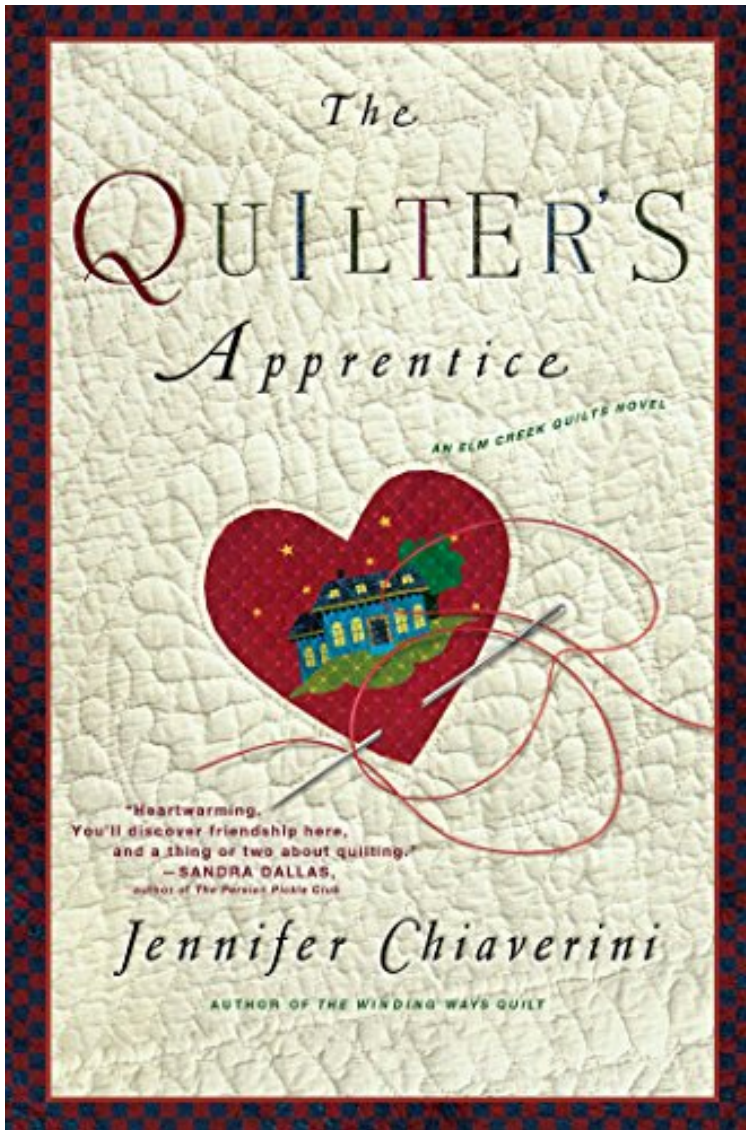


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# The Quilter's Apprentice: A Novel



Par Jennifer Chiaverini  
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(Mobile pdf) The Quilter's Apprentice: A Novel

Par Jennifer Chiaverini : **The Quilter's Apprentice: A Novel** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Quilter's Apprentice: A Novel:

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**Description :** Description du produit Tangled, anxious thoughts relaxed when she felt the fabric beneath her fingers and remembered that she was creating something beautiful enough to delight the eyes as well as the heart, something strong enough to defeat the cold of a Pennsylvania winter night. She could do these things. She, Sarah, had the power to do these things. From debut novelist Jennifer Chiaverini comes *The Quilter's Apprentice*, a delightful, timeless story of loyalty and friendship. When Sarah McClure and her husband, Matt, move to the small town of Waterford, Pennsylvania, to get a fresh start, Sarah struggles to find a fulfilling job. Disheartened by failed interviews, she reluctantly accepts a temporary position at Elm Creek Manor helping seventy-five-year-old Sylvia Compson prepare her family estate for sale after the recent death of Sylvia's estranged sister. As part of her compensation, Sarah is taught how to quilt by this reclusive, cantankerous master quilter. During their lessons, Mrs. Compson slowly opens up to Sarah, sharing powerful, devastating stories of her life as a young woman on the World War II home front. Hearing tales of

how Mrs. Compson's family was torn apart by tragedy, jealousy, and betrayal, Sarah is forced to confront uncomfortable truths about her own family -- truths that she has denied for far too long. As the friendship between the two women deepens, Mrs. Compson confides that although she would love to remain at her beloved family estate, Elm Creek Manor exists as a constant, unbearable reminder of her role in her family's misfortune. For Sarah, there can be no greater reward than teaching Mrs. Compson to forgive herself for her past mistakes, restoring life and joy to her cherished home. Heartfelt and inspiring, *The Quilter's Apprentice* teaches deep lessons about family, friendship, and sisterhood -- and about creating a life as you would a quilt: with time, love, and patience, piecing the miscellaneous and mismatched scraps into a harmonious, beautiful whole.

