. I mean, I'm so gooey. I'm such a romantic. So any of the really heightened emotional moments—their love or confession or an outbreak or a fight—those are the moments that I really enjoy as an actor. I mean, the first four episodes are pretty much two people not fully expressing themselves, you know?

NEVINS: Right.

STORRIE: So those were the moments that I was really excited because there was just so much unspoken tension the whole time.

NEVINS: Right. I think that's partially why it's hot and erotic—their moments of tenderness and intimacy set against the dynamic of two extremely successful and competitive athletes trying to one-up each other, talking trash and whatnot.

STORRIE: We're both good at what we're doing. Shane takes it really, really seriously. He wants to be a really good hockey player because he loves hockey—he wants to be the *best* at hockey. For Ilya, I think it's coming from feeling insignificant on some level and using anything to make himself feel good. I think that's why he's able to party. I think that's why he buys the crazy cars. I think that's why he has a million girlfriends. I think that's why he never settles down. I think that's why he can't ever crack jokes. Hockey just so happens to be something that was accessible and that he's good at, something that he can use as a tool to make himself feel good rather than his true value being in hockey. So when a rivalry like that happens, I think people try to make it as simple as two people who are the best at hockey, who love hockey and want to be the best. Whereas I think the rivalry really is between a perfectionist and... I'm trying to think.





*Tank Top and Socks Stylist's Own Boxers Tommy Hilfiger*





NEVINS: A hedonist?

STORRIE: Yeah, that's good. A hedonist and a perfectionist, and that's why that rivalry can transmute into a loving sexual relationship.

NEVINS: Which do you identify with more in your relationship to acting?

STORRIE: Well, even though I'm an actor, I always say I'm not an actor's actor.

NEVINS: What do you mean by that?

STORRIE: I don't see acting from the inside necessarily. I see everything from the outside first. I look at the piece, I look at the thing, and then I justify why we're there instead of really delving into the character and constantly questioning their reality. Sometimes you'll be on sets and—I don't think this is wrong, it's just not how my brain works—actors will question, "Maybe he wouldn't do that right now, or maybe he wouldn't say it that way." They gather all of this information, internalize it, let the person gestate inside of them, and then they work to bring that person to life. Whereas for me, I'm like, "The script is fucking king." Whatever it is, if I see the movie in my head, I want to make the movie. I mean, I don't predict every single choice I'm going to make, but I make it make sense. I'm like, "There's a fucking reason why I say this exact thing. I'm not going to question the reality. I'm not going to question why this or this shouldn't happen." So I think that is a little less perfectionist because I don't love acting for the skill. I love acting for the final outcome of being a component in a film or a TV show. I love the overall picture. I love being a part of the machine.

NEVINS: You see yourself as a vessel for the text.

STORRIE: Yeah.

NEVINS: It seems like you're adjusting to overnight fame pretty seamlessly. But what don't we—the public—see?

STORRIE: Do you mean in general, or during this period as things are changing for me?

NEVINS: Well, lately you've got to be *on* a lot. It's a relatively new experience for you. I guess I'm wondering what your quieter moments look like.

STORRIE: Well, I just saw *Hamnet* last night.

NEVINS: Oh, yeah? What did you think?



*Jacket, Jeans, and Shoes Gucci*

STORRIE: I thought it was great. Those performances, I'm not shocked at all. I'm actually unsurprised by how amazing they were. And then, I don't know, I'm just trying to take care of myself. I'm not able to go to the gym as much as I would like to. I'm being carted around everywhere, so I'm not able to eat as much as I want to. Hudson's been in town, so we'll have some quality time and come back down to ground zero. It's funny, because all the press and stuff is getting easier and easier and easier. You would think you would get burnt out and exhausted. Even though it's only been three weeks of doing press for this, I'm clicking into an interesting sort of confidence and appreciation for all of this. It really forces you to get good at knowing what you think, at speaking with confidence and translating ideas. Because this format is super bizarre for someone who's never done it before—to constantly be interviewed and talk with people that know things about the things that you've done. I don't even know if you realize how unnatural a situation like this is for someone who hasn't done it before.

NEVINS: Well, I can imagine. I'll let you go in a moment but, tell me, you were waiting tables in Los Angeles not so long ago. What's something you've splurged on since all of this changed your life?

STORRIE: Well, my feature film, the feature film that I shot in November that I have yet to finish that's going into post soon. I hadn't worked as an actor since *Heated Rivalry*, so I had a little bit of money left. I spent a solid amount of the money that I had left from *Heated Rivalry*, and it was pretty much looking like if nothing took off after *Heated Rivalry*, then it was only a matter of months until I'd have to go get another serving job again. So I splurged on my feature film.

NEVINS: Tell me about that.

