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Sophie Nélisse on queer love, haunted hotels and the book she's turning into a film

By: Alex Nino Gheciu, The Canadian Press
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Sophie Nélisse has been meeting a lot of interesting people lately.

Since "Heated Rivalry" caught fire worldwide, Crave's steamy gay hockey drama has expanded her orbit, putting her in the same rooms as creatives she's long admired from afar.

"I love seeing my career as, like, tiny little milestones," says the Montreal-born actor, who plays actress Rose Landry in the series.



"That show is definitely opening a lot more doors and has gotten me into conversations with people that I put on such a pedestal."

Those people include Michelle Williams, Pedro Pascal and singer-songwriter Gracie Abrams, all of whom Nélisse says she's connected with recently.

"To know that they've seen my face on their screens is an absolutely wild concept to grasp."

At 25, Nélisse — who broke out as a child actor in Philippe Falardeau's Oscar-nominated "Monsieur Lazhar" and now also stars in Showtime's wildly popular thriller "Yellowjackets" — has reached a moment where the meetings are stacking up and the milestones are arriving in rapid succession.

Last week, she even met Prime Minister Mark Carney at a gala in Ottawa toasting the Canadian screen industry, where he sparked a much-memed red carpet moment by embracing "Heated Rivalry" star Hudson Williams.

"He was so chill. Like, weirdly, it just felt like I was talking to my neighbour. It's kind of crazy to see how much he supports the show," she says.

And while filming the new slasher "Whistle," Nélisse believes she may have met a ghost. Or at least something that definitely wasn't on the call sheet.

She recalls arriving in Toronto for the shoot and immediately sensing something was off with her hotel room.

"I went grocery shopping, I came back and I swear to God, the bedsheets had been messed with, like someone had sat on the bed," she says, still sounding shook, on a call from Montreal.

"It made me panic and it made my heart beat really fast. I just remember dropping my grocery bags."

She texted her "Whistle" co-star, Dafne Keen, to ask whether her hotel room had "weird vibes," only to learn she was having the same experience.

"That's how we became close. We bonded over our shared fear of our hotel room, and we would end up having so many sleepovers because we couldn't sleep on our own."

Out Friday, "Whistle" stars Nélisse and Keen as high school outcasts who make the mistake of blowing an Aztec death whistle — an ancient artifact that turns out to be every bit as bad for you as it sounds.

Nélisse says the Canadian-Irish co-production appealed to her for the way it confronts death head-on. A self-professed "scaredy cat," she says drawing on her own fears came naturally.

"I'm scared of a lot of things. My biggest fear is to be, like, kidnapped or murdered or finding someone waiting in my apartment or in the back of my car," she says.

"I walk around with pepper spray everywhere I go."



Heated Rivalry star Sophie Nélisse poses in downtown Montreal on Monday, Feb. 2, 2026. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Christine Muschi

But it wasn't all terror. Nélisse also appreciated how her and Keen's characters dive fearlessly into a queer romance, calling it an "honour" to help create space for those roles.

"It's obviously a community that hasn't had enough representation and that deserves to have more screen time and to be seen and understood," she says.

"And to have stories where they come out as winners."

On "Yellowjackets," the drama about a high school girls' soccer team stranded in the Canadian wilderness, Nélisse's character Shauna Shipman is bisexual. She appreciates that the show "doesn't make a big deal out of it."

"I hope that by incorporating more stories like these, that are so positive and that give so much hope — 'Heated Rivalry' is the best example — it will give people the courage to come forward and to be more openly themselves, so that we can then see more representation out in our everyday."

In "Heated Rivalry," Rose is Shane Hollander's love interest who becomes a close confidante once his sexuality comes to light. Nélisse expects the character to return in Season 2, continuing to support Hollander as he navigates a relationship with his hockey nemesis, Connor Storrie's Ilya Rozanov.

"I'm Hudson's and Connor's biggest fan and cheerleader, and I just want Rose to keep being that way, and keep being an ally, and keep that safe space for (Shane)," she says.

As new doors swing open, Nélisse says she's drawn to work that challenges her, resonates personally and makes an impact. And she won't be spooked into playing it safe.

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Following in Jacob Tierney's footsteps, she recently optioned a book: "Girl in Pieces," Kathleen Glasgow's young adult novel about a teen navigating trauma, homelessness and addiction. Nélisse will co-produce and co-star in the film alongside her "Yellowjackets" co-star Courtney Eaton.

Nélisse says Glasgow's novel struck a chord for the way it captures the anxiety and negative self-talk many young women experience.

"That inner voice is so loud sometimes in my brain. I wish that I had a movie or a book like that growing up that made me feel so seen and understood," she says.

"The world is so dark and sad and depressing. I think the story offers a beautiful mix of realism and honesty. It's very raw, but also very hopeful at the end."

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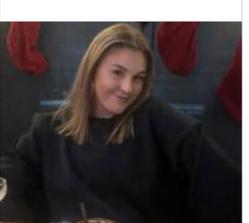
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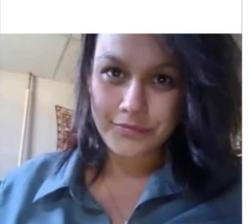
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