

What Nathan Learned in University

by Dan Posluns

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Cast List:

Nathan *Male*

The unlikely hero. A university student who is overworked, underappreciated, and generally unloved.

Ozzie *Male*

A university student who befriends Nathan. Fun-loving and carefree, but loyal to his comrades.

Sarah *Female*

A student who works for Dr. Cale. She knows Ozzie, and shows possible romantic interest in Nathan when she meets him.

Dr. Frost

A professor at the university, and Nathan's employer. Condescending, sarcastic, constantly enraged, and genuinely evil.

Dr. Cale

Another university professor, and the polar opposite of Dr. Frost. Friendly and compassionate.

The Professor

A personable, quirky, chorus-like character that interacts with the audience. Is intent on conveying the story of the play to what would normally be an inattentive class.

A note about gender neutrality: The characters of Dr. Frost, Dr. Cale, and The Professor are explicitly meant to be playable as either male or female roles. In the script, masculine pronouns are always assumed. *These are intended as defaults only*, and not as guidelines for casting, as the use of gender-neutral pronouns (“them”, “they”, etc.) would detract from the script. Naturally, when females are cast for any of those parts, the appropriate masculine pronouns should be replaced with feminine ones. Measures have been taken to ensure that this will not disrupt the iambic pentameter or the rhyming structure. For the most part, this will only involve changing the occasional “him” to “her” and “he” to “she”. Of particular note is Dr. Frost's first speech in Scene 6, where the word “father” should be replaced with “mother” if the person playing Dr. Frost is female. And yes, a female Dr. Frost still finds Sarah “exquisite”.

Scene 1: A lab at the university. Enter **The Professor**, who stands before the audience.

Professor

Hello there, class. My, my. And how are we?
I must confess I'm truly glad to see
That so many of you could make it here.
Of all the lectures that I've done this year
This one's importance is so very great
Its worth is well beyond my estimate.
To listen can be tough; you all can feign it,
But what I want is for you to retain it.
So humour me; put all your notes away
And harken well to what I have to say.
Now you may hear some tough things to believe,
But I would never practice to deceive.
I won't embellish, and I'll make it brief.
If you can just suspend your disbelief
Then I'll tell you a tale that's so fantastic
That you might just forget that its scholastic.
And hey, far be it for me to complain;
If nothing else, I'm glad to entertain.
But if one of you leaves with just a tad
More knowledge than what formerly you had,
Then it would make me absolutely thrilled,
And I could leave this place feeling fulfilled.
So heed well to the web of tales I'm spinning.
Now where shall I begin? Ah, the beginning.
A man named Nathan, in an institute
Of higher learning, is in hot pursuit
Of a degree in optics, eyes, and light.
His thesis has him slaving day and night.
He's working on a lens that lets one view
More colours in the spectrum than we do.
From Doctor Frost, Nathan's thesis professor,
Came research that became its predecessor.

But this professor doesn't nurture well;
He just makes Nathan's life a living hell.
With sheer contempt the wicked doctor scolds;
Bear witness to the lab, where it unfolds.

Exit.

Enter **Dr. Frost** and **Nathan**.

Dr. Frost

You good-for-nothing, worthless waste of time.
That I should let you work with me's a crime!
Can you not understand why I'm so weary?
I've given my whole life to craft this theory!
And you, you shameless clod, all that I ask
Is that you do for me one simple task.
That you should take my research notes, my data,
My test results, my findings, and schemata,
And that you should but make for me the thing
That all my work has been envisioning.
My lens that can see light we can't perceive
Is what I've worked my whole life to achieve.
And you... you've had these past two years to build it.
A blind man with no arms could have fulfilled it!
But you can't seem to get off your caboose.
So where the hell's my lens?! What's your excuse?!

