

# Pre U: Chronicle of a Blood Merchant: Themes and Key Quotes

## Themes

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|---------------------------------|---|
| Blood                           |   |
| Family relationships and duties | Contrast of what we say / what we do              |
| Father-son relationships        | Traditional v changing society/ Communist society |
| Public v Private                | Importance of "image" and "face"                  |

## Key Quotes: General (i.e. remember these if nothing else!)

p.125 "All I have left is my blood."

p.250-51 "You were *raised* on his blood."

p.88 XS: "She's like a broken pot that's not afraid of shattering, and I'm a dead pig who longer minds that the water's coming to a boil."

p.179 "If you hate her, you have to hate me too, because she and I are birds of a feather."

p.131 "If you were my own son, you would be my favourite son of all."

p.161 (XS) "Yile... Just shout a few times, and when you're done, that bastard HX will never be your real dad again. From now on I'm your real dad."

p. 243 "Just now I was crying because I thought Yile was dead. Now I'm crying because I know he's alive."

p.35 "*these people keep talking and talking, and once they get started, it never stops.*" (XS)

p.67 "her neighbours picked up and left, like theatre patrons after a show."

p.170 "What are you kids afraid of? You kids were born into the new society, and you've grown up under the red flag. You're innocent."

p.120 "It doesn't matter who eats it in the end. It'll turn into shit no matter who eats it. Let the kids shit a little extra."

p.118 "What they say is true: You have to have a mountain before you can gather some wood.' That means we have to get through these tough times now, so we'll live to see better days."

## Blood

p.6 (XS and grandpa) "Around here the men who haven't sold blood can't get themselves a wife."

"What kind of rule is that?"

"I don't know if there's a rule or not, but everyone who's strong enough goes to sell his blood."

p.147 "Most people in town think selling blood is something to be ashamed of, but in my grandpa's village they believe that the men who sell blood are stronger than the ones who don't. Now look at me. I've sold blood. Am I the weaker for it? No, of course not. And why not? Because Old Man Heaven's rewarding me. I'd continue to survive even if I sold blood every day. Blood for me is like a money tree."

p.230 "Your blood is like water in a well. It'll never run dry, no matter how much you draw."

p.237 "When I was young I was just the same, I thought selling blood was like shaking money from a tree... but that's not how it is at all... if you keep on selling your blood, you'll ruin your health."

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p.15 (AF to XS) "You've just sold your energy. That's why you feel weak. What we sold just now is energy, understand? City people call it blood, but we country folk call it energy. There are two kind of energy. One kind comes from muscle. But the kind that comes from the blood is worth a lot of money."

p.16 (XS) "I've only just learned what it means to sell the kind of energy that comes from blood... you can't spend that kind of money on just anything. I have to find something important to spend it on."

p.184 (CS) "You know, energy isn't like money. The more you use money, the less you have. But the more energy you put out, the more you'll have."

p.221 "If you sell just once or twice, you feel weak. If you keep on selling blood, all the warmth in your body escapes, and you just can't get warm."

p.221-2 "I already sold all my strength. All I had left was my warmth... now even the little warmth that I had left is gone."

p.247 "There's more dead blood than living in your veins... the only person who might be able to use your blood is the lacquer man... because just before they lacquer a piece of furniture, they prime the wood with a coat of pig's blood."

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p.125 "All I have left is my blood."

p.127 "*it's not like it's mere sweat. It's blood after all.*"

p.245 "Today he would sell blood once again, but this time he was going to sell blood just for himself."

p.247 "he had overcome every family calamity by selling his blood. Now that no one wanted his blood, what would be do if some calamity were once again to befall his family?"

p.250-51 (whole of XY's speech) "You were *raised* on his blood."

### **Quotes: XS & XY relationship**

p.25 (XS to XY's father) "look at it this way- if I marry Xu Yulan, it would be just the same as if I agreed to take on your family name instead of making Xu Yulan take mine."

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p.83 "She looked everything over, then went to look for the man with whom she'd worked together for those ten years to make a home. Xu Sanguan was sitting by the table inside the house."

p.106 "I've suffered and I've struggled for ten years now, and I've given you three sons. When did you ever sell blood for my sake? I never knew until now what a heartless son of a bitch you are. I can't believe you sold your blood just to give that fat bitch some soup bones."