Presentation de l'auteur Jennifer Chiaverini's bestselling Elm Creek Quilts series starts with *The Quilters Apprentice*, a timeless tale of family, friendship, and forgiveness as two women weave the disparate pieces of their lives into a bountiful and harmonious whole, and begin the legacy of the Elm Street Quilters. When Sarah McClure and her husband, Matt, move to Waterford, Pennsylvania, she hopes to make a fresh start in the small college town. Unable to find a job both practical and fulfilling, she takes a temporary position at Elm Creek Manor helping its reclusive owner Sylvia Compson prepare her family estate for sale and after the death of her estranged sister. Sylvia is also a master quilter and, as part of Sarah's compensation, offers to share the secrets of her creative gifts with the younger woman. During their lessons, the intricate, varied threads of Sylvia's life begin to emerge. It is the story of a young wife living through the hardships and agonies of the World War II home front; of a family torn apart by jealousy and betrayal; of misunderstanding, loss, and a tragedy that can never be undone. As the bond between them deepens, Sarah resolves to help Sylvia free herself from remembered sorrows and restore her life and her home to its former glory. In the process, she confronts painful truths about her own family, even as she creates new dreams for the future. Just as the darker sections of a quilt can enhance the brighter ones, the mistakes of the past can strengthen understanding and lead the way to new beginnings. A powerful debut by a gifted storyteller, *The Quilters Apprentice* tells a timeless tale of family, friendship, and forgiveness as two women weave the disparate pieces of their lives into a bountiful and harmonious whole.

Extrait Chapter One Sarah leaned against the brick wall and tried to look comfortable, hoping no one walking by would notice her or wonder why she was standing around in a suit on such a hot day. She shaded her eyes with her hand and scanned the street for Matt's truck -- their truck -- but she didn't expect to see it. He wasn't late; she was early. This interview had been her shortest one yet. A drop of perspiration trickled down between her shoulder blades to the small of her back where her silk blouse was tucked into her navy skirt. She removed her suit jacket and folded it over her arm, but she knew she wouldn't feel comfortable until she was back in her customary T-shirt and shorts. A barrette held her hair away from her face, and the back of her neck sweltered beneath the thick, brown waves. The people who slowly passed on their way to jobs, shopping, or summer classes at nearby Waterford College looked as uncomfortable and as drained by the humidity as Sarah felt. In a few months, she knew, she'd be griping about the snow like everyone else in central Pennsylvania, but today she longed for autumn. The handle of her briefcase began to dig into her palm. As she shifted it to her other hand, she glanced at the revolving door half a block away. With her luck, some of the interviewers would leave early for lunch and spot her lingering there. They'd probably urge her to wait inside in the air-conditioning, and then she'd have to figure out some polite way to refuse. That, or slink back inside like a reprimanded child. The thought of it made her shrink back against the wall. Two staccato beeps of the horn sounded before Sarah saw the red truck pull up and park along the opposite curb. She pushed herself away from the wall and hurried across the street. "How'd it go?" Matt asked as she slid into the passenger's seat. "Don't ask." Though she had tried to keep her voice light, Matt's face fell. He started the truck, then reached over and patted her knee. "I guess you already know how sorry I am about all this." "Sorry about what? You're early." "You know what. Don't pretend you didn't understand. If not for me and my job, we never would've moved here." "It's not like you dragged me here by my hair." Sarah closed her eyes and sank back into her seat. "It's not your fault I don't have a clue how to make it through a job interview without sounding like an idiot." "You're not an idiot." "And you're not responsible for my unemployment." "Well, I feel bad anyway," he responded as he pulled into traffic. "I mean it, Sarah. I'm really sorry." Of course he felt sorry. So did she, but feeling sorry didn't make her any less unemployed. Apparently, neither did working her tail off to graduate with a great GPA and sacrificing every other available moment to part-time jobs and internships to gain work experience. Even the years she had invested in her last job apparently did her more harm than

