

Snow Flower and the Secret Fan by Lisa See



It is 1829, and Lily is six when her mother invites the local diviner round to set a date for her footbinding. The process will take months and involve folding her toes until they touch her heels, making her walk on the wrapped stumps until the bones break, changing her bandages, and binding ever more tightly until her feet shrink to the desired seven centimetres. Lily's reward for her suffering will be marriage into a wealthy family, but in the meantime there is an even more important match to be made - to her laotong, Snow Flower. The two girls are "old sames", or official best friends for life, they write to each other in nu shu - a type of Chinese used as a secret women's script - and their relationship will become closer than their marriages. Lisa See, a third-generation Chinese American, tells Lily's 80-year life story with relish.