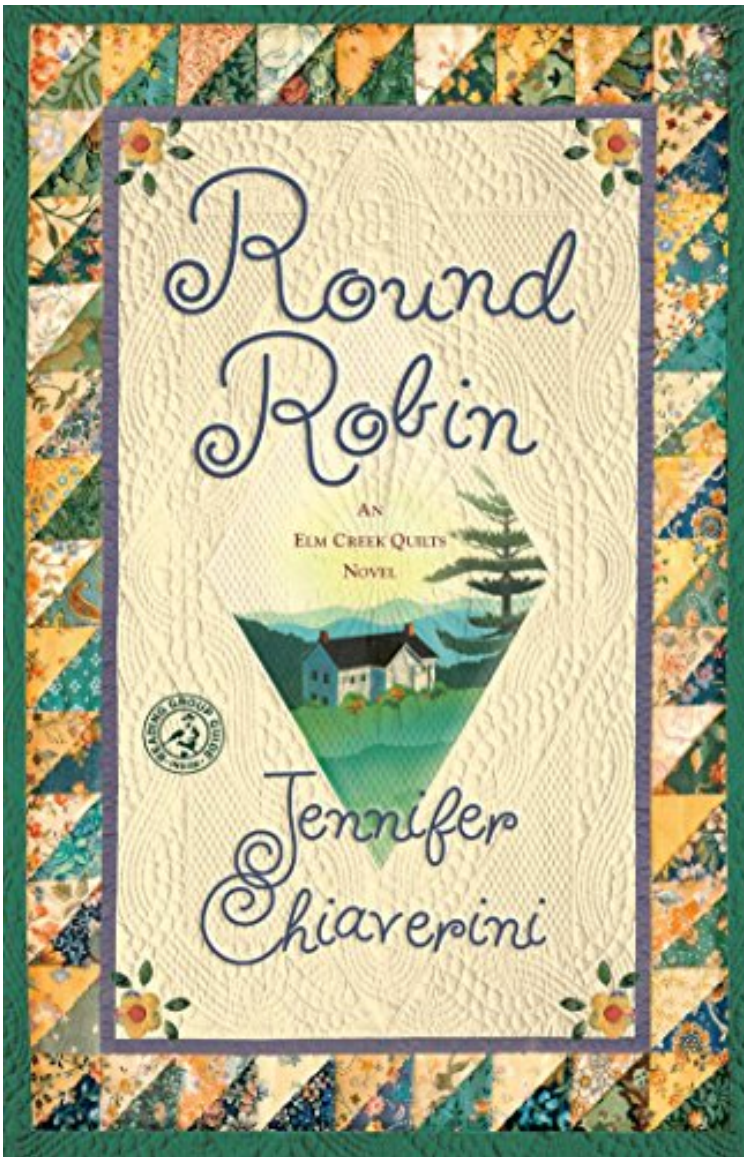


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Round Robin: An Elm Creek Quilts Book



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Quilts Book

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Description : Description du produitShe chose green and blue for the colors of Elm Creek Manor. She chose blue for truth and green for new beginnings....She pieced a border of pinwheel blocks -- pinwheels for her windblown life, which with faith and perseverance she tried to stitch into order. The pattern was a four patch, a square divided into four smaller squares, which were in turn divided into two equal triangles, one light, one dark, like the darkness of the past...and the light hope of the future. In Round Robin, the much-anticipated follow-up to *The Quilter's Apprentice*, Jennifer Chiaverini reunites us with the Elm Creek Quilters in a continuing tale of friendship and loyalty in which quilting is a bountiful metaphor for the way we stitch our lives together, piece by imperfect piece. A round robin quilt is created by sewing concentric patchwork or appliqu borders to a central block as it is passed around a circle of friends. We rejoin the Elm Creek Quilters as they embark on just such a project, intended as a gift to their beloved Sylvia. But for each

member of the circle, the threads of happiness begin to unravel. As each woman adds a border to the central block, she contributes her story to the ongoing history of Elm Creek Manor. Resplendent in green, blue, and gold, the quilt serves as a symbol of the complex, lasting ties that unify mothers and daughters, sisters and friends. As they stitch together the sometimes harmonious, often discordant scraps of their crazy-quilt lives, the Elm Creek Quilters learn that friendship is a most precious gift, and that even in the darkest of times, love illuminates the way home.

