



THE WAY OF THE WIND.

AN EASTERN LOVE STORY.

BY LAURENCE HOUSMAN.

WHERE the world breaks up into islands among the blue waves of an Eastern sea, in a little house by the seashore lived Katipah, the only child of poor parents. When they died, she was left quite alone, and so poor that no man thought of marrying her, and so delicate and small that as a drudge she was worth nothing to anybody.

Once a month she would go and stand at the shrine gate and say to the people as they went in to pray: "Will nobody love me?" And the people would turn their heads away quickly and make haste to get past, and in their hearts would wonder to themselves: "Foolish little Katipah! Does she think that we can spare time to love anyone so poor and unprofitable as she?"

On the other days Katipah would go down to the beach, where everybody went who had a kite to fly—for all the men in that country flew kites, and all the children—and there she would fly a kite of her own up into the blue air; and watching the wind carrying it farther and farther away, would grow quite happy thinking how a day might come at last when she would really be loved, though her queer little outside made her seem so poor and unprofitable.

Katipah's kite was green, with blue eyes in its square face; and in one corner it had a very small, pursed-up, red mouth holding a spray of peach-blossoms. She had made it herself, and to her it meant the green world with the blue sky over it when the spring begins to be sweet; and there, tucked away in one corner of it, her own little

warm mouth, waiting and wishing to be kissed; and out of all that wishing and waiting the blossom of hope was springing, never to be let go.

All around her were hundreds of others flying their kites, and all had some wish or prayer to Fortune. But Katipah's wish and prayer were only that she might be loved.

The silver sandhills lay in loops and chains round the curve of the blue sky, and all along them flocks of gaily coloured kites hovered and fluttered and sprang. And as they went up into the clear air, the wind sighing in the strings was like the crying of a child. "Wahoo! wahoo!" Every kite seemed to cradle the wailings of an invisible infant as it went mounting, spreading its thin apron to the wind.

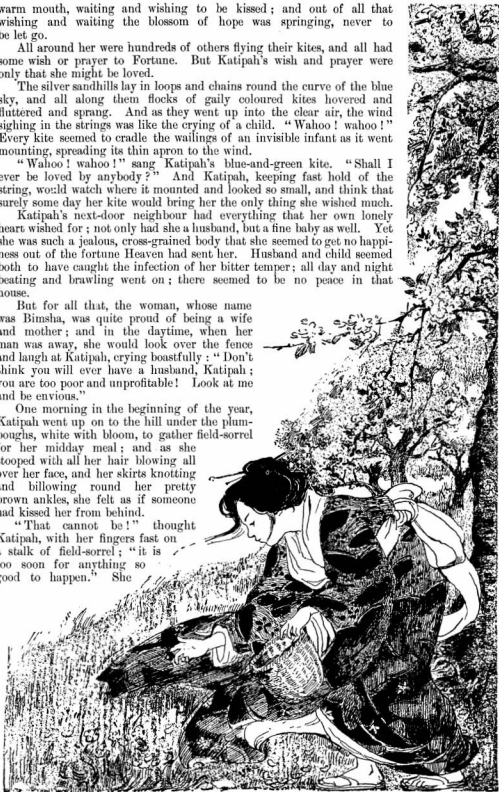
"Wahoo! wahoo!" sang Katipah's blue-and-green kite. "Shall I ever be loved by anybody?" And Katipah, keeping fast hold of the string, would watch where it mounted and looked so small, and think that surely some day her kite would bring her the only thing she wished much.

Katipah's next-door neighbour had everything that her own lonely heart wished for; not only had she a husband, but a fine baby as well. Yet she was such a jealous, cross-grained body that she seemed to get no happiness out of the fortune Heaven had sent her. Husband and child seemed both to have caught the infection of her bitter temper; all day and night beating and brawling went on; there seemed to be no peace in that house.

But for all that, the woman, whose name was Bimsha, was quite proud of being a wife and mother; and in the daytime, when her man was away, she would look over the fence and laugh at Katipah, crying boastfully: "Don't think you will ever have a husband, Katipah; you are too poor and unprofitable! Look at me and be envious."