"Since when have you given me three sons? Is Yile my son? And when I sold blood to pay Blacksmith Fang, who do you think I was doing it for?"

p.88 XS: "She's like a broken pot that's not afraid of shattering, and I'm a dead pig who longer minds that the water's coming to a boil."

p.169 "XS, as long as you're good to me, I'm not afraid of anything in the world."

p.179 "If you hate her, you have to hate me too, because she and I are birds of a feather."

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p.37 "*this woman... is a stupid fool. You're not supposed to air your dirty laundry, and here she is, sitting on the doorstep crying for the whole world to hear...*" (XS about XY)

p.85 “she weepingly made her way to the door... Xu Sanguan growled from behind her, “Come back here, you bitch. You’re going to the doorstep again. You’re gonna start screaming and yelling and making a scene again.”

p.91 XS to LFF about XY “if three days go by and she hasn’t gone out to the doorstep to cry and carry on, she starts to feel uncomfortable, just like she hadn’t taken a shit for a week.”

p.108 “As she shouted, she edged her way toward her place on the doorstep. Xu Sanguan rushed to block her way, saying as he held her fast, “okay, okay, okay then, I’ll never bring it up again, all right?”

### **Quotes: XY (about her)**

p.21 (of XY) “another girl who was very pretty... she changed her outfit three times a day, because the fact was that she only had three outfits into which to change... everyone thought of her as the girl with the most extensive and fashionable wardrobe in town. Her strolls through the streets made everyone feel as if her pretty face were as familiar as the stream that flowed across town. And almost everyone in town knew her as the Fried Dough Queen.”

p.86-7 (HX’s wife to XY) “And here’s a woman who’s so shameless that she’ll even boast about stealing someone else’s seed!” ... “If I’ve got a department store in my pants, you have a public toilet!”

(BF to XS) “There’s a big crowd there, thirty people at the very least, and they’re all laughing at your woman... everyone’s laughing and enjoying the show”

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p.166 (of XY’s hair) “it looked like a rice paddy midway through the harvest season.”

p.168 “She’s like MSG. You can add MSG to any kind of dish, and it makes everything a little tastier.”

p.169 “When I stand on the street, I’m just like a telephone pole for all anyone cares.”

p.171 “XY’s clothes were in tatters, and her back was curved like the question marks that filled the big-character posters.”

### **Quotes: XS and Yile relationship**

p.39 “I was happy for no reason. I’ve wasted nine years raising that boy, and it turns out that after all he really belongs to someone else.” (XS)

p.51 “Sometimes Xu Sanguan would sit back in the rattan chair thinking about Yile and start to cry.”

p.130 (XS to Yile) “The money I made today came from selling blood... I put my life at risk to get this money. So if I let you eat noodles too, I’d be doing that bastard He Xiaoyong a favour” ... Yile nodded as if he had understood what Xu Sanguan had said.”

p.131 “If you were my own son, you would be my favourite son of all.” With these words, Yile beamed.

p.136 “he replied to Xu Sanguan’s snores with a declaration: *If I’m not really your son, then you’re not my dad either.*”

p.142 (XS) “If a kid really isn’t your own flesh and blood, there’s no way he’ll ever become your own, no matter how well you raise him.”

p.144 “it would be better if you never came back.”

p.145 “Timidly he asked Xu Sanguan, “Dad, are you taking me to eat noodles?” Xu Sanguan stopped cursing Yile. His voice suddenly grew gentle. “That’s right.”

p.161 (XS) “Yile, all you have to do is shout a few times. Once you shout, I’m going to be your real dad. Just shout a few times, and when you’re done, that bastard HX will never be your real dad again. From now on I’m your real dad.” When Yile heard what XS said, he lifted his face to the sky and shouted...”

p.162 "Standing by the doorway of HX's house, he lifted the blade to his face and sliced his own cheek. Then he stuck out his hand, rubbed it with the blood running from the gash, and announced to the crowd, "You saw what I just did, right? I cut my own face with this knife. From now on... if any of you ever dares to say that Yile is not my real son, I'll do the same to you."

