

# Tears, Ideal Tears

Elizabeth Bowen

The title of this short story reminds us of the title of one of the famous poems written by Lord Tennyson. Elizabeth Bowen borrows this romantic title to refer to the tears of a child. Elizabeth sheds light on the way children should be treated, on one hand, and the relationship between a mother and her children, on the other hand.

Mrs. Dickenson is introduced to us as a widow who has only one child called Fredrick. There is nothing in her life except her son; **"I'm bound to put him first"**. She is pretty, attractive and young. Yet, the idea of getting married again is quite far from her mind. She devotes all her life to her child. To our surprise, she has no idea about how she should treat her son. Once he bursts into tears, she starts threatening him that she will deprive him of what he wants if he does not stop crying and behaving in such a way since **"he was too big to cry"**. Mrs. Dickenson has a lot of friends with married and unmarried men. However, she is a straight woman and never indulges herself in any commitment leading to something wrong.

**"Several wanted to marry her. But courage had given a new intractable kind of virgin pride: she loved it too much, she could never surrender it. No don't ask me that. She would say, lifting her chin and with that calm, gallant smile. Don't spoil things. You've been splendid to me. Such a support!"** she became the perfect friend for men who wished to wish to marry but were just as glad not to, and for married men who liked just a little pathos without being upset.

Though Mrs. Dickenson considers her son as the only man in her life, she is always complaining because of his childish behaviour in spite of the fact that he is "too big to cry". She always loses patience because of his crying. She loses control over herself and becomes irritable. She even punishes him very severely as a result of his sobbing. She prevents him from going to the zoo since **"Fredrick did not deserve the zoo."** She pointed out, in a tense voice with dislike: **"I'm not taking you to the zoo."** Besides, she is always reminding him of what his **"father would think."** **"He used to be so proud of you. He and I used to look forward to what you'd be like when you were a big boy. One of the last things he has said was: "Fredrick will take care of you."**

Mrs. Dickenson's impatience with her child reaches its climax. The tone of her cruelty and severity is dominated by words of cruelty and severity. "I'm ashamed of you." You almost make me glad, he's not here now.

Maybe Mrs. Dickenson treats her son so badly because he is the cause of depriving his mother of a great deal of pleasure. When she walks by herself, she becomes a charming woman. Being young and attractive, Mrs. Dickenson wants to enjoy her life. Yet, at the same time she wants the people around her to think of her as an ideal mother who devotes all her life to her child.

At last, Fredrick has stopped crying. He forgets his focus of grief and forgets his mother. He stepped over the rail, no park keeper being at hand to stop him. So Fredrick enters a private park with a duck-pool. There he meets a strange girl he has never seen before. She gives him an apple. She treats him very kindly. There is a contrast between the way his mother treats him and the way this girl does. When Mrs. Dickenson realises the absence of her son, she comes back very quickly to look for him.