THE PREFRONTAL CORTEX

Ibe Rossel

This month, I'm turning twenty-five. I try to remember what my eight-year-old self imagined about this age. Probably that high heels and the hole in the ozone layer would play a bigger role in my life. A steady diet of children's news shows and my mom's magazines likely influenced this. But the lack of Louboutins in my closet would surprise me less than the absence of a general feeling of adulthood. Or at least, what the word adulthood implies: routine, acceptance, certainty. Knowing what you are doing, you know?

I told my sister all this, with a bit of drama, while we were eating wrinkled black olives at her coffee table. She interrupted me: "Just wait until your prefrontal cortex is fully developed." With a half-chewed olive pit in my mouth, I asked: "What do you mean?" I tend to take Flo seriously in these matters. She's studying biochemistry, and to me, that means she understands every scientific process.

"The prefrontal cortex is basically our control center," Flo continued, unfazed. "It helps us react appropriately to our surroundings, plan, and avoid rash decisions. "And importantly, Ibe, the prefrontal cortex is not fully developed until you're twenty-five." She made it sound like the gates to paradise would swing open on my birthday. Like I would wake up to find a robot waiting for me, ready to do my dishes, pay my bills on time, and finally smooth out my messy love life.

I should have questioned her scientific expertise, but even more so, her experience. Flo is twenty-one. What does she know about a fully developed prefrontal cortex? Does she think that in a few years, I will stop bringing the olives, and her brain will bring them instead? Instead of snapping back, I took the bowl to the kitchen. Then it dawned on me: maybe Flo is right. Growing older should always mean hoping the best is yet to come.

"Oh, and Ibe," Flo called from around the corner. "Don't forget that black olives with wrinkles taste better than smooth ones."