Presentation de l'auteur Jennifer Chiaverini's bestselling Elm Creek Quilts series began with *The Quilters* Apprenticeship and continues with *Round Robin* the name for a quilt stitched by many hands in a poignant story of friendship and loyalty. The Elm Creek Quilters have begun a Round Robin quilt, created by sewing concentric patchwork borders to a central block, as a gift for their beloved fellow quilter Sylvia Compson.

But even as the quilt is passed from friend to friend, its eloquent beauty increasing with every stitch, the threads of their happiness begin to unravel. As each woman confronts a personal crisis, a painful truth, or a life-changing choice, the quilt serves as a symbol of the complex and enduring bonds between mothers and daughters, sisters and friends. Extrait Chapter One In a few months, spring would turn the land surrounding Elm Creek Manor into a green patchwork quilt of dark forested hills and lighter farmers' fields and grassy lawns. After last night's snowstorm, however, the view from the kitchen window resembled a white whole cloth quilt, stitched with the winding gravel road to Waterford, the bare, brown tree limbs, and a thin trace of

blue where the creek cut through the woods. The barn stood out in the distance, a cheerful splash of red against the snow. So much about Elm Creek Manor had changed, but not the view from the window over the sink. If not for the stiffness in her hands and the way the winter chill had seeped into her bones, Sylvia could convince herself that the past fifty years had never happened. She could imagine herself a young woman again, as if any moment she would hear her younger brother whistling as he came downstairs for breakfast.

She would look up and see her elder sister entering the kitchen, tying on an apron. Sylvia would gaze through the window and see a lone figure trudging through the snow from the barn, returning to his home and his bride after completing the morning chores. She would leave her work and hurry to the back door to meet him, her footsteps quick and light, her heart full. Her husband was there and alive again, as was her brother, as was her sister, and together they would laugh at the grief of their long separation. Sylvia squeezed

her eyes shut and listened. She heard a clock ticking in the west sitting room off the kitchen, and then, distantly, the sound of someone descending the grand staircase in the front foyer. For a moment her breath caught in her throat, and she almost believed she had accomplished the impossible. She had willed herself back in time, and now, armed with the wisdom of hindsight and regret, she could set everything to rights. All the years that had been stolen from them were restored, and they would live them out together. Not a single moment would be wasted. "Sylvia?" someone called out from down the hall. It was a woman's voice, one she had come to know well over the past two years. Sylvia opened her eyes, and the ghosts receded to the past, to memory. In another moment Sarah appeared in the kitchen doorway, smiling. "The Elm Creek Quilters are here," Sarah said. "I saw their cars coming up the back drive." Sylvia rinsed the last coffee cup and placed it

in the dishwasher. "It's about time. They'd be very disappointed if they missed the show." She caught the smile Sarah tried to hide. Sarah often teased Sylvia for her insistence on punctuality, but Sylvia had no intention of changing her opinion. She knew, even if Sarah and the six other Elm Creek Quilters didn't, the value of a minute. Sarah gave Sylvia a look of affectionate amusement. "The show won't start for twenty minutes, at least," she said as they went to the back door to greet their friends. They had called themselves the Tangled Web Quilters when Sylvia and Sarah had joined the bee nearly two years before, but together they adopted the new name to symbolize the creation of a new group and to celebrate the beginning of their business, Elm Creek Quilts. Gwen and Summer entered first, laughing together like no mother and daughter