One morning in the beginning of the year, Katipah went up on to the hill under the plum-boughs, white with bloom, to gather field-sorrel for her midday meal; and as she stooped with all her hair blowing all over her face, and her skirts knotting and billowing round her pretty brown ankles, she felt as if someone had kissed her from behind.

"That cannot be!" thought Katipah, with her fingers fast on a stalk of field-sorrel; "it is too soon for anything so good to happen." She





picked the sorrel composedly and put it into her basket. But now, not to be mistaken, arms came round her and she *was* kissed.

She stood up and put her hands into her breast, quite afraid lest her little heart, which had grown so light, should be caught by a puff of wind and blown right away out of her bosom, and over the hill and into the sea, and be drowned.

But her eyes could not leave her in doubt: there by her side stood a handsome youth with quick-fluttering, posy-embroidered raiment. His long, dark hair was full of white plum-blossoms, as though he had just pushed his head through the branches above. His hands also were loaded with the same, and they kept sifting out of his long sleeves whenever he moved his arms. Under the hem of his robe, Katipah could see that he had herons' wings bound about his ankles.

"He must be very good," thought Katipah, "to be so beautiful! And indeed he must be very good to kiss poor me!"

"Katipah," said the wonderful youth, "though you do not know me, I know you. It is I who so often helped you to fly your green kite by the shore. I have been up there, and have looked into its blue eyes, and kissed its little red mouth which held the peach-blossom. It was I who made songs in its strings for your heart to hear.

"I am the West Wind, Katipah, the wind that brings fine weather. 'Gammon-gata' you must call me, who bring back the wings that fly, till the winter be over. And now I have come down to earth to fetch you away and make you my wife. Will you come, Katipah?"

"I will come, Gammon-gata!" said Katipah, and she crouched and kissed his feet; then she stood up and let herself go into his arms.

"To come with me," said the Wind, "you need to have much courage; if you have not, you must wait till you learn it. But none the less for that shall you be the wife of Gammon-gata, for I am the gate of the wild geese, as my name says, and my heart is foolish with love of you."

Gammon-gata took her up in his arms and swung



with her this way and that, tossing his way through blossom and leaf; and the sunlight became an eddy of gold round her, and wind and laughter seemed to become part of her being, so that she was all giddy and dazed and glad when at last Gammon-gata set her down.

"Stand still, my little one," he cried; "stand still while I put on your bridal veil for you; then your blushes shall look like a rose-bush in snow!"

So Katipah stood with her feet in the green sorrel, and Gammon-gata went up into the plum-tree and shook, till from head to foot she was showered with white blossoms.

"How beautiful you seem to me!" cried Gammon-gata when he returned to the ground.

Then he lifted her once more and set her in the top of a plum-tree, and going below, cried up to her: "Leap, little wife of the Wind, and let me see that you have courage!"

Katipah looked long over the deep space that lay between them, and trembled. Then she fixed her eyes fast upon those of her lover and leaped, for in the laughter of his eyes she had lost all her fear.

He caught her half-way in the air as she fell. "You are not really brave," said he; "if I had shut my eyes, you would not have jumped."

"If you had shut your eyes just then," cried Katipah, "I should have died for fear."

He set her once more in the tree-top and disappeared from her sight. "Come down to me, Katipah!" she heard his voice calling all around her.

Clinging fast to the topmost bough, "Oh, Gammon-gata," she cried, "let me see your eyes, and I will come!"

Then with darkened brow he appeared to her again out of his blasts, and took her in his arms and lifted her down a little sadly till her feet touched safe earth. And he blew away the beautiful veil of blossoms with which he had showered her, while Katipah stood like a shamed child and watched it go, shredding itself to pieces in the spring sunshine.

And Gammon-gata, kissing her tenderly, said: "Go home, Katipah, and learn to have courage! And when you have learned it, I will be faithful and will come to you again. Only remember, however long we may be parted, and whatever winds blow ill-fortune up to your

door, Gammon-gata will watch over you. For in deed and truth you are the wife of the West Wind now, and truly he loves you, Katipah!"