good. Potential employers took one look at her rsum, noted all the accounting experience, and refused to consider her for any other kind of work. Sometimes Sarah thought back to those first years after college and wondered how she and Matt ever could have been so hopeful, so optimistic. Of course, their prospects had seemed brighter then, colored by newlywed joy and professional navet. Then the newness faded from her job as a cost accountant for a local convenience store chain, and the days began to follow each other in an unrelenting cycle of tedium. Matt enjoyed his job working on the Penn State campus, but just after he had been promoted to shift supervisor, the state legislature slashed the university's budget. College officials decided that they could do without new landscaping more easily than library books and faculty salaries, so Matt and many of his coworkers found themselves out of work. They soon learned that open positions were hard to come by in a medium-sized college town in the middle of Pennsylvania. Matt couldn't find anything permanent, only occasional landscaping jobs for some of his former agricultural science professors. One by one, his former coworkers found jobs in other towns, sometimes in other states. But Matt was determined to find something in State College, the town where he and Sarah had met, where they had married, and where one day, they hoped to raise children. Eventually even Matt's natural optimism waned, and he grew more discouraged every month. Soon Sarah found herself slinking off to work every morning, wondering if she should be doing something more to help him find a job and fearing that if she did get more involved he'd think she doubted his ability to find a job on his own. As time passed, the sharpness of her worries dulled, but they never completely faded. Matt made the best of the part-time work he managed to find, and Sarah was proud of him for it. She watched him persevere and tried not to complain too much about the drudgery of her own job. Instead, year after year, she put in her hours and collected her paychecks, and thanked her boss for her annual bonuses. She knew she should be grateful, but in her heart she felt something was missing. One December, as she and Matt decorated their Christmas tree, Sarah counted the number of Christmases they had spent in that apartment. "Has it been that many?" Matt asked. His eyes grew sad. "I thought we'd have a house of our own by now." Sarah placed another ornament on a high branch and thought quickly. "Lots of people wait much longer than this before they buy a house. Besides, I like it here." "So many years in this apartment, and too much of that time without steady work." "So many years of bean counting. It's amazing my brain hasn't melted into mush." Matt tried to grin. "Maybe we're just having a midlife crisis." "Speak for yourself. I don't think I've hit midlife just yet." "You know what I mean. Wouldn't it be nice to get a fresh start, knowing now what we didn't know then?" She reached out for his hand and squeezed it to show him she understood. A few weeks later, a group of their friends gathered at their tiny apartment on College Avenue to welcome the New Year. They spent the day watching bowl games and proclaiming the superiority of the Nittany Lions, and in the last half hour before midnight they watched the ball drop in Times Square on television and took turns announcing their New Year's resolutions. Everyone burst out laughing when Sarah resolved to take the CPA exam so she could go into business for herself. They quite rightly noted that a CPA's life wasn't much of a departure from the work she already knew and despised. She saw their point, but any change, however slight, would be a relief. Then Matt stood up and announced his resolution: to find a permanent job even if it meant leaving State College. Sarah raised her eyebrows at him, a silent message he immediately understood. He quickly added, "As long as that's okay with you, honey. As long as you don't mind moving." "I'd rather not, if you want to know the truth." "But we both want a fresh start. You've said so." "I think it's time to cut you off." She smiled to soften her words as she took the beer can from his hand. It wasn't his resolution that troubled her so much as the way he had presented it, springing something that big on her so unexpectedly -- and in front of an audience. Matt was methodical and patient, never one for surprises. It wasn't like him to make decisions that affected them both without talking to her first. She waited until the guests had left and the mess from the party had been cleared away. Then she cornered him in the bathroom as he brushed his teeth. "Do you think you could warn me next time before you make major life decisions for us, especially if you're going to do it in front of all our friends?" Matt spat out his toothpaste. "I'm sorry, Sarah. I spoke without thinking." He rinsed his mouth and spat again. "Actually, that's not entirely true. I've been thinking about this a lot." "About moving?" "About getting a fresh start somewhere else. Come on, Sarah. You hate your job; I can't find one. It couldn't be any worse in a new place, and I'm willing to risk that it would be even better." He studied her for a moment. "Are you willing to risk that?" Sarah watched him, and thought about how long he had been looking for permanent employment, how he sometimes scraped together a full day's work out of a few odd jobs, and how her own career bored her so senseless that she hated to get up in the morning. "I'll sleep on it," she said. In the morning she told him she was ready to risk it, too. A few weeks later, Matt finally landed a job -- a job in a town more than two hours'