Sylvia had ever known. Bonnie followed close behind, carrying a large cardboard box. "I cleared out a storage room at the shop last night," Bonnie told them. "I've got scraps, leftover ribbon, and some thread that's been discontinued. I thought we could use it when classes start up again in March." Sarah thanked her, took the box, and placed it on the floor out of the way. Bonnie owned Grandma's Attic, Waterford's only quilt shop. Elm Creek Quilts ordered material and notions through her, and in return Bonnie gave them any leftovers or irregulars that couldn't be sold. Sylvia admired Bonnie's generosity, which had not lessened even after the new chain fabric store on the outskirts of town opened and began steadily siphoning away her income. Diane entered just in time to overhear Bonnie's words. "You should let us root through that box first," she said, holding the door open for Agnes. "I can always use a bit of extra fabric, especially if it's

free." "Did you hear that?" Gwen asked Bonnie, as Judy entered, holding the hand of her three-year-old daughter, Emily. "Better turn on the security cameras next time you let Diane help in the shop." Diane looked puzzled. "You have security cameras? I never noticed any." When the others began to chuckle, she grew indignant. "Not that I had any reason to look." Gwen's eyebrows rose. "Sounds to me like you have a guilty conscience." The hallway rang with laughter, and Sylvia's heart soared as she looked around the circle of women. She had welcomed them into her home, first as friends and later as business colleagues. In her heart, though, she would always consider them family. Not that they could replace the family she had lost more than fifty years before -- no one could do that -- but they were a great comfort, nonetheless. The new arrivals were breathless with excitement and red-cheeked from the cold. They put their coats away in the hall closet and soon were settling into the formal parlor. Sarah took a seat on the sofa beside Sylvia's chair. "Didn't I promise you someday you'd be glad we got cable?" she said as she turned on the television. "Indeed you did,"

Sylvia said. "But I'll reserve judgment until after the show." "Sarah's going to drag you kicking and screaming into the twenty-first century if it's the last thing she does," Gwen said. "She most certainly will not," Sylvia retorted. "I have more dignity than that. I'll move along calmly and quietly, thank you." Emily squirmed on Judy's lap. "I want to sit by Sarah." "Sarah wants to see this show," Judy told her. "Maybe later she can play." "That's okay. Emily can sit here if she likes." Sarah slid over and patted the seat beside her. "I haven't seen her in two days. We have lots to talk about." Emily jumped down from her mother's lap and ran across the room to Sarah, who laughed and helped her climb onto the sofa. "When are you going to have one of your own?" Diane asked. Sarah rolled her eyes. "You sound like my mother." "You can't wait forever, you know." "I realize that." Sarah shot Diane a quick frown before putting her arm around Emily. Emily giggled and smiled up at her. Sylvia caught the fragrance of baby shampoo and something else, something sweet and

fresh beneath it, and she wondered why Sarah, who used to speak confidently about having children someday, had not said a word on the subject in months. Perhaps the couple had decided against having children, or perhaps they had no choice. Sylvia didn't want to pry, but her heart was troubled for Sarah and Matt, and she wished she knew how to help them. "Where is Matthew, anyway?" Sylvia wondered aloud. "He's inspecting the orchards for storm damage," Sarah said. "He said he'd try to make it back in time for the show, but..." She shrugged. "He can't miss this," Judy protested. "He won't. There's a new tape in the VCR." Sarah smiled, tight-lipped. "You know how he is about those trees. Besides, he was here for the filming last fall, and that was the exciting part, right?" "Nonsense, Sylvia wanted to say, but she kept quiet. "The show's starting," Summer announced, taking the remote from Sarah. Sylvia saw their eyes meet, and something passed between them. Whatever it was, it made Sarah relax, and so Sylvia did as well.

Summer was an exceptional young woman -- optimistic and empathetic, and more thoughtful than most people her age. Sylvia would miss her when she went off to graduate school in the fall. The young couldn't help growing up and wanting to make their own ways through life, but Summer would be the first Elm Creek Quilter to leave their circle, and they would not feel whole without her. Sylvia pushed the thoughts to the back of her mind, choosing instead to focus on the television. As the theme music played, a familiar man with graying hair and a red-and-black flannel coat appeared on the screen and walked across a gravel road toward the camera, a snowy cornfield in the background. "Good morning, friends," the man said. "I'm Grant Richards." "He looks better on TV than in person," Diane said. Grant Richards smiled out at them. "Welcome to America's Back Roads, the show that takes you down the road less traveled to the heart of America, to the small towns where old-fashioned values still endure, where life goes on at a slower pace, where friends are friends for life, where the frantic clamor of the city ventures no closer than the evening news." Gwen grinned.

