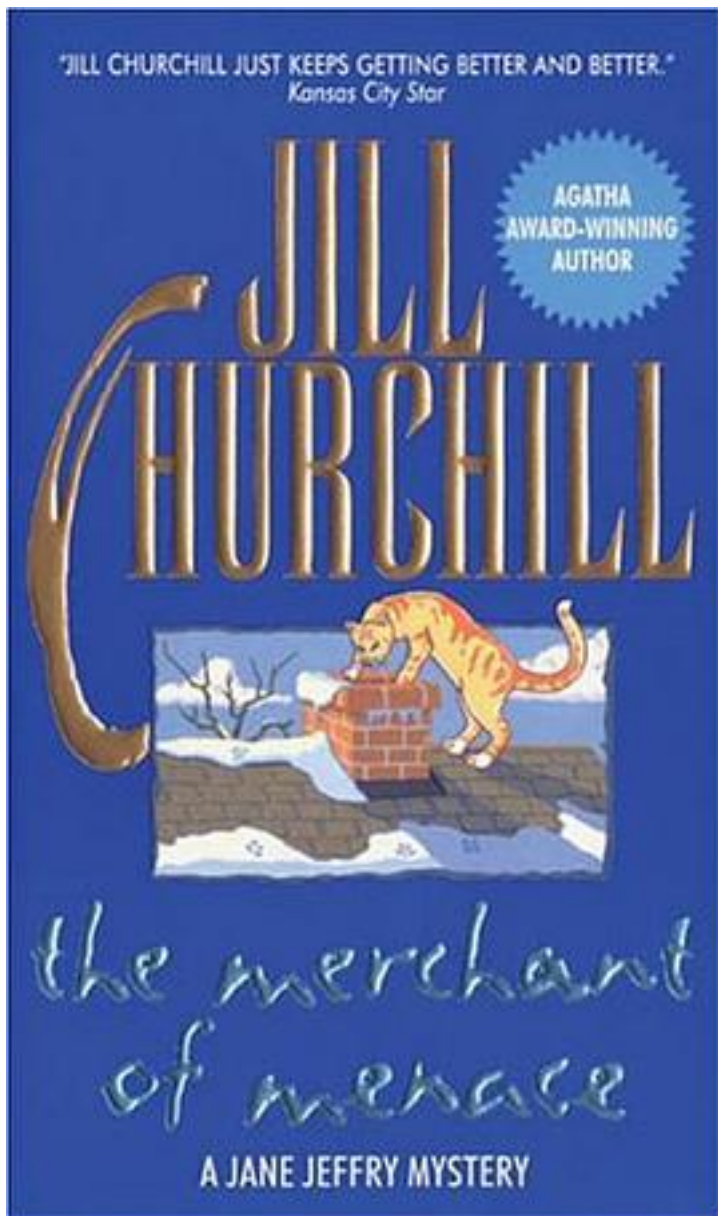


The Merchant of Menace



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It's beginning to look a lot like murder'Tis the season to jolly and suburban mom Jane Jeffry's in a mad scramble to finish her cookie baking and household chores before her teenage kids arrive home. Also expected are two moms-both the late husband's mother "and" the disapproving mater of Det. Mel VanDyne, Jane's significant other. The kitchen is a disaster zone, the dog has decorated the house with hair, and the earsplitting racket coming from the neighbors tacky, music-making Christmas display is driving Jane crazy. Now she has to get the green icing out of her hair and be ready to host her post-caroling dinner party. One thing Jane isn't ready for is a surprise visit from a muckraking TV "action reporter," disguised as Santa Claus. The nasty old St. Nick is out to wrap a happy holiday caroling into a package marked "scandal," but before he has a chance to color the event with yellow journalism, his red-suited body slides off the neighbor's roof to land, silenced forever, on the horns of a plastic reindeer. It looks like Santa's mishap is no accident and, with the help of her friend Shelley, Jane finds plenty of suspects. The phony Santa has an ex-wife and a female assistant who both hate him, and plenty of nice people ruined by tales of naughtiness. Now Jane has to find the Grinch who thought murder was a way to save Christmas before the holiday turns into the unhappiest day of the year.

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