drive away. Sarah celebrated with him and tried not to be too dismayed when he described Waterford, an even smaller college town in an even more remote location in Pennsylvania with an even tighter job market than State College. But how could she refuse when Matt was so elated at the chance to work again? And how could she not side with Matt after her mother had shrieked into the phone, "You mean you're giving up your professional job to go with that -- that -- that gardener?" Sarah had curtly reminded her mother that "that gardener" was her husband and that he had a bachelor of science degree in landscape architecture, and added that if her mother didn't approve Sarah wouldn't bother to leave a forwarding address. Her mother had never understood about Matt, had never tried to understand. She just set her mouth in a prim line and refused to see what Sarah saw, that Matt was an intelligent, thoughtful, caring man with a good heart and a love for earth and rain and all growing things. If Sarah's mother wailed and moaned to think that her daughter was yoking herself to a country bumpkin, she had it all wrong. Sarah reached over and stroked Matt's curly hair. From April through October he had sun-streaked blond hair and a perpetually sunburned nose. "It's only been eight weeks. I didn't expect to find something as soon as we rode into town. That's not realistic." Matt glanced at her before returning his gaze to the road. "I know you said not to ask, but how did it go?" "Same old thing,"

Sarah grumbled. "The more I talked, the more his eyes glazed over. And then he said, 'Frankly, we're looking for someone who conforms better to our company persona.' And then a smile and a handshake and he was showing me the door." "What's a 'company persona'?" "I think he meant I wouldn't fit in." "They usually at least think about it for a day or two before rejecting someone." "Thanks, sweetheart. Now, which part of that remark was supposed to make me feel better?" "You know what I mean." Matt gave her an apologetic look. "Did you tell them that you don't want to work in accounting anymore?" "Yeah, but that didn't help. I feel like I've been typecast." "Well, don't give up, honey. Something will come along." "Yeah." Sarah didn't allow herself to say anything more because she wasn't sure she'd be able to keep the sarcasm out of her voice. Something will come along. That's what she had told Matt at least once a week while he was unemployed, and he'd never believed it. But now that he was the one repeating the refrain, it took on the status of gospel. She loved Matt, but sometimes he drove her nuts. Matt signaled for a left turn and pulled off the main street onto a gravel road. "I hope you don't mind a detour." "Where are we going?" Sarah asked as the truck jolted unsteadily down the narrow road, leaving a cloud of dust behind it. "A new client stopped by the office yesterday to set up a contract. She brought a few photos of her house, but I need to take a look at the grounds myself before Tony can finalize the agreement. It's just a little place, just some lady's little cottage. I thought maybe you could help me find it." "Fine by me. I'm not in any hurry." It wasn't as if she had anywhere to go. She looked around but saw no houses, only farmers' fields already knee-high with pale green cornstalks, and beyond them the darker green of rolling hills covered with trees. The road forked ahead, and Matt turned the truck onto an even narrower road that arced sharply to the left into a thick forest. "See that road?" Matt asked, jerking a thumb over his shoulder at the fork they had not taken. "That leads right up to the front of the house, or it would if the bridge over Elm Creek wasn't out. The lady who owns the place warned us to use the back way. She said she's tired of having people complain about having to hike into town to call a tow truck." Sarah smiled weakly and clutched at her seat as the truck bounded jerkily up a gradual incline. Pennsylvania roads were infamous for their potholes, but this drive seemed worse than most.

As the grade became steeper, Sarah hoped that no one was approaching them from the opposite direction.