"Apparently he's never seen campus during Freshman Orientation." "He's right about one thing, though," Judy said. "Around here, friends are friends for life." "Hmph." Sylvia frowned at the screen. "I don't care for his folksy posturing. He makes it sound like we're a bunch of hayseeds out in the middle of nowhere." "We are in the middle of nowhere," Agnes pointed out, and no one contradicted her. Grant continued. "This Sunday morning we're traveling through the snow-covered hills of Pennsylvania, where you'll meet a man who makes musical instruments out of old auto parts, a Tony Award-winning actress who abandoned the bright lights of Broadway to become a high school drama teacher, and a group of quilters dedicated to passing on their craft, warming toes and hearts alike in a place called Elm Creek Manor." The Elm Creek Quilters burst into cheers and applause. Emily looked up at Sarah, puzzled. "We're last?" "Probably," Sarah told her. "We won't have to wait too long, though." Emily's face fell anyway, and Sarah laughed and kissed her on the top of her head. The excitement in the room built through the first two segments. The weeks between the arrival of the producer's first letter and the final wrap had passed swiftly compared to the

months they had waited for this moment. Sylvia could hardly keep still. If she were almost three years old like Emily, she, too, would be bouncing up and down in her seat, but she settled for drumming her fingers on the arm of her chair. Then, finally, it was time. "There's Elm Creek Manor," Agnes said, just as the rest of them saw it. Grant Richards was walking up the front drive as he told the audience about Elm Creek Quilts, the business founded by Sylvia Compson and Sarah McClure, two women from Waterford. "Sarah isn't really from Waterford," Diane said. "She moved here." The others shushed her. "After months of preparation, Elm Creek Quilts welcomed their first guests." Grant's voice-over kept pace with a montage of scenes: quilters arriving at the manor, moving into their rooms, attending quilt classes, laughing and chatting as they strolled through the grounds. Then Sylvia appeared on-screen, Sarah by her side. "We wanted to create a place where quilters of all backgrounds and skill levels could come to quilt, to make new friends, to practice old skills and learn new ones," Sylvia explained. "Quilters can come for a weekly quilt camp or they can rent a room for as long as they like and work independently. Beginning and intermediate quilters usually prefer the former; advanced quilters, the latter." Unconsciously, Sylvia sat up straight and touched her hair, pleased.

