

## Synopsis

### *ON THE EDGE: STORIES FROM FINLAND'S DWINDLING VILLAGES*

**Jenni Räinen and Vesa Ranta**

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Rural Finland has been experiencing a radical change in the past twenty years, and the documentary photobook *On the Edge* sets out to examine the results of this change. Rural flight in Finland at the beginning of the twenty-first century has been as high as during the great emptying of the countryside in the 1970s. And because fewer people are living in rural areas today, the effects of depopulation since 2000 have been even more dramatic than before.

In sparsely populated rural areas, emigration has become almost non-existent because no one is left there to move. Most of the residents are retirees, and when they die, huge numbers of houses will stand empty. As it is, there are already 140,000 empty houses in Finland.

*On the Edge* arose from a desire to pause beside the empty houses that stand along the roads. It arose from a curiosity to see beyond the statistics and a need to reflect on what's left for remote rural areas. At the same time, the book was born from an urge to record the stories of life in areas that may be emptying out for good.

Non-fiction author and journalist Jenni Räinen and photographer Vesa Ranta spent two years traversing several rural villages in Kainuu and North Ostrobothnia. Both regions hold questionable honors in the migration statistics: North Ostrobothnia has suffered the largest population loss in absolute numbers, while Kainuu has had the greatest loss in relation to its population.

Kainuu and North Ostrobothnia offer good examples of the phenomenon of rural flight, but structural change does not take place at the local level. Its aftermath can be seen all over Finland – and across Europe.

Räinen and Ranta visited twelve rural homes, hearing from both recent arrivals and life-long residents of the countryside about their thoughts on the future of Finland's remote areas.

The future will look different. But it would be wrong to say that the countryside will be completely abandoned. Differences between areas are large and growing. People are still living and working in rural areas, and newcomers still arrive, the numbers are just fewer than before.

The question that arose again and again in interviews was whether the remote countryside still belongs to the welfare state. Some people are managing in remote areas, like Veera Kuha, in Orijärvi, who produces her own vegetables, eggs, and meat. Being healthy helps, too. Doctors and nurses can be hard to come by in municipal centers, let alone rural villages. How are the current residents of rural villages, many of whom are elderly, coping?

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Synopsis translated by Christina Saarinen.