Nathan

Well, Doctor Frost, please try to understand.
I've tried my best to do as you command.
I swear I have the lens almost completed,
But nearly all my energy's depleted.
My life is in a shambles. I'm flat broke.
I have no friends. The last time that I spoke
With someone, I was sitting in his cab.
I only ever get out to this lab.
As women go, I'm always their last pick:

The very sight of me makes people sick.
I don't have any parents. I don't sleep.
I've three week's laundry in a stinking heap.
I work a thankless job to pay the rent.
I've nearly got it finished, but I'm spent.

Dr. Frost

You've *nearly* finished it? Isn't that grand!
A nearly finished AIDS vaccine would stand
A dullard's chance to win the Nobel Prize.
As for your tale of woe, I'll wipe my eyes.
Your miserable state is only fit.
No friends? No girl? No cash? No life? No shit!
Should it surprise me that you can't succeed
When you can't even make the lens I need?
Your drivel sickens me. You're not a man.
You're a disgrace.

Nathan I'm doing all I can!
I've tried my best; I think I've made that blatant.

Dr. Frost

I'm trying to awaken all that's latent
In you. A billion numbskulls on the Earth...
I can't believe you're of such little worth!

Nathan

Have you no understanding of my pain?
Why scold me? What is it supposed to gain?
Forget about it. You can't grasp my sorrow.
I'll have your lens done for you by tomorrow.

Dr. Frost

Your misery gives you no right to shirk.
So when you're done lamenting, get to work.
You kids these days, you think you know it all.

But pride always doth come before a fall.

They both exit.

Scene 2: The university grounds. *Enter **The Professor**, who stands before the audience.*

Professor

As you can see, his treatment isn't mild;
It's been this way since Nathan was a child.
If ever someone questioned his abuse
The Doctor would retort the same excuse:
"I do it so he'll turn out for the best."
So Nathan never strayed from Frost's behest.
The Doctor claimed he'd justified the crime:
A diamond forms with pressure, heat and time.
But these three aspects dance a steady dance,
And don't consider elements of chance.
Like peering eyes, the stars above us glare
With incandescent knowledge in their stare.
Revolving up in their celestial spheres,
Some say they even know the course fate steers.
Our fortunes wait like water in a pond,
And drops of luck make ripples well beyond
What mortal minds should dare to comprehend.
It's with this understanding that we send
A drop of chance, to alter what you see.
From what emerges there will come to be
A lesson that the Doctor finds quite awful:
Time, heat and pressure also make a waffle.

Exit.

*Enter **Ozzie**, who is looking for the cafeteria when **Nathan** enters.*

Ozzie

Excuse me sir, forgive my imperfection,
But I could use some help with my direction.

I know a cafeteria's nearby,
But it would seem no matter how I try
To find it I can never get it right.
Would you help rid me of this awful blight?
If so I would forever rest your debtor.

Nathan

I tell you what: I'll do for you one better.
I'm headed there as well. I'll lead the way
And see to it you don't end up astray.

Ozzie

Oh, thanks so much. I had begun to fear
That I would end up wandering all year.
I just moved here, and this place is stupendous.
I'd swear to God its boundaries are endless.
Say, don't I know you? I think it may be
That we're in the same math class. Is it me?

Nathan

Do you mean Doctor Cale's calculus class?
When I'm in there I only wish to pass.
I focus on my notes and nothing more.
But yes, I think I've seen you there before.

Ozzie

Well isn't that the damndest! Allow me
To introduce myself. My name's Ozzie.

Nathan

I'm Nathan.

Ozzie

It's a pleasure. Did you know
Our prof's hosting a party? Want to go?

Nathan

Is that the one that's happening tonight?

Ozzie

From eight P.M. till dawn, you got that right!

Nathan

I'm in the lab; I don't think I can shake it.

Ozzie

You're kidding me. Come on, you've got to make it!
Of all professors he's the only one
Who wants to see his students having fun.
Your life will be forever dull and drab
If you insist on hiding in a lab.
Plus you'll meet Sarah. She works as his tutor.
I guarantee they don't come any cuter!

Nathan

Well, I'll admit that I could use a break.
But I think this might be a big mistake.
I hope I don't regret what I've decided.