She did look very smart there on the television in that nice blue skirt and blazer Sarah had insisted she purchase for the occasion. Her friends looked very nice, too, she thought, watching as the camera showed the Elm Creek Quilters sitting around a quilt frame, answering Grant's questions as they worked. Sylvia couldn't help smiling at the sight. They all looked so cheerful, so companionable. On-screen, Grant admired Judy's red-and-white Feathered Star quilt in the frame. "I guess you finish a quilt much faster when you all work on it together, right?" "That's exactly so," Agnes said. "That's not what's most important about working around the quilting frame, however," Gwen said to the camera. "Get ready, everyone," Diane said, watching. "The professor is about to expound." The real-life Gwen threw a pillow at her. On-screen, Gwen's expression had grown serious. "The quilting frame speaks to something deep within the woman's soul. Too often, work in the modern society isolates us in offices or cubicles. We speak to people on the phone or through the computer rather than face-to-face. The essential element of human contact has been lost. The quilting frame, on the other hand, draws us back together, back into a community." Gwen wrinkled her nose at the television. "Do I really sound that pompous when I talk?" "Yes," Diane said, throwing the pillow back at her. Sylvia held up a hand. "That is a throw pillow, but let's not take the name quite so literally, shall we?" Gwen's speech played on. "Women's work used to be much more communal, as when the entire village would gather food together, as when the women would all go down to the river together and do the laundry by pounding the clothes on rocks." Summer looked up from her quilting, her eyes wide and innocent. "That's how they did it when you were a girl, right, Mom?" Both on-screen and off, the Elm Creek Quilters laughed. Even Grant chuckled before resuming the interview. "But what about you? How did you learn to quilt? There were no Elm Creek Quilters around to teach you as you now teach others." "My mother taught me," Sylvia responded. "And Sylvia, in turn, taught me." Agnes gave her a sidelong glance. "Or at least she tried to." "My mom taught me," Summer said. Grant looked around the circle. "So most of you learned from your mothers, is that it?" All but Sarah nodded. "Not me," she declared. "I mean, please. The idea of my mother quilting...." She laughed and shook her head. "I don't even think she knows which end of the needle to thread." On-screen, the Elm Creek Quilters smiled, but in the parlor, they didn't. "Oh, dear," Agnes said. "It seemed funnier at the time," Bonnie said, looking from the television to Sarah, who sat rigid and still on the edge of the sofa. "I didn't know they filmed that part," she said. Diane shot her a look of disbelief. "That little red light on the camera didn't clue you in?" "I thought they had stopped filming by then. Really." Her eyes met Sylvia's. "Really," she insisted, as if something in Sylvia's expression conveyed doubt. "I believe you," Sylvia said, although she wondered. "What'll your mom say when she sees this?" Summer asked. "Maybe she won't see it," Sarah said. "Of course she'll see it," Agnes said. "No mother would miss her daughter on national television." Sarah said nothing, but her expression was resolute, as if she had seized a thin thread of hope and had no intention of letting go. Then the phone rang. Agnes was closest, so she answered. "Good morning, Elm Creek Quilts." A pause. "No, I'm Sylvia's sister-in-law, Agnes. Would you like to speak to her?" A longer pause. "Sarah? Yes, Sarah's here." Her eyes went wide. "Oh, yes, hello. I've heard so much about you." She threw Sarah a helpless look. "Why, yes, I'll get her. Hold on, please." She held out the phone to Sarah. "It's your mother." Sarah dragged herself out of her seat, took the phone and the receiver, and carried them as far toward the doorway as the cord would permit. Watching her, Summer fingered the remote as if unsure whether to lower the volume so that Sarah could hear her mother better or turn up the sound to give Sarah some semblance of privacy. Sylvia turned back to the television and pretended to concentrate on the show. The other Elm Creek Quilters followed suit, but Sylvia doubted they were paying