She doubted that both cars could stay on the road without one of them scraping a side on a tree. Or worse. Suddenly the forest gave way to a clearing. Before them stood a two-story red barn built into the side of a hill. The road, now little more than two dirt trails an axle's width apart surrounded by overgrown grass, climbed away from them up the hill and disappeared behind the barn. Matt shifted gears and followed. Just beyond the barn, the path crossed a low bridge and then widened into a tree-lined gravel road. "Elms," Matt noted. "They look healthy, but I'll have to check. The house should be around here somewhere." Sarah glimpsed something through the trees. "There. I see it." And then, as they approached and she was able to see more, her eyes widened. Matt's description hadn't prepared her for anything this grand. The gray stone mansion was three stories tall and L-shaped, with Tudor woodwork along the eaves and black shutters bordering each of the many windows. The shorter branch of the L pointed west, toward them, and the other wing stretched to the south. Where the two wings met there were four stone stairs leading to a door. "You call this 'some lady's little cottage,' Matt?" The truck slowed as they pulled into a gravel driveway encircling two enormous elm trees. Matt stopped the truck and grinned at Sarah as he put on the parking brake. "What do you think? Pretty impressive, huh?" "That's an understatement." Sarah left the car and shut the door behind her without taking her eyes from the mansion. A twinge of envy pricked her conscience, and she

hastily buried it. "I thought you'd like it." He came around the truck to join her. "Tony was lucky to get her as a client. I can't wait to get a look at the rest of the grounds." They climbed the steps and knocked on the door. Sarah closed her eyes and savored the breeze while they waited. Despite the bright afternoon sun, it felt at least ten degrees cooler there than in town. After a few moments Matt knocked again. "Maybe nobody's home." "Did they know you were coming?" "Tony told me he made an appointment for today. I usually call to confirm, but they don't have a phone here." He raised his hand to knock a third time. Suddenly the door swung open. Hastily, Matt dropped his hand to his side as a woman who looked to be in her mid-seventies wearing a light blue dress appeared in the doorway. She was taller than Sarah, and more slender, with silver-gray hair parted on the right and blunt cut a few inches below her chin. The only softness to her face was in the gentle sagging of skin along her jaw and in the feathery lines etched around her eyes and mouth. Something in her bearing suggested that she was used to being obeyed, and for a moment Sarah wondered if she ought to curtsy. Whoever the old woman was, she fit the proud old manor as surely as Matt fit his sturdy, reliable pickup, as surely as Sarah herself fit -- what? She couldn't think of any way to finish the thought, and she wished she could. The woman put on a pair of glasses that hung around her neck on a fine silver chain. "Yes?" she asked, frowning as if she wasn't sure she liked what she saw. "How do you do, ma'am. I'm Matt McClure from Exterior Architects. I have an appointment to photograph the grounds for the restoration you requested." "Hmph." The suspicious gaze shifted to Sarah. "And who are you?" "Oh, I'm -- uh, Sarah. I'm Matt's wife. I'm just here with Matt." She gave the woman a quick smile and extended her hand. The woman paused a moment, then shook her hand. "Well, you probably know that I'm Sylvia Compson. You may call me Mrs. Compson." She looked Matt up and down and frowned. "I expected you earlier." She turned and walked into the foyer. "Well, come on, Matt and 'Uh, Sarah.' Come on inside. Shut the door behind you." Sarah and Matt exchanged a quick look, then followed Mrs. Compson inside. She entered a doorway on the left and led them into a spacious kitchen. The left wall was lined with cupboards and appliances, and there was a window over the sink. A microwave oven rested incongruously on a counter next to a rickety old stove directly across from them. There was an open doorway on the other side of the stove, and a closed door on the adjacent wall. A long wooden table took up the center of the room. Mrs. Compson eased herself onto a low bench next to the table and regarded them for a moment. "Would you like a glass of lemonade, or perhaps some iced tea?" she finally asked, directing the question to Matt. "No thank you, ma'am. I just need you to show me the grounds so I can take a few pictures, and then we'll be on our way." Her eyes still on Matt, Mrs. Compson jerked her head in Sarah's direction. "What about her? Maybe she wants something." "A glass of lemonade would be wonderful," Sarah said. "Thank you. I've been standing outside downtown and --" "There are glasses in the cupboard and a pitcher of lemonade in the icebox. Don't expect me to wait on you." Sarah blinked. "Thanks. I'll just help myself." She gave the woman a tight smile and walked around the table toward the cupboard. "And now I suppose we'll all have to wait around while you sip your beverage, even though you've come here later than your appointment and you've already kept me from my work long enough." Sarah stiffened. "If it's that much trouble --" "Mrs. Compson," Matt broke in, shooting Sarah a helpless look over the old woman's shoulder. "Tony made the appointment for two. We're five minutes early." "Hmph. Ten minutes early is 'on time' and fifteen minutes is 'early,' if one cares about one's first impression. Now, is she going to get on with that drink or will she stand there gaping at me until she puts down roots?" "Mrs. Compson --" "Don't worry about it, Matt," Sarah interrupted, hoping she was meeting Mrs. Compson's stern gaze with one equally strong. "I'll wait for you here." A beautiful estate to explore, and to keep Matt's client happy Sarah would see no more of it than this one room. Still, she'd rather have a glass of lemonade than another moment of Mrs. Compson's company. Mrs. Compson nodded, satisfied. "Come on," she said to Matt, rising stiffly from the bench. "I'll show you the front grounds." She left the kitchen without a backward glance. Astonished, Sarah caught Matt's sleeve as he turned to go. "What did I do?" she asked, whispering so that the old woman wouldn't overhear. "You didn't do anything wrong. I don't know what her problem is." He glanced at the doorway and shook his head in exasperation. "Look, why don't I take you home? I can come back for the pictures another time." "No, that's okay. That would just make things worse. I don't want you to get in trouble." "I won't get in trouble." "It's all right. I don't mind waiting here. Really." "Well, if you're sure..." Matt still looked doubtful, but he nodded. "Okay. But I'll be as quick as I can so we can get out of here." He gave her a quick kiss and a reassuring smile before hurrying out of the kitchen after Mrs. Compson. Sarah watched him go, then sighed and opened the cupboard doors in search of the glasses. She wondered why the woman had even offered the drink in the first place, if it were so much trouble. She found a glass, and as she shut the cupboard, she glanced out the window and spotted

