

Not his Character

by [Joshua C. Frank](#) (March 2024)



Portrait of a Little Girl with a Basket of Flowers and Orange, by Paul E. Poincy, 1886

Hand shaking, Michael rapped the ornate knocker on his sister's door for the first time in seven years. The heavy oak door creaked open. His sister Anita, now older, peered out. "Can I help you?" she asked.

"Anita, it's me, Michael! Your brother!"

"I don't have any brothers, just one sister." Her face slowly awakened. "*Michaela?*"

"I don't go by that name anymore. Call me Michael."

Anita's face froze. "No. It can't be. You were the girliest little girl, no trace of boy."

"Can I come in? You may want to sit down for this."

Anita opened the door. Michael entered the spacious country house and sat on the old, familiar couch, the seat of twenty years of memories of another life. Anita sat on the couch, facing him. "When you left for San Francisco," she said, "I didn't expect to see you again at all, let alone dressed as a man."

Michael took a deep breath. "It didn't pan out—no friends, nowhere to go, reduced to foraging in the dumpster ... where I dug up a Bible. It showed me how I had lived my life all wrong, and that Someone would save me."

"You sound like a crazy person. What does any of this have to do with why you're here dressed like a man?"

"I *am* a man: born a boy, still have the parts. That Mom and Dad raised me as a girl, just because I wanted it when I was four, doesn't mean anything. What does a child that age know,

anyway?"

Anita stared at Michael, mouth agape. "No," she finally said. "You're a girl. All those years, sharing a bedroom, it couldn't have been an act!"

"The most talented actor is one who doesn't know he's not his character. I truly believed I was a girl, and Mom and Dad went along with it. What parent consults his own child for advice on how to raise him?"

Anita's face clenched. "Don't you dare push your Christian agenda on me! Mom and Dad were great parents!"

"I came hoping you'd accept me as I truly am."

"You *are* my sister, not this religious nonsense."

"Why are you being so intolerant?"

Anita sprang up, jabbing a finger toward the front door. "Get out! Now! Don't ever come back!"

Michael ran like a dog with an angry master. Then he took a last look, blurred by tears, at his childhood home in the distance, and walked away.

[Table of Contents](#)

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