any more attention than she herself was."Hi, Mother....Yes. I know. I know. I'm sorry, but -- " Sarah winced and held the receiver away from her ear for a moment. "Look, I said I was sorry....I didn't know the camera was on....Of course that makes a difference." A pause. "Well, so what? I didn't mention you by name or anything....It's not an excuse. It's the truth." Silence. "I said I was sorry. It was just a joke. Summer told a joke about her mom, and so I -- " Sarah's mouth tightened. "I do not. That's unfair, Mother." Her face went scarlet. "He would not. Dad would never say such a thing. I'm sorry, okay? I'm sorry. What else do I have to do?...I can't apologize on national television and you know it." Silence. "Fine. If that's the way you feel, have it your way." She slammed down the phone and stormed across the room to return it to the table."How did it go?" Diane asked.Sarah shot her a dark glare and flung herself onto the sofa. "How do you think?"Emily didn't recognize the sarcasm. "Bad?" she guessed, looking up at Sarah with wide eyes.Sarah softened and snuggled her close. "Not so bad," she assured her, but she gave the others a look that told them otherwise. "She'll never let this one go. Never. She's convinced I made her look like a fool.""Well..." Summer hesitated. "You kind of did.""Not intentionally," Sarah protested. "She thinks I did it on purpose, just to humiliate her. Honestly. She's so self-absorbed. She thinks everything's about her.""Hmph," Sylvia said, thinking.Sarah turned to her. "For goodness sake, Sylvia, what's 'Hmph' supposed to mean?"Sylvia refused to be baited. "Don't lash out at me, young lady. I'm not the one you're angry at, and neither is your mother." To her satisfaction, Sarah's anger wavered. "You know your words were thoughtless and silly, just as you know your mother's feelings are justified. You're embarrassed and ashamed, and rightfully so. If I were your mother, I would have given you an earful, too."Sarah sank back into the sofa, defeated. "If you were my mother, none of this would have happened.""Now, now," Sylvia said. "You'll put things right. Take an hour or so to cool down, then get back on that phone and apologize.""I did apologize.""I mean apologize sincerely."Sarah shook her head. "I can't. You don't know her like I do. There's no use talking to her when she's this upset.""Call her tomorrow, then.""I can't." Sarah rose. "You don't understand.""Explain it to us," Gwen said. "We'll listen. We want to understand."But Sarah just shook her head and left the room."What should we do?" Judy asked."Nothing," Diane said. "We should stay out of it.""There must be some way we can help." Summer looked around the circle of friends anxiously. "Isn't there?"No one could answer her.The show had ended, though no one had seen the last half of their segment. Sylvia considered rewinding the tape they had made for Matt and playing the last part, but decided against it. Already the Elm Creek Quilters were getting to their feet, preparing to leave. She would save the tape for another day.Later, when she was alone, Sylvia mulled over the morning's events as she quilted in the west sitting room. She thought of a promise Sarah had made to her nearly two years before as they sat on the front veranda negotiating their agreement to launch a new business together."I don't know what kind of conflict stands between you and your mother," Sylvia had said, "but you must promise me you'll talk to her and do your best to resolve it. Don't be a stubborn fool like me and let grudges smolder and relationships die."The unexpected request had clearly caught Sarah by surprise. "I don't think you know how difficult that will be.""I don't pretend to know, but I can guess. I don't expect miracles. All I ask is that you learn from my mistakes and try."Sarah had given her a long, steady look, and for a moment Sylvia had been certain that she would refuse and that their agreement to create Elm Creek Quilts would founder on this one point. Sylvia had been tempted to tell Sarah she would take back the condition, but she held fast, determined to see to it that Sarah would learn from her older friend's mistakes and not have to endure the hard lessons of a lifetime, if she could be spared them.Her patience had been rewarded."All right," Sarah had said at last. "If that's one of your conditions, I'll try. I can't promise you that anything will come of it, but I'll try."Nearly two years had come and gone since Sarah had spoken those words, and what had she to show for it? Sylvia let her hands fall to her lap, still holding her quilting. She sat there for a long while, lost in thought.So many things could go wrong, she knew. But life carried no guarantees for anyone. That couldn't keep one paralyzed, fearing to act. That was no way to live.Once Sylvia made up her mind, she saw no reason to wait. She put her quilting aside and went to the parlor, where she eased the door shut so she could make her call in privacy.

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From Publishers Weekly
The Elm [Creek] quilters return in this sequel to the popular *The Quilter's Apprentice*, and again a round-robin quilt is made collaboratively by a group of friends, each contributing a border of patchwork around a central block. The apt metaphor is used once more to share the individual stories and bonds of friendship of the club members. Sarah McClure helps her aging friend Sylvia Compson run a quilting school from Sylvia's large manor house in the small town of Waterford, Pa. The quilters decide to surprise Sylvia with a round robin, and in passing the work-in-progress to one another, their stories unfold. Sarah struggles with her cold and critical mother and with her husband's identity crisis, while

overachiever Gwen must accept that her daughter wants to work at the quilt store rather than attend graduate school. Supermom Diane copes with her teenage son, a friendless delinquent whose troubles disappear as soon as the family puts a skateboard ramp in their backyard. Bonnie discovers that her husband is conducting a romance over the Internet. In the most complicated and most strained vignette, Judy, a Vietnamese-American professor of computer science, receives a letter from an American half-sister she never knew of, reporting that their biological father, who abandoned Judy and her mother in Vietnam, is dying. Rounding out the ensemble is Sylvia, whose health is deteriorating but who gleans new hope when an old flame visits. By the end of this sugary story, not only have the Elm [Creek] ladies stitched a beautiful quilt, but they've also learned to rely on and help each other. The tale is neatly concluded on a tender if sentimental note: "true friends are the most precious gift." Agent, Maria Massie. 3-city author tour. (Apr.)
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