

Back to the end of the world

From a European capital to a small fishing village in Brittany: Rozenn Le Ru leaves the busy streets of London and returns to her hometown in the far West of France.

As I get off the plane in Brest, it overwhelms me. Like a wave, it enters my nose, my pores. The smell of the ocean.

I'm back at my parents' home for the weekend. Le Conquet is a fishing port that possesses less than 3000 inhabitants. A radical change after more than a year in the British capital. Here, you can forget the anonymity.

In the morning, my Dad sends me to buy some "Conquetoise" - the name of the village's female inhabitants, but overall, the best bread in the world. In London, I never really bother trying to find a good bakery. Like all the Bretons, I am excessively chauvinistic. And like most of the French, it particularly concerns food. Nothing equals *la Conquetoise*.

Two hours later, I come back home, with not much of the irresistible *baguette*-style bread left. Bihan Bakery is maybe 200m from my house. What happened? Oh, nothing really. I just met half of my family - Le Conquet counts a ridiculous number of Le Ru - in the one-hour queue in front of the shop.

So many people know me here. And if they don't know me personally, they know my parents, my grandparents, my uncles and aunts, my cousins or my sister and her Argentinean husband - famous for their handcrafted jewellery.

To be honest, I am a bit wild and one of the reasons I left Brittany for London is this permanent over-proximity of little villages. I love to walk in a city where I am completely anonymous. And seriously, two hours to buy bread?

One of my favourite places is the port. I used to go there at 5 or 6pm to buy a fresh pollock or two pounds of langoustines directly from the boat. Many people would say the docks stink. The sea, the fuel, the fish, the nets drying under the sun... It is, without doubt, a strong smell. But I like it.

I sit on the dyke at the entrance to the port. Three seagulls fight violently for a piece of crab shell. One takes off with it but the battle continues in the air.

The sun goes down. I stay until it completely disappears behind the horizon, waiting for the Green Ray... I have never seen it. I don't even know if it exists elsewhere than in Jules Verne's imagination. Maybe it is only a legend.

My grandfather, when on holidays aboard his sailing boat, used to tell me stories about it. You can only see it on the sea horizon and it has to be a cloudless sunset. A green light appears for half a second at the very moment when the sun passes on the other side. It is a sign of luck for sailors.

From the port to the beach of my childhood, it is a 30 minutes' walk. I pass the

footbridge from where I used to jump at high-tide, as a child. Les Blancs-Sablons - the name of this 3km beach - are still invisible, but I already can hear the whirring of the waves.

The beach is deserted. Only a few windsurfers and long-boarders are packing up their equipment. It is getting dark. I take my shoes off and dig my feet into the fine sand. Thousands of cold grains slide between my toes.

At night, the beach's contours disappear. Above me, the sky is incredible... It sparkles and moves as if thousands of fireflies had suddenly appeared and started to dance... When living in London, I almost forgot how shiny the night can be. Light pollution does not exist here. The stars are countless.

Afar on the sea, lighthouses blink at regular intervals. I have always been fascinated by lighthouses, and moreover, their keepers. The one right in front of me is Kereon, guardian of the island of Ouessant.

Keepers don't exist anymore. Everything is automated. But they used to distinguish three types of lighthouses: the Paradises on the continent, the Purgatories on the islands, and the Infernos at sea... Kereon is an Inferno.

I love to imagine what the life of an Inferno keeper was decades ago. The sound of the wind swirling around the lighthouse. The waves smashing onto the windows... How courageous those men were, when they couldn't be replaced by the next keeper because of the storm. Without them, how many would have perished, their ship impaled on the rocks...

The next day is grey. A light drizzle is falling and the wind is getting up. Perfect for a walk. A white fog spreads out in the lanes of the village, giving another face to the stone houses. If the captain of a pirate ship was to appear out of the blue now, I would not even be surprised. I just hope he would invite me to share a bottle of fine rum and tell me stories of remote islands, boarding royal ships and hidden treasures...

A light music rises in the mist. The boats sing - their halyard slapping the masts - soon joined by the Foghorn. There is no sound I prefer to this one. It awakens so many stories, so many legends... Brittany is never more beautiful than in a storm.