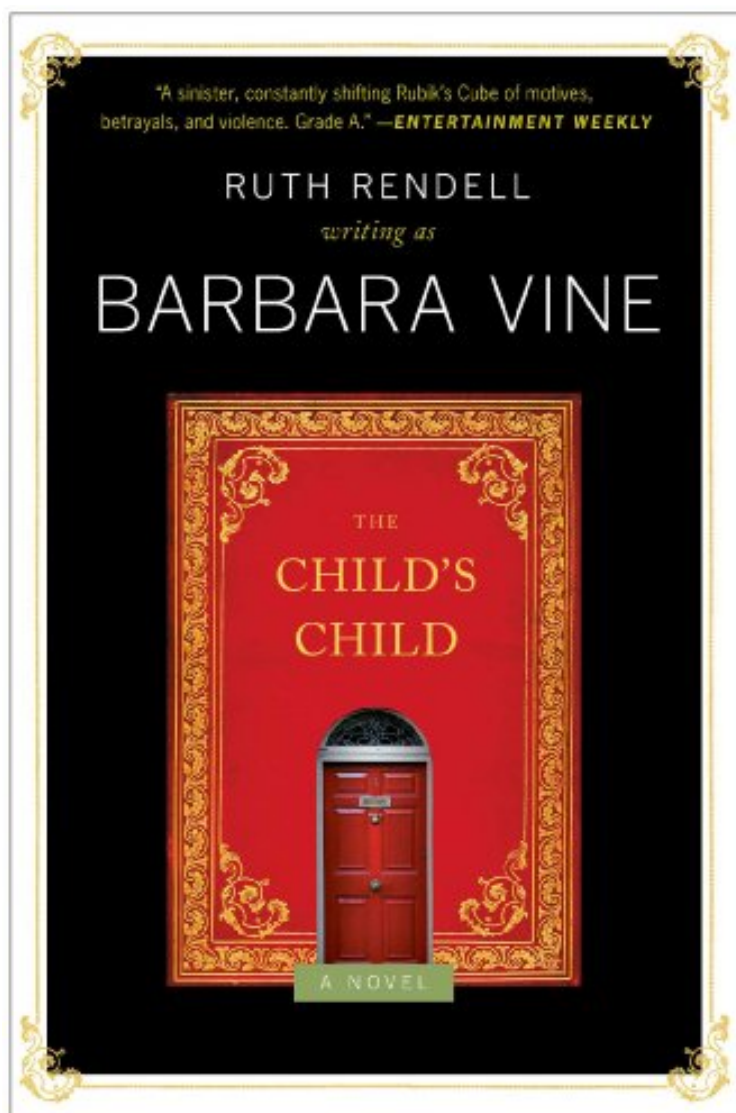


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The Child's Child: A Novel (English Edition)



Par Barbara Vine
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(Download pdf ebook) The Child's Child: A Novel (English Edition)

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurINCLUDES AN EXCERPT OF RENDELLS FINAL NOVEL, DARK CORNERS From three-time Edgar Awardwinning mystery writer Ruth Rendell, writing here under her Barbara Vine pseudonym, an ingenious novel-within-a-novel about brothers and sisters and the violence lurking behind our societys taboos. When their grandmother dies, Grace and Andrew Easton inherit her sprawling, book-filled London home, Dinmont House. Rather than sell it, the adult siblings move in together, splitting the numerous bedrooms and studies. The arrangement is unusual, but ideal for the affectionate pairuntil the day Andrew brings home a new boyfriend. A devilishly handsome novelist, James Derain resembles Cary Grant, but his strident comments about Graces doctoral thesis soon puncture the houses idyllic atmosphere. When he and Andrew witness their friends murder outside a London nightclub, James begins to unravel, and what

happens next will change the lives of everyone in the house. Just as turmoil sets in at Dinmont House, Grace escapes into reading a manuscript a long-lost novel from 1951 called *The Childs Child* never published because of its frank depictions of an unwed mother and a homosexual relationship. The book is the story of two siblings born a few years after World War One. This brother and sister, John and Maud, mirror the present-day Andrew and Grace: a homosexual brother and a sister carrying an illegitimate child. Acts of violence and sex will reverberate through their stories. *The Childs Child* is an enormously clever, brilliantly constructed novel-within-a-novel about family, betrayal, and disgrace. A master of psychological suspense, Ruth Rendell, in her newest work under the pseudonym Barbara Vine, takes us where violence and social taboos collide. She shows how society's treatment of those it once considered undesirable has changed and how sometimes it hasn't.

WHILE TEACHING at a university in West London, I had been working for a PhD on a subject with which no one among my family and friends seemed to have any connection: single parents or, in the phrase Toby Greenwell had used, unmarried mothers. As my supervisor remarked after I chose the subject (and she reluctantly approved), it would be a bit absurd in a climate where nearly half of women remain unwed. So Single Parents. Such women in English literature was the idea, but I was still asking myself and Carla, my supervisor if this should be extended into life. Into reality. Would this make it too much like a social science tract?

When my grandmother died, I had already begun reading every English novel I could find that dealt with illegitimacy or with the mothers of illegitimate children. I was living in a flat in West London that I shared with two other women and a man, a not unusual configuration in overcrowded old London. The day before her death I had visited her in hospital, where she had been for just a week. A stroke had incapacitated her without disfiguring her, but she could no longer speak. I held her hand and talked to her. She had been a great reader and knew all those works of Hardy and Elizabeth Gaskell and a host of others that I was reading for my thesis. But when I named them, she gave no sign of having heard, though just before I left I felt a light pressure on her hand from mine. The phone call from my mother came next morning. My grandmother, her mother, had died that night. She was eighty-five. A good age, as they say. No one ever says a bad age, but I suppose that would be mine, twenty-eight, or my brothers, thirty. We were just the age when people tire of sharing flats with two or three others or crippling themselves with a huge mortgage for two or three rooms, but at the time of our grandmothers death we could see no end to it.

