



# A Down Home Christmas

Liz Talley

**I** *SHOULD'VE COME HOME BEFORE NOW.*

The thought buzzed in Kris Trabeau's head as his car bumped down the winding drive that led to Trabeau Farms. New potholes and overgrown trees greeted him, causing the guilt he continually stowed in the back of his conscience to rocket to the forefront.

At the very least, he should've hired someone years ago to help his aunt. The old homeplace was too big for such a slip of a woman to take care of by herself—especially one with a broken leg.

But he knew his Aunt Tansy well. The fiercely independent woman would have sent whomever he hired on their way before the ink was dry on the check. Which was part of the reason he'd driven almost three hundred miles to Charming, Mississippi. It was beyond time to convince his stubborn aunt to give up on living alone and come live with him in Nashville.

Just as Kris crested the hill that would bring the farmhouse into view, a chicken flapped across the drive.

A chicken wearing a sweater.

“What the—” The words died on his lips as a huge beast

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loped behind in pursuit of the squawking fowl. A leash trailed behind the dog that seemed single-minded in its pursuit of the chicken.

Next came a barefoot brunette, waving her hands and screaming. “Heel, Edison. I said heel!”

Kris slammed on the brakes, the brand-new Mustang fishtailing before jerking to a halt. The woman’s gaze flew toward him, her mouth dropping open, before she continued her mad dash to apprehend the dog. Kris unbuckled and climbed out of the car. “Whoa, hey, you need help?”

“I got it,” she called back, disappearing down the hill. Kris lifted his eyebrows and mouthed, *Wow*.

Then his aunt came limping as fast as her crutches would allow. She wore a track suit circa 1995 and a medical boot around her leg. “Think he’s gonna get my Loretta, does he? Well, he’s got another think coming, is what he’s got.”

Kris moved then, meeting his aunt who hadn’t seemed to notice he stood in her driveway. “Whoa, now, Aunt Tansy. What’s going on?”

“Oh, sugar, Edison’s after Loretta Lynn again. That dog has taken a fascination with my chickens,” his aunt said, her gaze fastened to the spot where the chicken, dog, and pretty brunette had disappeared. Then she jerked stunned eyes to him. “Wait, *Kris*? What are *you* doin’ here?”

“Surprise,” he said, throwing up his hands. “I thought I would visit for the holidays.” *Even though I swore I would never come back.*