

# BACK TO THE BEGINNING

by Christina Ann Gist

## EXCERPT

“Hey sweetheart.” Heath sat down on the grass by the headstone that marked where his little girl was buried. “I brought you a daisy.” He pulled the little white flower from his coat pocket and laid it next to the stone.

She couldn't answer, and the grave was nothing more than a memorial, but visiting and talking as if she were listening made him feel better. “I know your birthday's not for another two weeks,” he continued, “but I've had a rough few days.” He choked up, “It's been nearly eight years, yet I still feel as if we lost you just yesterday. Your mother's come back into town, and that's probably part of the reason it hurts so much more right now.”

“Sorry,” someone whispered softly. Heath looked up and saw Everley walking towards him, stopping a short distance away. “I didn't know you were here... I can come back later.”

“Nonsense,” he said quietly, “there's plenty of room here.”

Everley hesitated, then started shaking. “I haven't been here since the funeral. It was always too painful-” whatever else she was going to say was lost in mumbles as she started crying.

Heath stood and crossed the distance she'd left between them. He expected her to pull away when he wrapped his arms around her, but she stayed, burying her face in his chest as he tried to calm her. She continued talking, but it was hard to understand her muffled words. It sounded like apologies, but he couldn't quite make out for what. “Shhhh,” he soothed, “it's all right... I've got you.” He felt her arms wrap around his waist, and he squeezed her tighter, letting her know he wasn't going anywhere.