

## **IN MEMORY OF THE SOUL OF DON TREMENTINO MARABUNTA**

**By José Baroja**

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Translate: Ingrid Flores (Docente adjunta en Universidad de O'Higgins, Chile)

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*"The whole life of a man revolves around the heat.*

*The man fears the cold: cold food, cold woman,*

*cold clothes, cold wind".*

Manuel Rojas. *Hijo de ladrón*

Trementino Marabunta loved to cook. In fact, don Trementino, over all the activities that an artist could have devoted himself to, had long since opted for the one he loved most: cooking. This, even though, throughout his life, there are witnesses to this, he only knew how to cook a single hot dish; one and nothing else. However, in his defense, it must be said that every time he cooked it, every time he served it, the taste, smell and texture of his masterpiece transmitted to the lucky diner, feelings so varied, so intimate, that the only hot dish seemed to multiply towards infinity.

At that moment, at that very moment when the taste buds came in contact with the precious treasure, many smiles were not long in coming. Especially, among those who were its main critics, who, without even knowing it, revealed pupils so dilated that, surprisingly, seemed to cover the entire eyeball; besides, the anxious movements of the mouths and hearts beating very strongly, always accused of wanting a little more. Perhaps, after eating with Trementino Marabunta, that one hot dish, created with so much passion, more than one would conclude that a single dish of food can equal all the hot dishes that have been served since the beginning of time. Undoubtedly, Trementino Marabunta loved to cook.

-What did he cook? -You'll wonder right away. The answer itself is complex. The most superficial people, more "adult", more comfortable in this role, perhaps will say, with arrogant security, that the only dish of Marabunta was a simplicity: rice with ground meat. It is even possible, as I have seen happening on more than one occasion, that these people will despise the graciously served warning that anyone, in this and any reality, would be able to cook something so insignificant. However, there are also those with more heart, who are far removed from the obtuse routine, those who resemble the children he always served them with so much affection. They, and only they, always managed to notice that every hot dish, from our beloved chef, had a different flavor.

Undoubtedly, for most of us, it was magical that their rice so explicitly remembered the sweets that a few days ago we had stolen, with obvious talent, from a small supermarket in the neighborhood. Others imagined that this should be the taste of a filet mignon, of those seen in the movies, but that they can hardly be known in the real world. The most daring ventured to talk about manna, about the biblical story that one morning at Sunday school, a lady of ancient smells had told us. In this, God had provided his chosen people with this delicacy when they were hungry in the desert; hunger, something so recognizable among us, the privileged diners of Marabunta. I think that, in part, we saw him as that god provider or, at least, his eyes made us think of him on more than one occasion. God was good.

Unlike the children he served to, Trementino lived with his father and mother throughout his childhood: he, a serious Mathematics teacher; she, an intelligent housewife. Undoubtedly, those who knew him at that time will be able to affirm that he was a child who liked to play in the street, run and run like those madmen who are missing in adulthood, full of joy and without absurd worries and who, of course, enjoyed small things that, at that time, were enormously wonderful. Maybe it's right to say they still were.

Don Trementino Marabunta did not miss the opportunity to tell us many stories about life, hoping that we would believe that they were absolute truth. I remember one time he told me about a man who came into a café and turned a lump of sugar into a fish: I didn't believe him, because he wasn't a child to believe in those things anymore, yet he seemed to believe it. I would have even dared to say that he was the man with the sugar cube. However, I can conclude that Trementino Marabunta remembered and relived with love how beautiful his childhood had been. If you ask your closest friends or family members, they will agree with me.

Mr. Trementino knew how to cook infinite plates of hot food, at least - and that's the important thing - said the children with whom he shared, voluntarily and free of charge, in that "home" where children without a father or mother, or badly called criminals, waited for some light of affection; even among those corridors that led to cold rooms of recurring loneliness. Marabunta knew this and, therefore, the two times he visited us during the week, he made an effort to ensure that the food had that one element that could not be missing.

Once, a priest visited our "home", with the aim, of course, of tasting our hero's food. Certainly, the comments about him had spread and generated some curiosity among the most skeptical. The expectation was very high: the ecclesiastic expected to find a gourmet dish, worth all that fuss. I remember his surprised face very well when in front of him he only found a humble dish of rice with ground meat. I also

remember how he grumbled without even trying a bite. Which contrasted, almost immediately, with the happy face of my companions -and mine-, after putting the fork in my mouth: "Mine is pizza!" "It tastes like mashed potatoes in here!" "What delicious fries!" It seemed crazy, but in truth, the flavors multiplied, while Trementino's eyes shone before us like those of a god.

I'll take a chance to say that that glow came from his past. His childhood was beautiful, and he enjoyed sharing a moment of it with so many children, through that unique dish of hot food that he cooked so well. It is likely that if he were asked to remember any negative moments before the age of eighteen, he would only smile, raise his shoulders and say in his calm voice, "I was happy. Which was your favorite dish at that time? As you can guess, dear reader, the rice with ground beef that his mother prepared smiling and that he hoped to find every time he returned from school.

As an adult, however, he would be surprised to learn that for almost two months, when he was only ten years old, it was the only dish he ate. He remembers, with love, the image of his mother heating the water in that old teapot that used to be his grandmother's. That's why Trementino, while cooking, remembered and imitated the way his mommy stung garlic, poured the rice in a nice cup and then threw it into a pot where the oil was heard. In particular, he liked to repeat the part where after stirring it, he poured two cups of hot water into the pot causing an explosive sound that announced with some impetus the beginning of the wait: twenty-five magical minutes.

He had always thought it was beautiful to see how that cheap, ugly meat turned into something so beautiful and delicious when mixed with rice. That was his memory: simple and beautiful. Then, he would learn that during those two strange months, his father suffered what many families in Chile did: he had a debt so big that he was forced to sell belongings, to commit to payments, to even cry. Both of them were already his admiration then, but by the moment he learned this, his mother and father seemed like giants to him because in front of them, he and his two brothers never ever complained. Instead, there was always a wonderful plate of hot food for lunch.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Mr. Trementino Marabunta learned to cook countless dishes, even though they all resembled each other and were called the same. The children of the "home" were always the best gastronomic critics to judge his art because they never did it with their eyes. Now, Trementino is gone, we never knew anything beyond his smiles, his bright eyes, his childish eyes and the beautiful childhood he had. Don Trementino Marabunta was, without a doubt, the greatest artist I knew.

*In your memory.*