the truck. She considered waiting there until Matt finished, but then the old woman might think she'd scared her off, and Sarah wasn't about to give her the satisfaction. The refrigerator stood next to the closed door. After pouring herself some lemonade and returning the pitcher, Sarah sat down on the bench and rested her elbows on the table. She sipped the cool, sweet liquid and looked around the room. Matt might not finish for an hour, maybe more. Her gaze rested on the closed door next to the refrigerator. Curious, Sarah rose and shifted the glass to her left hand. She wiped the condensation off her right hand and tested the doorknob. Finding it unlocked, she opened the door and peered inside to find a tiny room. It was a pantry, apparently, judging by the shelves filled with canned fruits and vegetables and cloth sacks whose contents she could not determine. She closed the door and, after a quick glance in the direction the old woman had taken, stepped through the open doorway to the left. She found herself in a sunny, pleasant sitting room, larger and wider than the kitchen, with overstuffed furniture arranged by the windows and the fireplace. Cheerful watercolors hung on the walls, and a small sewing machine sat on a nearby table. A chair stood nearby as if someone had been sitting there recently. Two pillows and a small stack of neatly folded sheets rested on the largest sofa, right next to -- Sarah caught her breath and walked over for a better look. She unfolded the blanket with one hand and draped it over the sofa. Not a blanket, a quilt, she corrected herself, stroking the fabric. Small diamonds of all shades of blue, purple, and green formed eight-pointed stars on a soft ivory background. Tiny stitches formed smaller diamonds within each colorful piece, and the lighter fabric was covered with a flowing, feathery pattern, all made from unbelievably small, even stitches. A narrow vine of deep emerald-green meandered around the edges. "How lovely," Sarah whispered, lifting an edge up to the light to better examine it. "If you spill lemonade on that quilt I promise you you'll wish you hadn't," a voice snapped behind her. With a gasp Sarah dropped the quilt and spun around. Mrs. Compson stood scowling in the doorway, her hands on her hips. "Mrs. Compson -- I thought you were with Matt --" "I don't remember inviting you in here," the older woman interrupted. Sarah jumped aside as Mrs. Compson strode to the fallen quilt and slowly bent to pick it up. She straightened with an effort, folded the quilt carefully, and returned it to the sofa. "You may wait for your husband outside," she said over her shoulder. "That is, if you can be trusted to find your way to the back door without wandering about?" Wordlessly, Sarah nodded. She left her glass in the kitchen sink and hurried through the foyer. Idiot, she berated herself as she pushed open the back door. Taking the back steps two at a time, she walked as quickly as her heels would allow to the pickup. She climbed into the passenger seat, rested her elbow on the open window, and chewed on her thumbnail. Was Mrs. Compson angry enough to cancel the contract? If Matt lost his new job because Sarah had offended one of his company's clients, she'd never forgive herself. Thirty minutes later Matt appeared from around the south wing. Sarah watched as he walked over to the back door and knocked. The door swung open almost immediately, but from the truck Sarah could not see inside the house. She fidgeted in her seat as Matt and the unseen old woman conversed. Finally, Matt nodded and raised his hand in farewell. The door closed, and Matt walked down the steps, back to the truck. Sarah tried to read his expression as he climbed into the cab. "I thought you were going to wait inside, honey. What are you doing out here?" he asked with a cheerful grin, then continued without waiting for an answer. "You should've seen the grounds." "I wanted to," Sarah mumbled. If Matt heard, he was too caught up in his enthusiasm to think of a response. Instead, as they drove back to town he described the sweeping front lawn, the gardens gone wild, the orchard, and the creek that ran through the estate grounds. Ordinarily, Sarah would have been intrigued, but now she was too worried about what he would say when she told him she had been snooping about in his client's home. She waited until after dinner, when the anxiety finally became too much. "Matt," she ventured as she stacked plates in the dishwasher. "What were you and Mrs. Compson talking about right before we left?" Matt rinsed their knives and forks and turned off the tap. "Nothing important," he said, placing the utensils in the silverware basket. "She wanted to know what I thought of the north gardens, and she said she'd see me tomorrow." "So she didn't cancel the contract?" "No. Why would she do that?" Sarah hesitated. "Well, actually, I was kind of poking around her house and she caught me." He looked wary. "Poking around?" "It's not as bad as it sounds. I went into her sitting room and touched a quilt. She got all mad about it." Sarah couldn't look at him. "I was afraid she'd switch to another landscaper." Matt chuckled and turned on the dishwasher. "You worry too much. She didn't cancel the contract." He held out his arms for her. She slipped into his embrace and sighed with relief. "I guess I should've stayed in the kitchen, but I was bored. I wanted to see something of the house, since I didn't get to see the grounds." "I'll be there all summer. I'll show you around some other time." "As long as Mrs. Compson doesn't find out." Sarah was in no hurry to see her again. "Tell me, Matt, how come this rude old lady gets a beautiful mansion and the lovely quilt and the gardens while a nice

