

All is fair in love and *tajadas*

By Darianna Molina

Growing up, my favourite dish was undoubtedly the golden, crispy *tajadas* that Abuela Carmen, my great-grandmother, skilfully crafted. However, my cousin Paola and I, the only two children in the family, turned the simple act of enjoying *tajadas* into a feud. She is a year younger, and when you are only six, it's a big difference. I was guilty of using the age to my advantage to try to get more *tajadas*, and she was known for using her big puppy eyes. Not a fair competition, if you ask me.

Tajadas were a common delicacy in our family—thin slices of ripe plantains fried to perfection, creating a glorious blend of sweetness and crunch, topped with salty and soft grated *queso blanco*. Every Friday, after school, Abuela Carmen would prepare a generous batch, and the fragrant sweet smell would fill her house. The big windows, covered only with yellow-painted metal bars and no glass, let out of the kitchen the most delicious smells every time she was inside.

My cousin and I had a ritual. We would be playing outside, in the grass patch in front of the house, but when we smelled *tajadas*, we would run to the dining table and wait patiently. As soon as the slices were laid out on the table, a silent battle would begin. It wasn't a battle of words; it was a battle of arithmetic precision. The unspoken rule was clear, we counted the *tajadas* and ensured

everyone received their fair share. Side glances were exchanged, and fingers were pointed as we meticulously counted the slices, no slice escaping our attention. The tension in the air was palpable, and the rest of the family watched with amusement.

Some Fridays the numbers aligned perfectly, and each of us would get an equal portion of the crunchy delight. But more often than not, the numbers betrayed our Abuela's hopes for a peaceful meal. When faced with an odd count, my cousin and I would count again, just to be sure, and the discussion would break out. Arguments about who was hungrier, who had the last one the last time, cries, and tears were to be expected. Usually, Abuela had to intervene and split that last one, or eat it herself, which settled the fight. The cheese was distributed and left to melt slightly on top of the hot pieces of plantain. After that, everyone could enjoy their meal, savour the dish and the laughter and joy of the family gathering would drown out any lingering hints of our culinary combat.