Ozzie

I've never met someone that's so divided!
You think too much. Your mind is way too vast.
Trust me on this. Tonight we'll have a blast!

Scene 3: Dr. Cale's house. *Enter **The Professor**, standing before the audience.*

Professor

So Ozzie, sharing one of Nathan's courses,
Is drawn to Nathan by some unseen forces.
His friendly if unusual persistence
Defeats our hero's fairly meek resistance.
But all this new and unforeseen compliance

Is tempered by a parallel defiance
Of Doctor Frost's command to make the lens.
So if it's strength or weakness all depends
On how you look at things. But Nathan's going
To celebrate all night long fully knowing
How mad his prof may be. But if all's lost,
I'll shed a single tear for Doctor Frost.

Exit.

Enter Nathan and Ozzie.

Ozzie

I told you that you'd have an awesome time!
To miss this evening would have been a crime.

Nathan

With all my work, this party's quite the blessing.
I must admit it has been most de-stressing.
I'm glad my common sense didn't prevail.
So, thank you.

Ozzie

Hey look, here comes Doctor Cale!

Enter Dr. Cale.

Dr. Cale

Hi, Ozzie. You look well. I'm glad to see
That you could make it. And who might this be?

Ozzie

Meet Nathan, sir. He's in your class as well.

Dr. Cale

A pleasure, but I never could foretell
That you, of all my students would be here.
You haven't said a word to me all year.

I've seen you in the back, looking quite sore.
I figured that you found my class a bore.

Nathan

I never meant to give you that impression.
It's just that I'm real overworked this session.

Dr. Cale

I understand. There's no need to lament.
I'm glad you came. I think it's time well spent.

Ozzie

Can I get you some wine, and we'll all toast
The domination of our gracious host,
With which he rules our academic lives?

Nathan

You know, I'd better not. It gives me hives.

Ozzie

So be it, then.

Dr. Cale

I also shall decline.

Ten years ago I swore off drinking wine.
Your ass-kissing could do with some finesse,
But your toast is well taken nonetheless.

Enter Sarah.

Sarah

Oh, Doctor Cale? So here you finally are!
The class had asked to hear you play guitar.

Dr. Cale

I bid you all to grant me a reprieve.
Enjoy the party, boys; I'll take my leave.

Exit.

But you poor dear, you must be drowned in work,
If you have to report to such a jerk.

Ozzie

He plays guitar?! In actuality?
Excuse me, Nathan; this I've got to see!

Exit.

Nathan

It's not like he's the only one at fault.
My lack of skill has brought him to a halt.

Nathan

You work for Doctor Cale?

Sarah

Indeed I do.
My name is Sarah. What shall I call you?

Sarah

Don't think that. He'll just use it to control you.
I wish there was a way I could console you.
Your eyes betray what your heart is concealing.
I know your pain. ...But what is this I'm feeling...?

Nathan

I'm sorry, but is your work agonizing
To the extreme you find yourself despising
The world, and all the creatures that it's made?

Nathan

Oh no...

Sarah (*hesitant*)

Did Doctor Cale give you an unfair grade...?

Sarah

What's wrong with me? Am I diseased...?
Why does my stomach feel like it's been squeezed?
My God, I swear I've never felt this ill...
The world is spinning... why won't it be still?!
What are you doing to me?! What are you...?

Nathan

Forgive me. I just work for Doctor Frost,
And he makes my life hell at any cost.

Nathan

(*Stammering*)
I'm sorry... I mean, I... I don't mean to...!

Nathan runs off.

Sarah

Oh, I know him. He behaves immaturely.
But Doctor Cale would never treat me poorly.
It's specimens like him I keep my faith in.

Scene 4: The university lab. *Enter **The Professor**.*

Nathan

I'm sorry, I've been rude. My name is Nathan.

Professor

So from the party Nathan promptly flies,
Just barely keeping tears out of his eyes.
To her, it's like her body just rejected
Her abdomen, which Nathan had expected.
His induction of nausea from a distance
Has plagued his social life all his existence.
And thus humiliation was his fine

Sarah

It's Nathan, then? And working for The Frost?
If it were up to me they'd have him tossed.

