

# THE BOX SOCIAL

Part Six | Dianne L. Christner

*Joseph Jamison I am not going to let you ruin my evening.* Charity fretted over the recent return of the man, who once jilted her, and only half-listened to her sister's chatting.

Becca took a thick slab of freshly-baked bread. "I don't really care who gets my box; I just hope it brings in a lot of money for the orphanage."

Charity cut a piece of roast beef and thought, not for the first time, how there was not a selfish bone in Becca's body.

Carefully wrapping a sandwich, Becca said, "It's important to the pastor. Have you seen how his eyes get those gold flecks in them when he's adamant about something?"

Charity frowned at the dreamy look on Becca's face. She narrowed her eyes and really listened to her sister.

"Why, his face just lights up in that special way, and he gets those crinkles right

here"—Becca gestured on her own face—"when he talks about the orphanage."

Charity couldn't have been struck harder had the town's train run her over, so hit was she by the obvious—to which she had been impervious. Becca was in love with Vincent Stone. Of all things. Becca, who had never shown any interest in a man before. Charity didn't even know what color Vincent's eyes were. Becca knew all their shades and glints.

Hiding her smile, Charity wondered if her sister even knew she was in love. Well, if Becca—her lifelong protector—wanted the preacher, Charity was not going to stand in the way. Wonderful Becca. Charity just had to find a way to let Pastor Stone realize he was pursuing the wrong sister. Suddenly a marvelous idea came to her. They'd switch boxes! Becca was not aware that Vincent had planned to bid on Charity's

blue velvet box. Only Becca would never agree unless—

Closing the lid on her hatbox and looking doubtfully at it, Charity complained, "I'm just not happy with this. Yours is so flamboyant. Mine is plain."

"You think my box is too flashy?"

Charity gave a wave of her hand. "Oh, never mind. I'm sorry I brought it up."

"No. Tell me."

"Mine is ugly. I'm embarrassed to be associated with it."

Becca placed her hands on her hips. "Charity Briggs. Your box is not ugly. Why you spent all those hours sewing those lovely pearl buttons on it!"

"Never mind. Forget I mentioned it."

Becca's face lit, and Charity knew she had taken the bait. "Do you want to trade?"

"You would? You wouldn't feel bad if I took the red feather?"

"Not at all. It's not really my style. I would much rather take your tasteful

one."

Charity hugged Becca. "Thank you. I hope you get a nice young man to share your dinner, and that it brings a high price. But are you sure you want to trade?"

"Indeed I am, and not another word about it," Becca said. "Now pass that pie my way."

Later that evening as the family prepared to leave, Charity felt quite smug about her matchmaking abilities until she slipped into her cloak. Strange, she thought, feeling a lump. Upon further examination, she withdrew a small painted dowel from her pocket. It was the missing piece to Michael's toy wagon. Just when she had hoped to avoid her former beau altogether. Without the security of the preacher bidding on her box, she suddenly realized how she had left the door open for Joseph's bid. Oh, what had she done?

*Read Part 7 of The Box Social next month.*