"Oh, Gammon-gata!" cried Katipah, "tell the other winds, when they come, to blow courage into me, and to blow me back to you; and do not let that be long!"

"I will tell them," said Gammon-gata; and suddenly he was gone. Katipah saw a drift of white petals borne out of the orchard and away to sea; and she knew that there went Gammon-gata, the beautiful youth who, loving her so well, had made her his wife between



the showers of the plum-blossom and sunshine, and had promised to return to her when she had fitted herself to receive him.

In the evening Bimsha looked over the fence and jeered at her. "Do not think, Katipah," she cried, "that you will ever get a husband, for all your soft looks! You are too poor and unprofitable."

Katipah folded her meek little body together like a concertina when it shuts, and squatted to earth in great contentment of spirit. "Silly Bimsha!" said she, "I already have a husband—a fine one! Ever so much finer than yours!"

Bimsha turned pale and cold with envy to hear her say that; for she feared that Katipah was too good and simple to tell her an untruth even in mocking. But she put a brave face upon the matter, saying only: "I will believe in that fine husband when I see him!"

"Oh, you will see him," answered Katipah, "if you look high enough! But he is far away over *your* head, Bimsha; and you will not hear him beating me at night, for that is not his way!"

At this soft answer Bimsha went away into her house in a fury; and Katipah laughed to herself; then she sighed and said: "Oh, Gammon-gata, return to me quickly, lest my word shall seem false to Bimsha, who hates me!"

Every day after this Bimsha thrust her face over the fence to say: "Katipah, where is this fine husband of yours? He does not seem to come home very often."

Katipah answered slyly: "He comes home late, when it is dark, and goes away very early, almost before it is light. It is not necessary for his happiness that he should see *you*."

"Certainly there is a change in Katipah," thought Bimsha; "she has become saucy with her tongue." But her envious heart would not let her leave the matter in peace; night and morning she cried to Katipah: "Katipah, where is your fine husband?"

And Katipah laughed at her, thinking to

herself: "To begin with, I will not be afraid of anything Bimsha may say. Let Gammon-gata know that!"


And now every day she looked up into the sky to see what wind was blowing; but east, or north, or south, it was never the one wind that she looked for.

The East Wind came from the sea, bringing rain, and beat upon Katipah's door at night. Then Katipah would rise and open, and standing in the downpour would cry: "East Wind, East Wind, go and tell your brother, Gammon-gata, that I am not afraid of you any more than I am of Bimsha!"

One night, the East Wind, when she said that, pulled a tile off Bimsha's house and threw it at her; and Katipah ran in and hid behind the door in a great hurry. After that she had less to say when the East Wind came and blew under her gable and rattled at her door. "Oh, Gammon-gata," she sighed, "if I might only set eyes on you, I would fear nothing at all!"

When the weather grew fine, Katipah returned to the shore and flew her kite as she had always done before the love of Gammon-gata had entered her heart. Now and then, as she did so, the wind would change softly and begin blowing from the west. Then little Katipah would pull lovingly at the string and cry: "Oh, Gammon-gata! have you got fast hold of it up there?"

One day, after dusk, when she, the last of all the flyers, hauled down her kite to earth, she found a heron's feather fastened among the strings. Katipah knew who had sent that, and kissed it a thousand times over; nor did she mind for many days afterwards what Bimsha might say, because the heron's feather lay so close to her heart, warming it with the hope of Gammon-gata's return.



But as weeks and months passed on, and Bimsha still did not fail to say each morning: "Katipah, where is your fine husband to-day?" the timid heart grew faint with waiting.

"Alas!" thought Katipah, "if Heaven would only send me a child, I would show it to her; she would believe me easily then."

And now every day and all day long she sent up her kite from the seashore, praying that a child might be born to her and convince Bimsha of the truth. Everyone said: "Katipah is mad about kite-flying. See how early she goes, and how late she stays: hardly any weather keeps her indoors."