couple like us only gets half of a run-down duplex? It's not fair." Matt pulled away and studied her expression. "I can't tell if you're joking or not. Would you really want to be like her, living all alone in that big place with no family or even a dog to keep you company?" "Of course not. Obviously the place hasn't made her happy. I'd rather be with you in a tiny little shack than alone in the biggest mansion in the world. You know that." "That's what I thought." He held her tightly. Sarah hugged him -- and wanted to kick herself.

How much longer would it take before she learned to consider her words before blurting them out? The same habit hurt her in job interviews, and if she didn't overcome it soon, that hypothetical little shack might be their next address. Copyright 1999 by Jennifer Chiaverini From Publishers Weekly Quilting is the overall motif of this leisurely paced, predictable first novel, set in a small Pennsylvania college town. Young Sarah McClure, an accountant tired of number-crunching, has accompanied her landscaper husband to the area, but she soon finds that jobs are few and uninteresting. Discouraged, she agrees to do housework on a temporary basis at Elm Creek Manor, a mansion on the edge of town. The manor's occupant, Sylvia Compson, an embittered master quilter and widow in her 70s, has returned to the family home following the death of her sister to ready it for sale. Sylvia's story, told with increasingly long flashbacks and confidences during the private quilting lessons she agrees to give Sarah, reveal a tormented family history of wealth and privilege ruined by tragedy. Sarah's sympathy for Sylvia is juxtaposed against the innuendoes she hears at meetings of the Tangled Web Quilters, a group of local women who mistrust Sylvia. Meant to be a sympathetic catalyst, Sarah comes across as whiny instead of plucky, and the book is burdened by far too many descriptions of her job interviews and subsequent insecurities. Chiaverini is at her best when describing the manor and its once grand history, but her prose is merely serviceable and the dialogue is stilted. Sure to be compared to Whitney Otto's *How to Make an American Quilt*, this novel fails to connect on an emotional level. Author tour.

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