p.178 (Yile) "I hate He Xiaoyong the very most. And I hate her second most... the person I love most, of course, is our Great Leader Chairman Mao. And the one I love second most"- Yile gazed and Xu Sanguan- "is you."

p.179 "Xu Sanguan stared back at Yile without so much as blinking. After what seemed like a long while, tears spilled from his eyes, and he said to Xu Yulan, "Who says Yile isn't my son?"

p.187 (XS to Yile) "Take all of it. I earned it selling blood just now. Take all of it."

p.222 "the old man said, "First you sold your strength. Now you've sold your warmth. What's left but your life?" "If that's what it takes, I'm willing" XS explained, "my son has hepatitis."

p. 243 "Just now I was crying because I thought Yile was dead. Now I'm crying because I know he's alive."

### **Quotes: XS and Erle/Sanle/ three sons relationship**

XS to Erle and Sanle "You two sons are all I have left now... when you two grow up, I want you to take revenge on He Xiaoyong for me... when you're all grown up, I want you to rape He Xiaoyong's daughters for me."

p.117 "All your mom and I can do is protect you little ones and make sure you get through this alive."

p.120 "It doesn't matter who eats it in the end. It'll turn into shit no matter who eats it. Let the kids shit a little extra."

p.120 "Since it's my birthday, I'm going to do something special for you kids. I'm going to cook a meal for each of you with my mouth, and you can eat it with your ears."

p.170 "What are you kids afraid of? You kids were born into the new society, and you've grown up under the red flag. You're innocent."

p.176 (XS to XY) "Don't look at them as your sons. Just try to see them as the revolutionary masses who are denouncing you."

### **Quotes: Neighbours' involvement and "face"**

P4 "Around here, that's not how you play by the rules" (grandpa to XS)

p.35 "*these people keep talking and talking, and once they get started, it never stops.*" (XS)

p.37 "*this woman... is a stupid fool. You're not supposed to air your dirty laundry, and here she is, sitting on the doorstep crying for the whole world to hear...*" (XS about XY)

p.63 "When she saw that a group of spectators had begun to gather around and watch, He Xiaoyong's woman chimed in, "Take a good look. She's a shameless bitch, this one. Trying to steal my man in broad daylight."

p.67 "By now Xu Yulan's litany had lost much of its interest for the spectators. She went through the changes several more times, but her voice had begun to weaken with fatigue and, lacking its original bit and elasticity, became dry and gravelly."

p.67 "her neighbours picked up and left, like theatre patrons after a show."

p.85 "she weepingly made her way to the door... Xu Sanguan growled from behind her, "Come back here, you bitch. You're going to the doorstep again. You're gonna start screaming and yelling and making a scene again."

p.199 "it's better to harm yourself than to hurt a friend's feelings."

## **Quotes: imagery (often using rural images)**

p.4 "The sky was a wash of crimson that seemed to emanate from the muddy paddies in the distance, shining across the fields, transforming the crops into a vast tomato-red expanse"

p.14 "A mass of weeds grew from in between the roof tiles, cascading over the eaves like eyebrows"

p.18 "I know Golden's. The flesh smells really good, but they aren't actually all that sweet... I've had Old Lady melons too. They're not too sweet, and they're not very crisp either. By the time you open one up and take a bit, it's all mushy." (XS)

p.54 "I heard his skull is cracked open, like a watermelon that's been dropped on the ground and broken into bits and pieces...The nurse at the hospital said his brains looked like stewed tofu, and steam was coming out from between the cracks in his head... It's not as easy as pulling up a patch of weeds, with the skull all broken to pieces like that."

p. 93 (LFF) "her body looked like the ruins of a collapsed house"

p.94 "I never thought your legs would be so soft and white. They're even whiter than fatty pork."

p.131 "The mass of flesh inside the sweet potato was orange, like sunlight."

p.152 "her eyes were so swollen from crying they looked like lightbulbs... She's as skinny as a pole. You could use her to hang your laundry out to dry."

p.166 (of her XY's hair) "it looked like a rice paddy midway through the harvest season."

p.168 "She's like MSG. You can add MSG to any kind of dish, and it makes everything a little tastier."

p.183 "The walls were nearly a hundred years old, and green weeds grew from the crack between the bricks, fluttering in the breeze."

p.212 "His time-bronzed skin flushed a deep red in the cold wind."

p.215 "The cold winter wind chilled his face, slipped down his collar, and down his neck... wrapped in the cotton-padded jacket, he felt his body suddenly go cold. He knew it was because he had sold his blood, because he had sold all the warmth in his body."

p. 215 "He looked as if he were pulling his body down the road with his collar."

p.248 (whole description of XS crying) "like rain streaming across a windowpane, or the hairline cracks crawling up the sides of a fragile antique bowl..."