For even briefly possessing a spine.
His penance is to do what it may cost
To finish up the lens for Doctor Frost.
He works in angered sadness through the night
And finishes the lens by dawn's first light.
His hatred of the hand that fate misdeals
Is made minute by what the lens reveals.
He watches several faculty that pass
And questions their appearance in the glass.
The only answer that he can surmise
Is that their human form is a disguise.
He sits alone and tries to comprehend
The purpose of these creatures that pretend
That they are human. So for now his anguish
Is temporarily allowed to languish.
The thought that his profs aren't what they appear
Replaces all his self-pity with fear.

Exit.

Enter Nathan, Ozzie, and Sarah. Nathan is staring intently through the lens.

Ozzie

So here you are. I heard about your plight.

Sarah

Look, Nathan, I'm real sorry 'bout last night.
I really don't know what came over me.
I never meant you such hostility.

Nathan

I never wished to move you negatively.
I'm very glad to hear you can forgive me.
*(For an instant, distracted back to the lens, then
attention returns to Sarah)*
It means so much to my enfeebled heart.

My friendships usually end before they start.
But if my presence no longer offends,
Then humour me and look out through this lens.
It might just be because I haven't slept,
But what I'm seeing I just can't accept.
So please make use of all your scrutiny,
And through this window relay what you see.

Sarah *(Obligingly)*

I'm looking out the window and I see
A winding path with benches and a tree.
Some students on the benches sit and chat.
It all seems pretty normal... but what's *that?*
If I were just an unassuming guesser
I'd say it was my chemistry professor.
But looking through this lens at what I'm seeing,
There's no way he could be a human being!

Ozzie

Here, let me have a look. Oh wow, it's true
That some of them look nothing like we do.
You two look like yourselves under the lens,
But some of those profs look like... aliens.

Enter Dr. Frost.

Dr. Frost

It seems as if the cat's out of the bag.
I must admit it is an awful drag
That you two should be here. I must condemn
You to your deaths.

Ozzie

Look out! He's one of them!

Dr. Frost

You need the lens for that?! You must be brilliant.

Your species is remarkably resilient
To have survived this long. You're past your prime
And will be laid to rest, all in good time.
Now Nathan, come with me, your time's at hand.

Nathan

What do you want with me?

Dr. Frost

You'll understand
When I feel that you're ready. But for now
You must do only that which I allow.

Sarah

He's not your slave to meet your beck and call.
Don't listen to his bullying at all!
All he will do is treat you like you're shit.
And what has Nathan got to do with it?
Just why did you obsess to make him yearn
To build your lens?

Dr. Frost

It's none of your concern.
Now come along with me. You needn't worry.

Nathan

I think we'd better leave here in a hurry.

Dr. Frost (*Cutting off their escape*)

To run away would be most ill-advised.
You'd be more dumb than even I surmised.
Your thoughts are all confused; I will repair them.
Come with me now, and I might even spare them.

Ozzie

He told you no. You might as well forsake him.

Sarah

There's no way that we'll ever let you take him!

Dr. Frost

As if you could deny me my intention.
Perhaps some pain will stall your intervention...!
(*Gestures towards Sarah*)

Sarah (*Cringing*)

My stomach... it's just like the other night...

Ozzie

You monster!

Nathan

If you're looking for a fight,
You've found one, and don't think that I'll refrain.
It's your turn, Doctor Frost, to feel the pain!
(*Concentrates and gestures towards Dr. Frost*)

Dr. Frost (*Cringing*)

You... impudent... fatuous little whelp...

Ozzie

You have their powers...?

Dr. Frost

(*Recovers with a sweeping motion of his hand, which causes Sarah, Nathan and Ozzie to recoil backwards*)

Too bad it won't help!

(*Touches Sarah's shoulder*)

I must say that I find this girl exquisite!
I'll keep her as a token of our visit!