We mourned her. We went to the funeral, both of us in black, I because it is chic, Andrew because as a fashion-conscious gay man, he possessed a slender black suit. My mother wore a grey dress and cried all the time, unusual for her in any circumstances. Next day we heard from her solicitors that my grandmother had left her house in Hampstead jointly to my brother and me. I have been honest about why we wore black, so I may as well keep up the honesty and say we expected something. Verity Stewart we had always called her. Verity had a son and a daughter to leave her considerable fortune to (and she did leave it to them), but as we were the only grandchildren, I thought we might get a bit each, enough, say, to help with getting on what's called the property ladder. Instead we got the property itself, a fine big house near the Heath. Fay, my mother, and her partner, Malcolm, expected us to do the sensible thing, the practical thing: sell it and divide the proceeds. Instead, we did the unwise thing and kept it. Surely a house with four living-rooms, six bedrooms, and three bathrooms (and about three thousand books) was big enough for a man and a woman who had always got on with each other. We failed to take into account that there was only one kitchen, one staircase, and one front door, congratulating each other that neither of us played loud music or was likely to have a party to which the other was not invited. There was one thing we never thought about, though why not I don't know. We were both young, and if we had none now, each had had several partners, and one of us, perhaps both, was likely to have a lover living in. In Andrews case that happened quite soon after we moved in. James Derain is a novelist, his books published by Andrews firm, as were Martin Greenwells, which is how Andrew knew about Martins literary output. They met at a publishers party. The occasion can't have been the anniversary of Oscar Wildes birth or, come to that, his death, it was too late for that, but it was something to do with Wilde, a hero of James Derains. At that party James told Andrew about Martin Greenwell and a book he'd written but never published that was based on the life of James's uncle or great-uncle. That party was the start of their friendship. It led to a relationship and soon, a falling in love, which they celebrated with a trip to Paris for the weekend. They went to look at Wildes newly refurbished tomb. It had been restored to Epstein's original pristine whiteness before its surface was damaged by the lipstick of all the women who came to kiss it over the years. Who would have supposed lipstick could scar marble? Andrew was happy about the lip imprints, saying it almost made up for all the women who spat at Wilde in the street after his downfall. Andrew and I had made a rough division of the house, the rooms on the left-

hand side, upstairs and down, mine, and those on the right, his. That was all very well, I got one bathroom, he got two; I got three bedrooms and Verity's study, he got my grandfather Christopher's study and three bedrooms. But we had to share the kitchen, which was enormous, and on my side of the house. How many places have you lived in, Andrew asked, where you've had to share the kitchen with two or three other people? I thought about it, tried counting. Four. It seems different in a place this size. Let's give it a go. If we can't stand it, we'll have another kitchen put in. It didn't much concern me. The house was marvellous to live in in those first weeks and like my grandmother I spent most of my time blissfully reading. It was spring and warm and I sat reading out in the garden, comfortable in a cane chair with a stack of books on the table in front of me, all of them fictional accounts of unwanted pregnancies and illegitimate births. Sometimes I raised my eyes to look upon verdure, as Jane Austen has it. Only one such birth in her works, only one natural child, and that one Harriet Smith, for whom Emma attempts the hopeless task of encouraging a clergyman, and therefore a gentleman, to marry her. Harriet may be the daughter of a gentleman, but somehow her illegitimacy negates that and makes her fit to marry a farmer but no one higher up the social scale. One book I didn't look at was *The Child's Child*, and I wasn't conscience-stricken, not then, though I did mention it to Andrew, who came out into the garden before going to work. He hadn't exactly forgotten about the book but seemed to drag it up out of the depths of memory before light dawned. It's been lying in a cupboard for half a century, he said. No harm done if it hangs about for a bit longer. Something happened that afternoon which was to have great importance in my life, as much as it has had in Andrew's. I met James Derain. *Revue de presse* "A novel by Ruth Rendell (or her literary alter ego, Barbara Vine) is like none other.... The results are seldom what we expect them to be, and that is part of this author's special genius." (Robert Croan Pittsburgh Post-Gazette) "Vine vividly conjures the high price paid by social outcasts, even in our own supposedly enlightened age." (People magazine (3 1/2 stars)) "Just a cracking good read." (Charlotte Observer) "Ruth Rendell, whether writing her mystery novels or molting into Barbara Vine and burrowing deep into *ralit intrieure*, has always written thoughtful novels on the consequences of our choice." (The Daily Beast) "In the hands of Vine, otherwise known as Ruth Rendell, the book-within-a-book strategy evolves into something infinitely more intricate a sinister, constantly shifting Rubik's Cube of motives, betrayals, and violence. Grade A" (Tina Jordan Entertainment Weekly) "A study of taboos of the past and the growing tolerance of the present -- except when open-mindedness is absent -- *The Child's Child* encompasses darkness and light -- and simultaneously offers diverting fiction with thought-provoking but never preachy purpose." (Richmond Times Dispatch) "Subtle" is an inadequate word for Ruth Rendell. So are 'crafty,' 'cunning,' 'clever' and 'sly.' Although these are accurate descriptions of her confounding technique, a better word would be 'surprising.' Whatever it is you might think Rendell is up to, especially when she's writing as Barbara Vine -- that's not it." (Marilyn Stasio New York Times Book) "Not even fans who expect more felonies will be able to put this one down." (Kirkus)