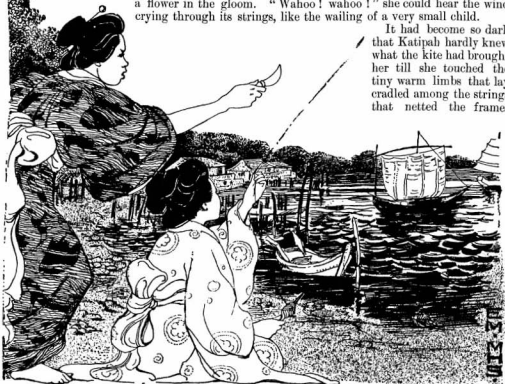
One day the West Wind came full-breathed over land and sea, and Katipah was among the first on the beach to send up her messenger with word to Gammon-gata of the thing for which she prayed.

"Gammon-gata," she sighed, "the voice of Bimsha afflicts me daily; my heart is bruised by the mockery she casts at me. Did I not love thee under the plum-tree, Gammon-gata? Ask of Heaven, therefore, that a child may be born to me; ever so small let it be, and Bimsha will become dumb. Gammon-gata, it is a very little thing that I am asking."

All day long she let her kite go farther up into the sky than all the other kites. Overhead the wind sang in their strings like bees, or like the thin cry of very small children; but Katipah's was so far away she could scarcely see it against the blue. "Gammon-gata!" she cried, till the twilight drew sea and land together, and she was left alone.

Then she called down her kite sadly; hand over hand she drew it by the cord till she saw it fluttering over her head like a great moth searching for a flower in the gloom. "Wahoo! wahoo!" she could hear the wind crying through its strings, like the wailing of a very small child.

It had become so dark that Katipah hardly knew what the kite had brought her till she touched the tiny warm limbs that lay cradled among the strings that netted the frames





to its cord. Full of wonder and delight, she lifted the windling out of its nest and laid it in her bosom. Then she slung the kite across her shoulder and ran home, laughing and crying for joy and triumph to think that all Bimsha's mockery must now be at an end.

So quite early the next morning Katipah sat herself down very demurely in the doorway, with her child hidden in the folds of her gown, and waited for Bimsha's evil eye to thrust itself over her happiness.

She had not long to wait. Bimsha came out of her door and, looking across to Katipah, cried: "Well, Katipah, and where is your fine husband to-day?"

"My husband is gone out," said Katipah; "but if you care to look, you can see my baby. It is ever so much more beautiful than yours."

Bimsha, when she heard that, turned green and yellow with envy; and there, plain to see, was Katipah holding up to view the most beautiful babe that ever gave the sunlight a good excuse for visiting this wicked earth. The mere sight of so much innocent beauty and happiness gave Bimsha a shock from which it took her three weeks to recover. After that she would sit at her window and for pure envy keep watch to see Katipah and the child playing together, the child which was so much more beautiful and well-behaved than her own.

As for Katipah, she was so happy now that the sorrow of waiting for her husband's return grew small. Day by day the West Wind blew softly, and she knew that Gammon-gata was there, keeping watch over her and the child.

Every day she would say to the little one: "Come, my plum-petal, my wind-flower, I will send thee up to thy father, that he may see how fat thou art getting and be proud of

thee!" And going down to the shore, she would lay the child among the strings of the kite and send it up to where Gammon-gata blew a wide breath over the sea. And as it went, she would hear the child crow with joy at being so uplifted from earth; and laughing to herself, she would think: "When he sees his child so patterned after his own heart, Gammon-gata will be too proud to remain long away from me."

When she drew the child back to her out of the sky, she covered it with caresses, crying: "Oh, my wind-blown one, my cloudlet, my sky-blossom, my little piece out of heaven, hast thou seen thy father, and has he told thee that he loves me?" And the child would crow with mysterious delight, being too young to tell anything it knew in words.

