

"This book has a really good storyline,
but I feel very sorry for Baoyu." Fred, 10



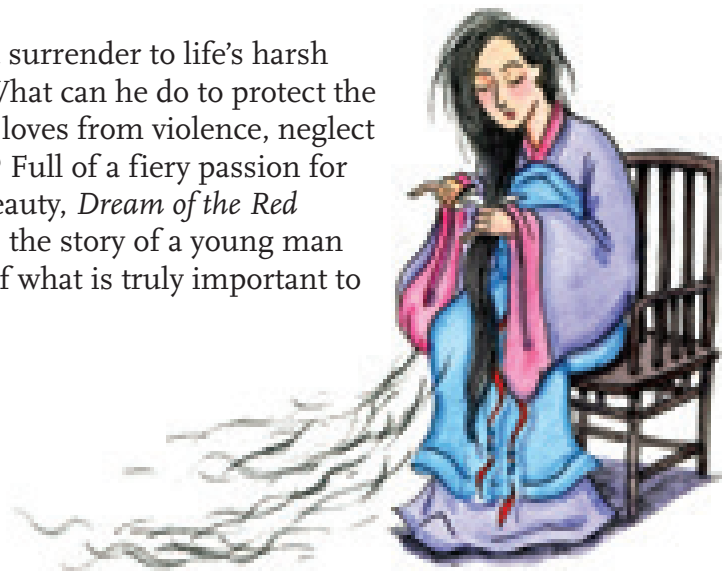
DREAM OF THE RED CHAMBER

CAO XUEQIN

Baoyu hopes to marry his childhood sweetheart, Daiyu. Daiyu is beautiful and talented, very sensitive, and physically fragile. It is a huge shock to him when he realises too late that his family has planned that he should marry Baochai instead, a lovely girl but not his true love.

Baoyu's family is fast losing its fame and fortune. One by one, Baoyu's female friends, relatives and servants are being married off or sold, and he realises just how much he values the qualities of the women in his life.

Will Baoyu surrender to life's harsh realities? What can he do to protect the women he loves from violence, neglect and abuse? Full of a fiery passion for love and beauty, *Dream of the Red Chamber* is the story of a young man in search of what is truly important to him.



ISBN 978-1-906230-36-4



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Published by Real Reads Ltd
Newbury, Berkshire, UK
www.realreads.co.uk

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First published in 2011
Reprinted 2013, 2014 (twice)

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ISBN 978-1-906230-36-4

Printed in China by Wai Man Book Binding (China) Ltd
Designed by Lucy Guenot
Typeset by Bookcraft Ltd, Stroud, Gloucestershire

THE CHARACTERS



Baoyu

Baoyu enjoys the company of girls, and is determined to do all he can to protect them. Can he successfully marry the girl he truly loves?

Daiyu and Baochai

Daiyu is talented and sensitive, while Baochai is capable and considerate. Which of them will win Baoyu's heart?



Yuanchun, Yinchun, Tanchun and Xichun

Each of Baoyu's four sisters has her own story to tell, but what part will they play in Baoyu's life?

Xifeng and Xiangyun

Xifeng is Baoyu's cousin-in-law, in charge of running the household. Xiangyun is Baoyu's second cousin. What can they teach Baoyu?



Miaoyu

Miaoyu is a young and beautiful nun living in a temple sponsored by Baoyu's family. Can she avoid the temptations of worldly affairs?

Qingwen and Xiren

Qingwen and Xiren are Baoyu's maids, taking care of everything in his life and worshipping him as a god. Are they secretly in love with him?



Baoyu's father and mother

Baoyu's father is a scholar and disciplinarian, while his mother is deeply religious. What are their plans for Baoyu's life and loves?





DREAM OF THE RED CHAMBER

Many, many years ago the sky cracked open, water leaked from the heavenly river, and the whole world was flooded. Seeing the people suffering from their loss of homes and crops, the goddess Nuwa decided to mend the sky. She transformed a massive mountain into 36,501 precious stones, and all but one of these she used to mend the hole.

The stone that was left over felt useless and sad.

Near where the stone lay was a lovely red flower growing by the side of a river. The precious stone was fascinated by the delicacy and fragrance of the flower, and devoted himself to caring for her day and night.

Grateful for the stone's kindness, the flower made a vow to herself. 'He waters me and helps me grow, but I have nothing to give him in return. Maybe one day he will be

transformed into a man, then I can become human too and follow him. I will repay him with all the tears of gratitude that a girl can weep in a lifetime.'



Many years later, a young girl called Daiyu sat alone in her room and wept. She was sad because her father had become very poor since his wife died, so he had sent her, his only daughter, to live with his mother-in-law, Daiyu's grandmother.

Beautiful and delicate as a flower, Daiyu was often sick. Ever since she was little she had spent a lot of time lying on her bed, feeling useless and sad. Although she wasn't physically strong, she was very creative. She wrote poems and studied music and literature.

Daiyu had just arrived at her new home and hadn't yet met her grandmother. She was worried that her grandmother's large and rich family would look down on her, and that she

wouldn't be loved. Would they see beyond her frailty and appreciate her talents?

She was startled by a knock at the door, and it opened to reveal a young man standing in the corridor. He was a little older than her, and looked strangely familiar. It was as if she had known him for a long time, though she was sure they had never met before. He was dressed casually, but every bit of his clothing was of the best quality. His radiant self-confidence was obviously the result of a comfortable life, but he was neither arrogant nor rude.

'Hello, I am Baoyu, your cousin,' he smiled, like an old friend. 'Would you like to come to dinner? Grandma would like everyone to meet you!'



Dining with Baoyu's family was an overwhelming experience for Daiyu. The room was large and lavishly decorated, brimming

- Baoyu's surname is Jia, which is pronounced the same as the Chinese character 'jia', meaning false, fake or fictitious. This is an important clue provided by Cao for us to understand the portrayal of Baoyu's family as both a realistic description and as a fictional (or 'dream') version of Cao's own family. Cao writes in the first chapter of the full version that his book is intended to be a memorial to the women he knew in his youth, including friends, relatives and maids.

- The book provides a comprehensive record of two branches of Baoyu's family, who live in two large adjacent family compounds in the capital. Numerous pages are devoted to describing the appearances and mannerisms of the characters, as well as their surroundings, daily gatherings, and all kinds of literary activities. Depictions of other aspects of traditional Chinese culture are provided, including medicine, cooking, proverbs, mythology, music, painting, landscaping, matchmaking and courtship.

- There are two 'standard' versions of the book, the original 80 chapters written by Cao and an extended version of 120 chapters, with 40 additional chapters written later by Gao E and Cheng Weiyan. Many other Chinese authors have written their own alternative endings. Cao's original book includes many fine and grand sections written as poetry.

- The full version of the book contains thirty major characters and more than four hundred minor ones, most of whom are female. While women are often portrayed to be more capable and loveable than their male counterparts, there are many more tales of power struggles, hatred, jealousy, conspiracy and even cold-blooded murder than those that are told in this shortened version.

Back in time

Cao Xueqin wrote *Dream of the Red Chamber* in the mid-eighteenth century. Commonly acknowledged as the highest peak of classic Chinese writing, the book is remarkable both