## **Quotes: Social changes v traditional life**

p.105 (XY to XS) "It's all over for us. With other folks the old saying holds true: 'As goes the nation, so goes the family.' But it's different for us. The country's fine, but we're ruined..."

p.111 "The state is just like the landlords before. Of course, you can't say that the state is a landlord. You should call it the People's Commune instead."

p.111 "...steel is like grain, grain for the state. That's why smelting steel is just like planting rice in the paddies."

p.111 "I saw lots of people in red armbands going from house to house confiscating people's woks, and their bowls, and their rice, and all their oil, salt, soy and vinegar."

p.111 "All the singing clowns from the Yue Opera Company are up onstage rinsing vegetables."

p.112 "They shut down all the canteens in town. Looks like the good times are over."

P115 "Hard times are going to come. No one can go through their life without running into hard times once or twice, You just can't escape."

p.115 "The rice shop was open on occasion and sometimes closed. Every time it reopened, the price of rice would double or even triple.... The silkworm factory stopped work, because there were no more silkworms..."

p.116 "I thought that we'd be eating at those big canteens for the rest of our lives. I never thought that after only a year we'd be responsible for ourselves again. And it costs money to build another stove. It costs money to buy a new wok, new bowls, new spoons and new plates again. It costs money to replace the oil, salt, soy and vinegar."

p.118 "What they say is true: You have to have a mountain before you can gather some wood.' That means we have to get through these tough times now, so we'll live to see better days."

p.120 "When you've finished eating, each of you has to wish me a happy birthday with a kowtow."

p. 149 "When people's souls take flight, they almost always exit through the chimney."

p.163 "Everyone's in the streets... there are people with red armbands, and people marching, and people writing political slogans, and people pasting up big character posters... they paste them up... thicker and thicker, until it looks like the walls are wearing cotton-padded jackets."

p.163-4 " Do you know why the factories have shut down, and the stores are closed, and why there are no classes at the schools,,, why some people have hung themselves from trees, and some people are locked up in 'cow sheds' and beaten half to death?... Do you know why as soon as Chairman Mao says something, people take what he said and make it into a song, and paint his words on the walls, and on the pavement, and on cars and ferry boats, on their sheets and pillowcases, on cups and cooking pans and even on bathroom walls and the sides of spittoons?... Because the Cultural Revolution has arrived."

p.164 "XS said, "I'm only just now starting to understand what this Cultural Revolution is all about. It's actually just a time for settling old scores. If someone offended you in the past, now's the time to write a big-character poster about him and paste it on a wall on the street... you can say whatever you like. There aren't any courts or police these days anyway. There's just a lot of different crimes. You can pick any one you like, put it up on a poster, and sit back and watch everybody hound whomever you've accused to death."

p.164 (Sanle) "Someone put up a poster on the wall of the rice store saying that Mom is a 'broken shoe.'"

p.166 "They said they had spent three days looking for a prostitute, and since there was only half an hour left until the meeting was to begin, they had finally found one."

p.170 "What are you kids afraid of? You kids were born into the new society, and you've grown up under the red flag. You're innocent."

p.176 (XS to XY) "Don't look at them as your sons. Just try to see them as the revolutionary masses who are denouncing you."

p.180 "Later Chairman Mao began to talk. Chairman Mao was saying things nearly every day..."

p.180 " They marched under a red flag, singing anthems, happily climbing onto buses, happily boarding ferries, waving good-bye to the tears of their mothers and fathers on their way to their new homes in the countryside."

p.181 "One day Chairman Mao sat on the sofa in his study and said, "You may keep one child by your side.'"