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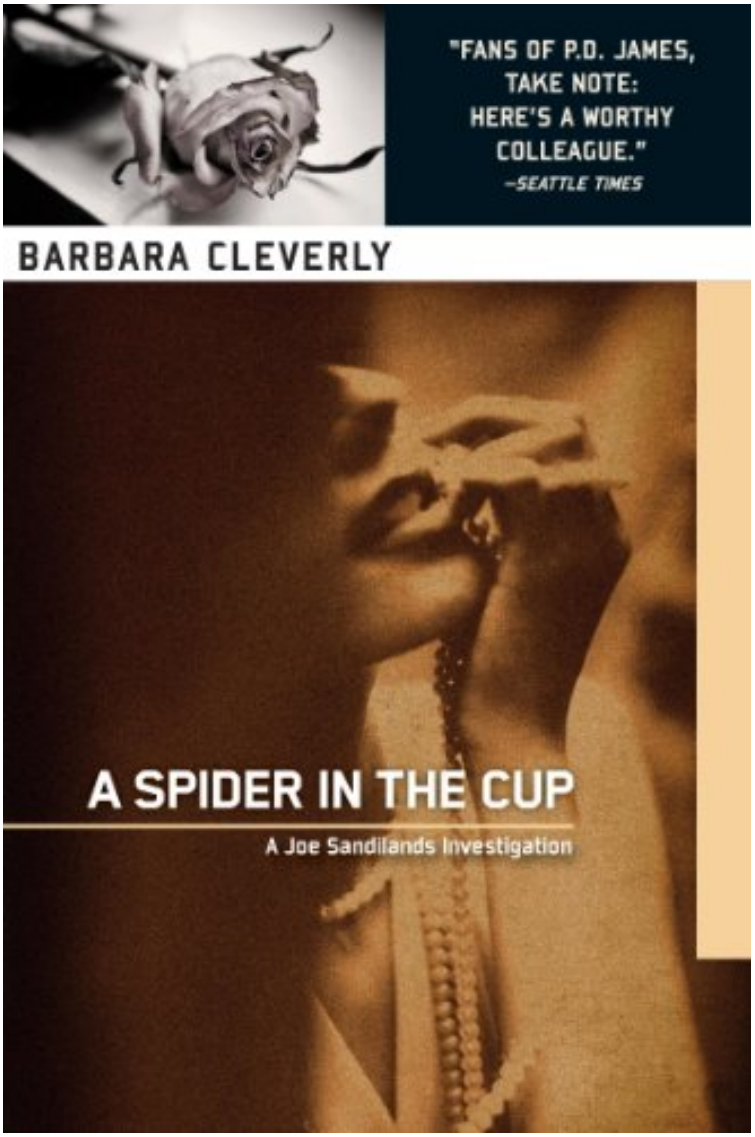
A Spider in the Cup



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(Free download) A Spider in the Cup

Par Barbara Cleverly : A Spider in the Cup before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Spider in the Cup:

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurAt dawn one morning in 1933, an amateur dowsing team digging the banks of the Thames for precious metals unearths the body of a young woman with a missing toe and a priceless gold coin in her mouth. The case falls on Assistant Commissioner of Scotland Yard Joe Sandilands' turf, but he's been given another assignmentand a very high-profile one. London is hosting a historic global economic conference to try to solve the global Depression, and political tensions are running very high, as very influential participants are starting to take positions allied with or staunchly against the rapidly militarizing Germany. Sandilands' job is to protect and keep an eye on the visiting American senator Cornelius Kingstone, right-hand man to President Roosevelt, throughout the conference. When a strange set of coincidences link the river bank body to the senator, Joe realizes his assignment is much bigger than he'd

thought, and that Senator Kingstone is caught up in a very dangerous gameone that might cost not just one but thousands of lives.ExtraitChapter 1 London, June 1933. Dawn. On a neglected reach of the Thames, a woman stood counting the chimes ringing out from Chelsea Old Church behind her. Five o'clock. All was going to plan. Miss Herberttall, imposing Hermione Herbertlistened as the bells of other churches made their contribution to the musical round, some ahead of and others hurrying to catch up with the authoritative boom of Big Ben sounding out a mile downstream. She glanced over her shoulder at the string of old-fashioned gas lamps outlining the bend of the river and sighed in satisfaction. The amber glow of the gas mantles was beginning to fade to lemon as a brightening sky quenched them, offering her sensitive eye a symphony in grey and gold worthy of Whistler. This was the moment and the place. And both were full of mystery. Objects invisible only minutes ago began to reveal themselves. A bundle of rags a few yards away on the muddy bank flapped in a sudden gust of wind, taking on a disturbing semblance of human shape; a barge waiting for the tide stirred lethargically as one of its blood-red sails lifted with the half-hearted flirtation of a tired tart's skirt. Hermione shivered in anticipation. Looking around at the desolate scene, she almost expected to catch sight of the frock-coated Victorian figure of Charles Dickens out and about on one of his insomniac forays into the dark alleys of London. The city was never still. She could sense the restlessness. Early though the hour was, there were people about. They weren't parading themselves but they were there all right, the lucky ones with jobs to go to: bakers, bus-drivers, factory workers, going quietly, almost apologetically, about their business. And there were others lurking there in the shadows above the waterline. The destitute and discarded. Watching. Furtive. She pulled her tweed cape up to cover her neck, glad of its warmth. Even on a late spring morning, the banks of the Thames were a funnel for cold damp air and, glancing round at her little group, she was pleased to see that that they had all taken her advice and kitted themselves out suitably for the occasion with waterproofs and mufflers, gumboots and torches. The six members had been carefully chosen by her. This had been a popular assignment and, as chairman of the Bloomsbury Society of Dowsers (Established 1892), Hermione had had her pick of volunteers: Doris da Silva had been chosen for her proven ability with the hazel-twig dowsing rod. (Doris could detect a half-crown under any thickness of Axminster carpet in a London drawing room in seconds.) Jack Chesterton, ancient buildings