

THE BOX SOCIAL

Part Five | Dianne L. Christner

“Look what just arrived!” Charity awkwardly balanced a bundle.

“Is that the banner?” Vincent left the men rearranging furniture for the evening’s festivities and crossed the short distance to Charity. “Let’s take a look.” He took one end from Charity and walked about six feet away so that it unrolled. Pleasantville Orphanage Thanks You. “No one should have any doubt where the box social’s funds will be going. Where shall we hang it?”

Charity pointed up high. “The delegation thought along that wall.”

“Perfect. I’ll do it right now. Let’s roll it back up so it’s easier to handle.”

Charity nodded and worked her end. When they drew close again, he gave her a flirtatious smile and winked. “I’ll fetch the ladder. In the meantime, be thinking about how you’ll describe your box to me.”

Thankful to be given a moment to

form her reply, Charity quickly began to reason out the situation at hand. Since Joseph’s return to Pleasantville, she had been single-minded. Given his active pursuit and repeated requests to call upon her so he could explain why he had jilted her and married someone else, she had not even been aware of the pastor’s increasing interest. Becca had only recently brought it to her attention. Now there was no denying it.

In truth, she loved Joseph, always would, but he had humiliated her and betrayed her trust. In addition, he had threatened to bid on her box tonight. She certainly did not want that to happen. Rather, she wished to erase their entire relationship from her mind and to deny him the opportunity to hurt her ever again.

On the other hand, if she shared her box with the preacher, who only had sincere intentions, where would that lead? She did

not want to hurt him, but it was not as if she were agreeing to a courtship. It was only one picnic meal.

Before she could fully reason it out, Vincent returned with the ladder. He still had his crooked smile in place. “Are you going to let me in on your secret?”

Charity tried to be friendly, but not flirtatious. “All I shall say is that if you were to favor blue velvet trimmed with pearl buttons, you shouldn’t go hungry tonight.”

“I’m not a rich man, but I’ll do my best.”

Willfully breaking the intimacy of the moment, Charity pointed out, “That ladder looks a little rickety.”

Vincent gave it a try, and it wobbled.

“I’ll hold it for you.”

“Good idea. I’ll go up and put a nail in the wall and return for the banner.”

Charity held tight, looking up until she heard a painfully familiar voice. “Let me hold that for you.”

She gave the ladder over to Joseph. “Where’s Michael?”

“Playing with Tommy Cummins. He’s been moody since his wagon broke. I thought it would do him good.”

“I’m sorry to hear it broke. Can it be fixed?”

“It’s fixed, but not brightly painted like the rest. He still calls it broken.”

Vincent climbed down and smiled. “Hello, Mr. Jamison.”

“Could I have a word with you?” Joseph asked.

“You want to help me hang this banner? We can talk while we work.”

“I’ll help, but I was hoping for a private meeting. It’s not often that I have time away from Michael.”

“Very well.” Vincent gave Charity an apologetic look.

“I’ll just go help the other ladies then,” she said, wondering with trepidation if their conversation could have anything to do with her or with tonight’s box social.

Read Part 6 of The Box Social next month.