STORRIE: It's super absurdist and bizarre, but it's just so much fun. It feels like early John Waters meets *Pi* by Darren Aronofsky meets a little bit of Sean Baker. It's a bunch of first films from filmmakers that I enjoy that just resonate, with the resources that I have, the artistic sensibility that I have right now. It's about an alien spirit that incarnates into a human body and just drops into a random 25-year-old human body, played by Gabe Kessler, and then goes on a journey and

pretty much gets screwed over for an hour-and-a-half.

NEVINS: That's a good sales pitch. I'll be tuned in.

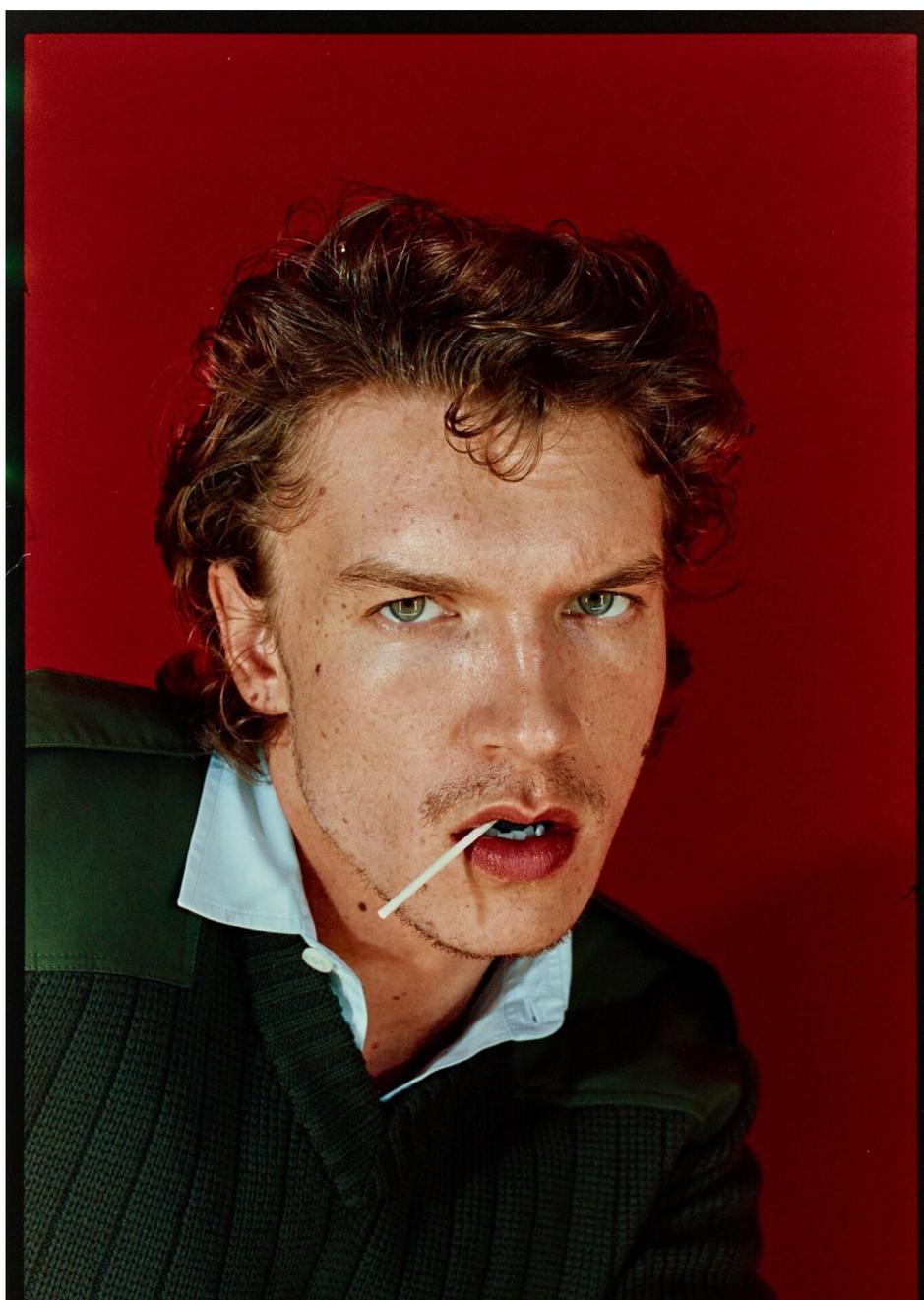
STORRIE: Yes, you will. [Laughs]

NEVINS: Well, Connor, thank you for taking the time. And congrats on all your success.

STORRIE: Thank you so much. And by the way, you asked questions that I have not been asked before, so you succeeded on that front.

NEVINS: I'm glad to hear it. Take care.

STORRIE: Thank you so much. Bye-bye.





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