architect was here on account of his charm, his common sense and his enthusiasm. And his belief. Jack had earned the admiration of all when he had discoveredarmed with no more than a pair of slender parallel rodsa tributary of the Thames, one of London's lost rivers which had run, unsuspected, for centuries beneath the venerable walls of St. Aidan's Church. Professor Stone. Reginald. Present solely on account of his knowledge of Romano-British history. Cynic and Snake in the Grass. The professor was that most disruptive force in any evangelizing Societya self-proclaimed interested disbeliever. Never embarrassed to call a clich into service, he was pleased to refer to himself as the piece of grit in the oyster that was the Society of Dowsers. Hermione had called to mind her father's advice: Enemies? Always keep 'em where you can see 'em, my girl! And here he was among them and rather surprised to have been chosen. Hermione was determined that any success her group might have this day would be witnessed at first hand and authenticated by their chief critic. And she was looking forward to rubbing the professor's nose in the London mud before the day was out. A loud harrumph drew her attention to Colonel Swinton. Chosen for his reassuring presence and the authority of his voice, Charles Swinton had vocal equipment so magnificent it could have sounded the charge of the Royal Dragoons above the battle-din of Waterloo. And, rather essentially, because he'd been able to offer in support: two of his gardening staff. Strapping, shovel-wielding auxiliaries brought up to town from his estate in Suffolk and hastily enrolled into the Dowsers for this venture, Sam and Joel were eager to get on with it. Whatever it might be. They were determined to go home with stories to tell about their jaunt up to London Town. On their presentation to the Society the day before, the colonel had interrupted Hermione's introduction to the art and science of the discipline, speaking on their behalf: A moment please, Miss Herbert. May I explain? My boys have grasped the theory that when a sensitive person takes in hand a forked twig and passes it over concealed water or precious metals, the device will announce the presence of the unseen object of interest by movements of a vibratory nature. He caught himself sounding didactic and added: An old country practice. We're not unfamiliar with it in Suffolk. He looked for confirmation to the boys. They nodded. 'S'right, sir. Old Malkie'e found 'imself a well. Far side o' the six acre. A good 'un. No problems there then, the colonel went on. No. What concerns us, ershall I say?us country folk is the source of this effect. Does, in short, the power stem from the Light or from the Dark, if you take my meaning? Sam and Joel have asked me to warn you that they will have no truck with vibrations of an occult origin. Us country folk? Hermione smiled at this description. She could

have pointed out that the colonel kept rooms in Piccadilly, had his club in St. James's and was connected to the highest in the land but she let it pass, appreciating his delicacy. She'd turned, instead, to his men. Gentlemen, let me reassure you! She spoke earnestly. We think of dowsing as a force for good. Life-enhancing... like bell-ringing or flower-arranging... Her spine, already straight from three decades of corset-wearing, straightened even further and she looked them directly in the eye. In this Society, we stand in the Light. The occult is not even acknowledged by us. Will you accept that we put out no welcome mat for the Devil? That no supernatural presence crosses our threshold? Not unless'n Old Nick were to get your signed permission first, miss, I reckon, Sam drawled. An' always supposin' 'e remembered to wipe 'is boots, miss, Joel added, straight-faced. Good enough, Sam? Good enough. 