Bimsha out of her window watched and saw all this, not comprehending it; and in her evil heart a wish grew up that she might by some means put an end to all Katipah's happiness. So one day towards evening, when Katipah, alone upon the shore, had let her kite and her little one go up to the fleecy edges of a cloud through which the golden sunlight was streaming, Bimsha came softly behind, and with a sharp knife cut the string by which alone the kite was held from falling.

"Oh, silly Bimsha!" cried Katipah, "what have you done that for?"

Up in air the kite made a plunge forward, fluttered and stumbled in its course, and came shooting headlong to earth.

"Oh, dear!" cried Katipah, "if my



beautiful little kite gets torn, Bimsha, that will be your fault!"

When the kite fell, it lay unhurt on one of the soft sandhills that ringed the bay; but no sign of the child was to be seen. Katipah was laughing when she picked up her kite and ran home. And Bimsha thought: "Is it witchcraft, or did the child fall into the sea?"

In the night the West Wind came and tapped at Katipah's window; and rising from her bed, she heard Gammon-gata's voice calling tenderly to her. When she opened the window to the blindness of the black night, he kissed her, and putting the little one in her arms, said: "Wait only a little while longer, Katipah, and I will come again to you! Already you are learning to be brave."

In the morning Bimsha looked out, and there sat Katipah in her own doorway with the child safe and sound in her arms. And, plain to see, he had on a beautiful golden coat, and little silver wings were fastened to his feet, and his head was garnished with a wreath of flowers, the like of which were never seen on earth. He was like a child of noble birth and fortune, and the small motherly face of Katipah shone with pride and happiness as she nursed him.

"Where did you steal those things?" asked Bimsha. "And how did the child come back? I thought he had fallen into the sea and been drowned."

"Ah!" cried Katipah slyly, "he was up in the clouds when the kite left him, and he came down with the rain last night. It is nothing wonderful. You were foolish, Bimsha, if you thought that to fall into the clouds would do the child any harm. Up there you can have no idea how beautiful it is — such fields of gold, such wonderful gardens, such flowers and fruits; it is from there that all the beauty and wealth of the world must come. See all that he has brought with him! And it is all



your doing, because you cut the cord of the kite. Oh, clever Bimsha !”

As soon as Bimsha heard that, she ran and got a big kite, and fastening her own child into the strings, started it to fly.

“Do not think,” cried the envious woman, “that you are the only one whose child is to go clothed in gold ! My child is as good as yours any day ; wait and you shall see !”

So presently, when the kite was well up into the clouds, as Katipah's kite had been, she cut the cord, thinking surely that the same fortune would be for her as had been for Katipah. But instead of that, all at once the kite fell headlong to the earth, child and all ; and when she ran to pick him up, Bimsha found that her son's life had paid forfeit for her own enviousness and folly.

The wicked woman went green and purple with jealousy and rage ; and running to the chief magistrate, she told him that while she was flying a kite with her child fastened to its back, Katipah had come out and cut the string, so that by her doing the child was now dead.

When the chief magistrate heard that, he sent and caused Katipah to be thrown into prison, and told her that the next day she should certainly be put to death.

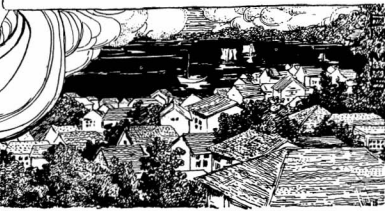
Katipah went meekly, carrying her little son in one hand and her blue-and-green kite in the other, for that had become so dear to her that she could not now part from it. And all the way to prison Bimsha followed, mocking and asking : “Tell us, Katipah, where is your fine husband now ?”

In the night the West Wind came and tapped at the prison window and called tenderly : “Katipah, Katipah, are you there ?” And when Katipah got up from her bed of straw and looked out, there was Gammon-gata once more.

He reached his hands through the bars and put them round her face. “Katipah,” he said, “you have become brave ; you are now fit to be the wife of the West Wind. To-morrow you shall travel with me all over the world ; you shall not stay in one land any more. Now give me our son ; for a little while I must take him from you. To prove your courage, you must find your own way out of this trouble which you have got into through making a fool of Bimsha.”

