

*Prayer and Parable*, a book of short stories by Paul Maliszewski, explores the depths of humanity through its characters as they go about their seemingly ordinary lives. Yet lurking in these lives are experiences that we, the reader, can relate to on an almost frustrating level. This is because many of Maliszewski's characters represent the parts of us that we have trouble coping with: our flaws. Many times, when these characters try their best to be a good--be it a good father, husband, wife, or partner--they sometimes come up short. However, this is not because the author wants to show us that people are evil; he simply wants to show us that they are merely human. First, in "Prayer for Something Seen but Briefly", a father tries to protect his daughter from a man, but ends up abandoning her in the woods. Then, in "Prayer for the Long Life of Certain Inanimate Objects", a father neglects his children and instead places his love in robots he spends all his time building. Finally, in "Prayer Against the Force of Habit," a boyfriend who wants nothing more than to share his day with his girlfriend ends up insulting her. This boyfriend shows up again in "Prayer for an Answer When an Answer Eludes", only this time, he tries to give the benefit of the doubt to his girlfriend's friends, but cannot be the person he wants to. Through sparse and honest language, Maliszewski's characters represent the good and bad we see in ourselves.

How protective to be over one's children is a personal decision. Hover too closely, they might rebel completely; give them too much space, they might abuse it. The father in "Prayer for an Answer When an Answer Eludes" grapples, through the story's entirety, with what to do when he thinks the caretaker of the campgrounds, at which he and his young daughter are staying, has exposed himself to the daughter. While it seems plausible that the caretaker *has* done this, the man and his daughter aren't certain:

"But what was that thing? the daughter asked.

The father said he wasn't sure. He hadn't gotten a good look either...Nevertheless, the father had managed over the last few hours to pretty well convince himself that it was the old man's penis they had seen" (Maliszewski 74).

Although the father, as we see, is not completely sure of what has happened, he ultimately decides that revenge is the best answer to the situation. What the author is trying to tell his reader is that often when something goes wrong and our loved ones are affected, sometimes acting on our first impulse is not the best answer. As a result, the father ends up leaving his daughter in their tent in the woods to confront the old man (Maliszewski 76). However, when the father goes to confront him, he doesn't know what to do. By the story's end, the father heads back to the tent, where his daughter is crying, upset because he has left (Maliszewski 78). Ironically, by trying to avenge his daughter, the father ends up betraying her by leaving her in the woods; and in the story's final lines, we see the father admit that the world's darkness is not something from which he will be able to protect his daughter forever. Despite the father making some mistakes, he at least tries his best to be a good father, which is not always the case for some of Maliszewski's characters.