'ave a go, shall we? They spat on their hands and held out rough palms for the hazel twigs. In spite of their compliance, Hermione wasn't quite sure they'd understood the finer points of the science of dowsing when she'd tried to explain. Indeed, when she'd attempted a demonstration of that pivotal stagethe rising of the rodtheyd gone into helpless convulsions with much flapping of red-spotted handkerchiefs, wiping of eyes and shaking of shoulders. Strong shoulders though. And warm hearts, Hermione guessed. At any rate, their scepticism had an edge of amused indulgence. And it was silent, unlike the all-too audible sniping of the professor. All present and correct, Hermione, my dear, announced the colonel. Dawn coming up like thunder behind Tower Bridge downstream. Time to make a start? Yes? Hermione silenced him by extending a finger dramatically towards the river. A minute or two spent in reconnaissance is never wasted, Charles, she said, reining him in sweetly. As you well know! You can give us all a lesson in preparedness. The peremptory finger redirected itself to the map she held in her other hand. She peered at it and raised her prow of a nose to align with the silhouette of Battersea Power Station just emerging from the mist on the southerly bank opposite. Yes, the tide's out and we have the right place. Last reminder, folks we have one hour and forty minutes of low tide. I'm going to ask the Colonel to plant this red flag at the edge of the foreshore. She held up a triangular piece of red cotton attached to a pea-stick. Keep an eye out at all times. When the water reaches this flag, abandon whatever you're doing and move out fast back to the embankment. Spring tides have swept many an inattentive mudlark away! I suggest we confine our search to the fifty yard stretch from that upturned old boat on the right and the breakwater to the left. We'll put Doris in from this side and Jack in from the other. She smiled encouragement. With our two best bloodhounds straining at the leash, what's the betting that we shall soon be shining our torches onto... Roman denarii... evidence of Caesar's lost river crossing... A piece of statuary wouldn't be bad, would it? The professor deigned to make a contribution. They found the severed marble head of Claudius in the riverperhaps with your additional supernatural skills, Miss Herbert, you can supply the British Museum with the imperial torso to go with it! Orbetter still!a Celtic warrior's shield. Hermione reclaimed the spotlight. It was a few yards from this place... She turned to direct her remarks helpfully towards Sam and Joel, that the most lovely, bejewelled bronze shield was dug from the mud. Why here? Did it indicate the site of some ancient battle? Or a devotional spot where precious objects were broken up and thrown into the water as a gift to the River God? To Father or Mother Tamesis? If you want to know more, you may ask the professor. She turned a beaming smile on him. Nowhow may we best deploy you, Reginald? Why don't you sit yourself down on that boat? Check it for rats and rough sleepers first. From there you can watch our antics with your usual jaundiced eye and stand by to be consulted. Perhaps before we hear the chimes of Chelsea Old Church behind us calling us to coffee, you will be planning a new chapter in the history of Londinium? All were now primed and ready and at the right pitch of eagerness to start. Did you all bring a flask? Excellent! Well, let's get at it, then. You know what to do. * Red flag in hand, Colonel Swinton turned to the river to conceal his smile. In Hermione Herbert, the British Army had missed out on an effective Field Marshal. But she hadn't been lost to them entirely. As a casualty of Cambrai, Swinton had, himself, encountered the full force of Missor, as she was then, MatronHerberts efficiency. He'd noted her leadership qualities from his hospital bed and had always reckoned it was the ministrations of this angular, grey-eyed angel that had saved his life. He'd watched her skilful disposition and motivation of her troops; he'd admired the cheerful way she'd snipped out the professor's sting, rendering him not only harmless but even an asset. All was going according to plan though he would not relax his vigilance. The colonel was accustomed to taking responsibility for events and people, for quietly managing outcomes. So far, so good. And no need at all for crossing fingers. Doris da Silva wasn't experiencing the colonel's sunny confidence. She sidled timidly to Hermione's side and began to whisper. Excuse me, Miss Herbert, but I really don't like this place. It's creepy! She looked over her shoulder with what Hermione considered an irritatingly girlish show of fright. There's someone watching us. I'm not at all certain I can

