

NORMAN LOCK

Alphabet of Chrysanthemums

Had he not looked up from the chapter of Confucius's *Analects* known as "The Master Shunned" to see a young woman smiling, Li Wan would not have put away the book and, leaving the library and its tides of shadow, seen everywhere in Ju-Xian Town the chrysanthemums heaped up in the flower-sellers' stalls as people might be who throng the streets in the capital of the sun to view the emperor and his retinue—or, say, as the sea is at the molten hour when the waves lie down in sheets of gold. His mind forgot in an instant (like a cup drained of its measure) Confucius and even the compilation of Tang poetry on which he had for so long labored below the Fragrant Mountain—remembering only the character for chrysanthemum, as a man cast into darkness will that moment when his eyes were dazzled.