

"We'll be a model for everyone"



Summer 1972. Maggie, a young schoolteacher, leaves the US to live with her boyfriend, Fletcher, on a farm near Niagara Falls. Fletcher is avoiding the Vietnam draft¹. They are at the US-Canada border.

"Well, it's going to be amazing. Up here, there won't be any war or election, and we'll get to make the rules ourselves. At first, we'll help Brid and Wale look after Pauline – it'll be four parents for one kid. Then, after Dimitri and Rhea turn up with their boys –" He breaks off. "You know all this. You really want to hear it?"

She nods, but she has a thought. "Wait a second. Let me get the movie camera and the tape recorder."

He looks surprised. "Now? We aren't even there yet."

She's thinking that the border wasn't the right way to start, but maybe with the camera they can have a second chance.

"Pull over," she says. "It won't take more than a minute."

"The turnoff's only a mile away."

"Yeah, but I want to get started right now." [...]

"America's too far gone to save," he says. "The land's polluted and the politicians are corrupt. They send the army to slaughter kids halfway around the world, then order up the National Guard when people protest. In this country we'll do things differently. We'll live peacefully and fairly. We'll get people from all over, people who want to escape the city, who are sick of the crime, the rat race³, who want their children to breathe clean air. The farm will let us provide for ourselves. We'll grow our own food and sell what we don't eat. Eventually we'll make enough money to buy the place. It'll be a life we could never have in Boston. We'll be a model for everyone."

The camera pans away from the landscape and across the dashboard before settling on his face. When he turns toward the lens, he crosses his eyes and blows a kiss. There's the sound of some unseen object bumping against the microphone.

"How was that?" he says. "Hey, why don't you drive and I'll film you?"

"It's okay," says Maggie. "Let's keep on the way we are. I'm just getting the hang of it⁴."

She films him until they leave the highway for a gravel road. Then she puts away the camera, wanting to see properly what's ahead. There's only one other house along the half-mile stretch, a mobile home with a gated lane. Soon afterward they reach a dead end and the driveway to the farmhouse. The building is red brick with gabled dormers⁵ and a broad porch. An overgrown lawn sprawls in all directions. Fifty yards behind the house, countless rows of cherry trees begin.

"Fletcher, it's gorgeous," she says, and he beams.

Once he has brought the camper to a stop, they exit on their separate sides, Fletcher stretching out his long legs, Maggie pulling her dress away from her body where it clings. For a time they stand there looking at the house. Then they exchange a loud, playful kiss and start up the porch stairs.

Robert MCGILL, *Once We Had a Country*, 2013

1. incorporation 2. embranchement 3. vie de fou
4. start to understand how it works 5. lucarnes

- Explain in your own words why the two main characters decided to leave the US in the first place.
- What are their dreams about the future?
- Analyse Fletcher's arguments about the United States. What message does he convey?
- Comment on the way Maggie and Fletcher show their opposition to the war in Vietnam.
- Imagine the reason(s) why Maggie is filming Fletcher.



f. ROLEPLAY: One week later, Fletcher and Maggie write a letter to their friends in the US, telling them about their new life in Canada and how different it is from what they had in mind.

Help yourself

Nouns

- draft dodger: *insoumis*
- haven (of peace/tranquillity): *havre*
- idealist /aɪ'diəlɪst/
- ideology /aɪdɪ'ɒlədʒi/
- pacifist
- values /'vælju:z/

Adjectives

- determined
- enthusiastic (about) /ɪnθu:zɪ'æstɪk/
- hopeful
- political

Verbs & expressions

- account for = explain
- do sth for the better
- flee = run away from
- fulfil one's dream = make one's dream come true
- have had enough of sth/V-ing
- leave everything behind
- make/start a new life for oneself = start over
- settle down

How did the Vietnam War trigger a protest movement?



Withdraw from Vietnam



Antiwar protest



Did you know?

A **draft card** is the notice sent to young registered American men ordering them to serve in the military. It was used by the American government from 1917 to 1973.

- Look at the still. Imagine the context and what is happening.
- Watch the video and find information about :
 - the main city,
 - the reasons for the protests,
 - the number and identity of the marchers,
 - the way they staged their demonstrations (what they did and why they did it),
 - the resistance that they met.
- What famous man took part in those protest marches? Why did he do so?
- What other city is mentioned? What happened there?
- How did the authorities respond to the protests?



f. ROLEPLAY: The reporter interviews an anti-war protester. Imagine the interview and act it out.

Help yourself!

Nouns

- campaigner = activist
- counterpower
- demonstration = protest /'prəʊtest/
- fight = struggle
- gathering = rally
- involvement
- placard /'plækə:d/; pancarte
- protester = demonstrator
- struggle

Adjectives

- antiwar
- emblematic (of)
- hawkish: *belliqueux*

- influential
- pacifist

Verbs & expressions

- advocate
- empower
- gather
- have one's say about
- make oneself heard
- march = take to the streets = demonstrate
- protest /prə'test/= rise up
- repress = crack down on
- spur/trigger (a protest movement): *déclencher*
- support