

Exemplar Stories – Higgins, the Great

Hamilton, Virginia. M. C. *Higgins, the Great*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999. (1993)
From Chapter 1

Mayo Cornelius Higgins raised his arms high to the sky and spread them wide. He glanced furtively around. It was all right. There was no one to see him greeting the coming sunrise. But the motion of his arms caused a flutter of lettuce leaves he had bound to his wrists with rubber bands. Like bracelets of green feathers, the leaves commenced to wave.

M. C., as he was called, felt warm, moist air surround him. Humidity trapped in the hills clung to the mountainside as the night passed on. In seconds, his skin grew clammy. But he paid no attention to the oppressive heat with its odors of summer growth and decay. For he was staring out over a grand sweep of hill, whose rolling outlines grew clearer by the minute. As he stood on the gallery of his home, the outcropping on which he lived on the mountainside seemed to fade out from under him.

I'm standing in midair, he thought.

He saw dim light touch clouds clustered behind the eastern hills.

Bounce the sun beside me if I want.

All others of his family were still asleep in the house. To be by himself in the perfect quiet was reason enough for him to wake up way early. Alone for half an hour, he could believe he had been chosen to remain forever suspended, facing the hills. He could pretend there was nothing terrible behind him, above his head. Arms outstretched, picture-framed by pine uprights supporting the gallery roof, he was M.C. Higgins, higher than everything.