bear to work here. She took a scented lace handkerchief from her pocket and put it under her nose. And what's that dreadful stench? Just normal river smells, Doris. Oil mostly. With a dash of Lots Road power station effluent thrown in. Possibly a dead dog or two. Detritus of one sort or another. Brace up! You won't notice it after five minutes. She lied cheerily. Four years of military hospitals, blood, gangrenous flesh and mud had never accustomed her to the smell of decay. She woke on some nights with her nostrils still full of the ghastly cocktail that no dash of eau de cologne seemed able to dispel. Now come along, Dorisyou're trembling so much I'm not certain how we'll ever know if it's the hazel twig vibrating or you. Calm down and show me a steady pair of hands. That's better! I'll come with you and get you started. Here's your marker. Hermione scraped a line in the mud with the heel of her boot. I see our handsome young architect has designed his own dowsing implement! Do you see? He's abandoned his parallel rods and brought along that steel contraption he was describing to us. I wonder if he's taken out a patent. Oh, lookhe's off already! Now, here's a challenge, Doris! Let's see if your honest-to-goodness hazel twig can outdo him! The forked steel and the forked hazel moved along methodically at a slow walking pace, advancing towards each other from opposite sides of the tide-smoothed mud flats. The wands were held stretched out in front of the two dowsers in hands that grasped lightly, waiting for the inexplicablebut always shatteringupward tug or the sideways swivel. After an hour, nothing more exciting than a metal-studded dog collar, a two bob piece and an ounce of rusty straight pins from the clothing factory upstream had surfaced. They'd been washed clean of the sticky black mud in a bucket of water thoughtfully hauled up from the river by Joel. Jack Chesterton, whose wand had located the pieces, was encouraged. There, you see! I tuned my gadget to metal-receptivity! And it seems to be working. He looked with sympathy at Doris's hazel twig and shook his head. Not much point using what is essentially a water-divining device on a river bank is there? Sensing ill-feeling in the ranks, the colonel chipped in. I sayare we thinking a change of bowling might be called for? he suggested cheerfully. Beginner's luck and all that? You never know! I'd love to have a go. Take up the twig and give Doris a rest? I shouldn't much care to handle Jack's contraption, however... It could well take my fingers off! In a moment perhaps, colonel. If there's a gold sovereign anywhere about, Doris will home in to it, I'm sure, said Hermione confidently. And it was Doris who made the find. As the sun slanted over the Albert Bridge, they heard a small shriek and turned to see Doris hanging on, but barely hanging on, to a hazel rod that seemed to be leading a demented life of its own. They hurried to her side and Hermione relieved her of the thrashing twig. Jack knelt and marked the spot by scratching a cross over it with the handle of his contraption. I say! Well done! he said. This really looks most interesting. He bent his head and peered sideways at the patch of mud. If you look at it with the light slanting behind it, you could almost imagine there was a ripple... an anomaly of sorts... Sorry! Trick of the light, I'm sure.... It's smooth on top where last night's tide has scoured it, of course, but... Odd that... Shall we? Delighted that their moment had