

CHAPTER SEVEN – DEATH OF HER MOTHER

Although Therese was only four, she knew that Heaven is our true home, and that in this world we cannot have everything we want. She knew what it means to be separated from those we love, for she sorely missed her sister Pauline, who was a boarder at the Visitation Convent of Le Mans. Poor little Therese was often to be seen on the balcony outside her room, gazing wistfully towards the station. Once Marie, finding her there, said:

"What are you doing, Therese?"

"I am looking to see if Pauline is coming back," was the answer.

But this separation was only a shadow of that which was to come a few months later, when Our Lord took from the children their pious and devoted mother.

During the illness of Madame Martin, Therese and Celine were often sent to spend the day with a friend. Instead of this being a pleasant change, it only distressed and troubled them. They instinctively clung to each other, as if oppressed with the knowledge that something very sad was happening at home.

One morning as they were on their way to their friend's house, Celine suddenly remembered that they had not said their prayers. She whispered to her little sister:

"Must we tell that we haven't said our prayers?"

"Oh, yes!" came the unhesitating reply.

On their arrival, therefore, Celine timidly told the lady, who took them to a big room and left them alone. Then for the first time it flashed on poor Therese what the loss of a mother means, and in a storm of grief she sobbed out:

"Oh, it's not like our mamma! She always heard us say our prayers!"

Madame Martin died on August 28, 1877. Therese was present when her mother received Extreme Unction; she heard her father's stifled sobs, and when all was over was lifted up to kiss her mother's icy forehead. She saw, too, the empty coffin which had been placed upright in the passage. These impressions were never effaced from her mind.

When the funeral was over, the five orphaned children returned to the desolate home. They were gazing at each other in awestruck silence when the nurse, turning pityingly to the two younger ones, exclaimed:

"Poor little things! you have no mother now!"

At once Celine threw herself into Marie's arms, crying out:

"You shall be my mother!"

It might have been expected that Therese, who always followed her sister's example, would have imitated her in this, particularly as Marie was her godmother. But it occurred to her that Pauline might be hurt at not having a little girl too, so she looked at her lovingly and exclaimed in her turn:

"And Pauline will be my mother."

Monsieur Martin bore his great loss with perfect resignation, forgetting his own sorrow that he might devote himself to his little motherless daughters.

Being uncertain what to do for the best, he consulted his friends. Some advised him to remain in Alencon; others suggested that he should send his children to a boarding-school; others, again, urged him to take them to live near their mother's family. The thought of leaving a place so full of tender memories as Alencon was very painful to him. His business was there, and he had many devoted friends. Moreover, outside the town, he had built himself a charming little country house, where for many years he had spent happy holidays with his children.

He did not, however, hesitate long. His brother-in-law, Monsieur Guerin, lived in Lisieux, and he decided to settle in the same town.