Dr. Frost begins to exit, Sarah dragging herself behind as if possessed.

Sarah

Help, Nathan, help!

Ozzie

Does every prof hail from these expeditions?

Dr. Cale

Not most, just some that are in key positions.
But once in place, a quandary appeared:
No one knew how you should be domineered.
Should we adjust the way your kind behaves,
Or should we make you all into our slaves?
Or should we just exterminate your kind?
Our options really put us in a bind.
Some of us wanted war, and others peace.
Some of us thought the project should just cease.
Our purpose, if we'd had one, was no more.
The only thing that kept us at our chore
Was lack of any other thing to do:
Our meddling was the only job we knew.
But then one day our points of view collided.
The future of mankind would be decided
By one who wasn't human or from space:
A child whose parents hailed from either place.
And now I hope that you can see what's true:
That baby born from both of us was you.

Nathan

It seems I never really did belong...
So this is why my life kept going wrong.

Dr. Cale

Your heritage has made your life most trying,
But calling it a failure is denying
The many things you've managed to achieve,
And it's that will in which we all believe.
Our defence mechanism, you may know,
Is making stomachs vibrate to and fro.

The nausea makes our rivals acquiesce.
For you it's been much harder to repress
What should have been a beneficial power.
I understand why it has made you sour.

Nathan

It's Sarah that I'm hoping is okay.

Ozzie

Would Doctor Frost hurt her in any way?

Dr. Cale

I wouldn't think so. Sarah should be well.
It's Nathan's will that he wants to compel.
Since our initial fleet had been deployed
He's felt that this whole world should be destroyed.
To Nathan he devoted every minute
To make him hate the world and all that's in it.
We all agreed that you shouldn't be told
That you'd pick how Earth's future will unfold.
Your heritage was to remain well-sealed,
And we, of course, weren't meant to be revealed
To you. That's why when you and I first met
I spoke as if I did not know you yet.
But Doctor Frost needed you to discern
That we weren't human so that you could learn
About your role, and do as he'd impel you.
But by our rules, he couldn't simply tell you.
He made you make that lens so that your eyes
Would get a chance to see through our disguise.
He figured that you'd then do as he'd say,
But it would seem your friends got in the way.

Nathan

If I'm in charge, then can't I just command
Your forces to evacuate this land?

Dr. Cale

It's not as simple as the things you say.
It's not your words, but actions, we obey.

Ozzie

Come on, I think I know a way to save her,
And get you out of Doctor Frost's ill-favour.

Nathan

You've heard all this, and still you are not fleeing,
Although you know I'm not a human being?

Ozzie

If you're not human, why must it offend?
You're Nathan, and it's Nathan who's my friend.

Dr. Cale

His faithfulness may prove most fortifying.
Now get some rest; tomorrow will be trying.
The blood of both of us exists in you.
Eventually you'll tell us what to do.

Scene 6: The lab again. *Enter The Professor.*

Professor

So Nathan, at long last, knows who he is.
The cards are laid; the final move is his.
An alien and human interbreed
On Earth's behalf will have to intercede
With what the evil Doctor Frost is scheming,
And prove that his existence is redeeming.
Now this young man, while no means born a zero,
Is not what one would call a textbook hero.
He's unexceptional to say the least,
And has to match wits with a clever beast.

But a true hero's strength comes from within;
With his friends' help, I think that he can win.
I won't leave any more to speculation;
Let's see at last their final confrontation.

Exit.

Enter Nathan, Ozzie, and Dr. Frost with Sarah.

Dr. Frost

We meet again. I'm sure by now you know
Just what my people did so long ago
That brought you to this miserable existence.
I kept it from you but at their insistence!
I've financed your survival from your youth,
And made sure that you'd one day learn the truth.
(Trying to convince himself as much as Nathan)
I might be harsh, but when all's said and done,
I tend to think I've reared you like a son.
The others I intend not to besmirch,
But to them all you're nothing but research.
(Unconvincing and rationalizing)
I've... loved you... like a father loves a child.
Our differences must here be reconciled.
So let's relinquish any sour grapes,
And rid ourselves of all these filthy apes.