So Katipah gave him the child through the bars of the prison window, and when he was gone, lay down and slept till it became light.

In the morning the chief magistrate and Bimsha, together with the whole populace, came to Katipah's cell to see her led out to death. And when it was found that her child had disappeared, “She is a witch !” they cried. “She has eaten it !” And the chief magistrate said that, being a witch, instead of hanging, she was to be burned.



"I have not eaten my child, and I am no witch!" said Katipah, as, taking with her her blue-and-green kite, she trotted out to the place of execution. When she was come to the appointed spot, she said to the chief magistrate: "To every criminal it is permitted to plead in defence of himself; but because I am innocent, am I not also allowed to plead?"

The chief magistrate told her she might speak if she had anything to say.

"All I ask," said Katipah, "is that I may be allowed once more to fly my blue-and-green kite as I used to do in the days when I was happy, and I will show you soon that I am not guilty of what is laid to my charge. It is a very little thing that I ask!"

So the chief magistrate gave her leave; and there before all the people she sent up her kite till it flew high over the roofs of the town. Softly the West Wind took it and blew it away towards the sea. "Oh, Gammon-gata," she whispered gently, "hear me now, for I am not afraid."

The Wind blew hard upon the kite, and pulled as though to catch it away, so Katipah twisted the cord once or twice round her waist that she might keep the safer hold over it. Then she said to the chief magistrate and to all the people that were assembled: "I am innocent of all that is charged against me. For, first, it was that wicked Bimsha herself that killed her own child."

"Prove it!" cried the chief magistrate.

"I cannot," replied Katipah.

"Then you must die," said the chief magistrate.

"In the second place," went on Katipah, "I did not eat my own child."

"Prove it!" cried the chief magistrate again.

"I will," said Katipah. "Oh, Gammon-gata! it is a very little thing that I ask."

Down the string of the kite, first a mere speck against the sky, then larger, till plain for all to see, came the missing one, slithering and sliding, with his golden coat, and the little silver wings tied to his ankles, and handfuls of flowers which he threw into his mother's face as he came.

"Oh, cruel chief magistrate!" cried Katipah, receiving the babe in her arms, "does it seem that I have eaten him?"

"You are a witch," said the chief magistrate, "or how do you come to have a child

that disappears and comes again from nowhere? It is not possible to permit such things to be; you and your child shall both be burned together."

Katipah drew softly upon the kite-string. "Oh, Gammon-gata!" she cried, "lift me up now very high, and I will not be afraid!"

Then suddenly before all eyes Katipah was lifted up by the cord of the kite which she had wound about her waist; right up from the earth she was lifted, till her feet rested above the heads of the people.

Katipah, with her babe in her arms, swung softly through the air, out of reach of the hands stretched up to catch her, and addressed the populace in these words—

"Oh, cruel people, who will not believe innocence when it speaks, you must believe me now! I am the wife of the West Wind, of Gammon-gata, the beautiful, the bearer of fine weather, who also brings back the wings that fly, till the winter be over. Is it well, do you think, to be at war with the West Wind?"

"Ah, foolish ones! I go now, for Gammon-gata calls me, and I am no longer afraid. I go to travel in many lands whither he carries me, and it will be long before I return here. Many dark days are coming to you, and you shall not feel the West Wind, the bearer of fine weather, blowing over you from land to sea; nor shall you see the blossoms open white over the hills, nor feel the earth grow warm as the summer comes in, because the bringer of fair weather is angry with you for the foolishness which you have done. But when at last the West Wind returns to you, remember that Katipah, the poor and unprofitable one, is Gammon-gata's wife, and that she has remembered and has prayed for you."

And so saying, Katipah threw open her arms and let go the cord of the kite which held her safe.

"Oh, Gammon-gata!" she cried, "I do not see your eyes, but I am not afraid."

And at that, even while she seemed upon the point of falling to destruction, there flashed into sight a fair youth, with dark hair and garments full of a storm of flying petals, who, catching up Katipah and her child in his arms, laughed scorn to those below, and soaring over the roofs of the town, vanished away seaward.