come, Sam and Joel took off their jackets, rolled up their sleeves, cracked their muscles and set to dig. Their shovel-spades, a country design carefully chosen for the work, sliced, scooped, and heaved aside the heavy clods in an ancient rhythm. The lads had clearly come prepared to dig all day and were brought up short, not a little disappointed, when their spades struck something only a foot or so below the surface. With a glad cry, Hermione moved in with her trowel. She was known to be a member of the Archaeological Society and a first cousin to a director of the British Museum. The others shuffled aside, giving her precedenceand room to operate. Seven heads bent over the wet patch as the first gleaming surfaces were revealed, showing white against the black mud. At a signal from Hermione, Joel approached and carefully slaked the area with the contents of a bucket of water he'd thoughtfully hauled up from the river. The murky flow oozed away, revealing a pale arm. After a chorus of startled gasps, a silence fell and no one thought of telling Hermione to stop as the skilful movements of her trowel laid bare the remaining limbs. Two complete arms, two well-muscled legs, a torso lightly draped in a short, classical tunic were released to the sunlight by the action of Hermione's whipping wrist, accompanied by carefully-anticipated libations of river water from Joel. The digging pair worked on in harmony until a head appeared. With a growl of distress, Joel put down his bucket, unable to go on. Tendrils of hair curled about the neck and cheeks of the sleeping features. The shell-white ears were small and perfect. The straight nose was intact. The delicate jaw, as the jaws of the recently dead will do, sagged open at the touch of Hermione's exploratory fingers. Flesh still covered the bones but the image of the gaping skull below broke through, striking a grotesque note. And arousing in the living an ancient terror.Revue de pressePraise for A Spider in the Cup"Intricate and intimate, Cleverlys series melds the whodunit with the political thriller. A Spider in the Cup burnishes her bona fides as she once again pulls off a chilling and charming story with an engaging hero, a dose of leavening wit and a keen sense of

history." Richmond Times-Dispatch "If you, as I, enjoy your mysteries moody, deliberate in the pacing,A Spider in the Cupwill be a read you enjoy... hither you to your nearest library or bookstore and jump on in!... I doubt you'll be disappointed."Nick Schenkel, WBAA"Secret societies, economic and political power plays, and assassins on the loose share space in...[an] involving tale, marked by historical, cultural, and literary references, stiff-upper-lip dialogue, and occasionally surprising wittiness."Booklist "A dangerous game set against a roiling historical backdrop."Bookpage"Cleverly writes extremely well of the era that she is evoking.... [A Spider in the Cup] explores economic and political tensions of the times."Deadly Pleasures"[A] suspenseful and intricate tale of honor and betrayal."Suspense MagazineA Spider in the Cup is an intriguing mix of history and murder mystery.... Another solid entry in this series, one definitely worth seeking out.Mysterious sCleverly's strength is in her ability to pick readers up and place them in a different time and place through vivid descriptions of everything from the scenery to the sounds and aromas of the place.... The author pulls in readers [with] her marvelously colorful characters. ing the EvidencePraise for Barbara Cleverly"Spellbinding."New York Times Book "Cleverly's crisp prose and solid cast of supporting characters ... make the book a delight to read."Denver Post"Stylish and intricate.... Cleverly has perfect pitch for period and place, whether her hero is unearthing evil in India, England or France."Richmond Times-Dispatch"A great blood and guts blockbuster."Guardian"The appearance of a Joe Sandilands book is always welcomed by fans of this intelligent and gripping series." San Jose MercuryFrom the Hardcover edition.