Nathan

If that's your best, you might as well just can it.
You've loved me the same way you love this planet.
I'm no more than a tool for you to use.
You couldn't love. At best you could abuse.
But even if you managed to coerce
My leaving, your position would be worse.
I still would never do as you directed,
And fight you till your plans had been rejected.
This madness ends this instant, Doctor Frost.

She is of no more use to you. You've lost.

Dr. Frost *(Enraged)*
Why stick your neck out for this awful place?
Did you forget? It made you a disgrace!
In every single way you were deprived.
If not for me, you wouldn't have survived!

Nathan
This "awful place" is where I've spent my life.
I'm joined to it as if it were my wife.
This is my home. This is where I belong.

Dr. Frost
Deluded fool. You couldn't be more wrong!
You have no home. You won't ever fit in.
Must I remind you that you have no kin?
You're only half a human. Your endeavour
To be accepted won't work now or ever.

Sarah
It's worked already, Doctor. You're mistaken
If you think that your subterfuge has shaken
The faith that Nathan's friends entrust in him.

Dr. Frost
I'm sure your friendship's nothing but a whim.
How has this cretin earned your just hurrah?

Ozzie *(Defiantly)*
He helped me find the cafeteria.

Dr. Frost
I'm hearing wrong. I could have sworn you said
You met because you're just a dunderhead
Who gets lost. And because of this you're friends?!

Ozzie
A tiny seed that grew to what transcends
Your malice.

Dr. Frost *(Realizing that he has lost, but still enraged and refusing to accept defeat)*
... I won't have it. All my labours
At fostering his hatred of his neighbours
Will not be ruined by two simian rejects.
You've given me the perfect little pretext
To show how strong my powers truly are!
(Begins to gesture, but is cut off by Ozzie)

Ozzie
If I were you, I wouldn't go that far.

Dr. Frost
I hardly think you pose much of a threat.

Ozzie
Perhaps... but every alien I've met
I've noticed shunned an alcoholic drink.
That's quite coincidental, don't you think?
Now Doctor Frost, I have a little hunch
You don't enjoy a snifter with your lunch.
I might be wrong, but then I might be right.
Leave Sarah now, and go without a fight.

Dr. Frost
Your impudent behaviour never stops!

Ozzie
Take one more step, I'll fill your face with schnapps!

Dr. Frost

A hybrid child, you fit in neither place,
But you may still go with us into space.
As we were your creators we are able
To look beyond your exterior label.
We can provide the love that you desire,
And on the Earth weren't able to acquire.

Nathan

A tempting gift; It's nice of you to give it.
But now I have a life, and want to live it.
I'm not all human, and if there's a way
I'm sure I'd like to visit you some day.
The universe would sure be swell to roam,
But I'll stay with my friends, on Earth. My home.

Dr. Cale

I figured I had gone out on a limb.
I know you two will take good care of him.
(Begins to leave, then turns back)
... You know, we thought our blood would make you great,
But it's your human half that's your best trait.
I've nothing left with which to be concerned.
Your future's yours, and it has been well-earned.

Enter **The Professor**.

Professor

At last our story reaches its conclusion.
I hope it won't be much of an intrusion,
But just before our lecture is adjourned
I'd like to recap all the things we've learned.
From Nathan we've observed right from the start:
A hero follows what is in his heart.
Without his friends he wouldn't have succeeded,
So Ozzie helped, and Sarah was well-needed.
For both of them, we find in our review

That loyalty made heroes of them too.
And Doctor Cale exhibits in good fashion
The value found in caring and compassion.
All this into the light my tale may bring,
But I don't think that Nathan learned a thing.
He struggled hard, and with his friends' reliance,
Their victory was won through their defiance.
His friends brought joy to him where it was due,
And *that* is what I'd wish for all of you.
So cherish those who call themselves your friends,
And on that final note my lecture ends.