

# Waiting for the Mail

by Jim Gold

“I sure hope I get some mail tomorrow,” Lance said as he fed his pigs. He shoveled slop into their trough and continued to glance at page 63 of Ovid’s Metamorphosis. Holding the book open with the heel of his work boot and letting the sun illuminate the text, he began reading the luxuriant hexameters. How he loved Latin! Every morning before feeding his pigs, he sat at his desk under the cozy light of his table lamp. Coffee in hand, he spent a meditative hour poring over each word, looking up meanings in his Latin dictionary, then checking with Webster’s for any Indo-European roots or connections between ancient and modern tongues. Lancelot believed a thorough understanding of etymology not only enriched his life but provided the insights required to run a successful pig farm.

Not that his farm was successful. Far from it. Pigs often died, especially when he wanted them to produce beef. His feeding methods also, although innovative, were questionable, for when he ran out of corn meal and slop, he tore pages from Dante’s Inferno, or lives of the saints, and threw them into the trough.

One morning, he was crossing his farmyard, pondering important problems as he stroked his chin. On the right stood his favorite pen. He kept asking himself, was he wasting his life as a pig farmer? Should he become a Latin scholar?

He squatted beside a sleeping hog. “Tell me,” he demanded, “what is more worthy? To place pork chops and ham on the dinner tables of distant city folks, or to study Virgil and read Cicero in the original?”

The pig snorted, grunted, wiggled its ear, and turned over. Its snout widened. In a low, rumbling voice, it replied, “Lance, I’d think it over a bit more. Mid-life changes take time.” It snorted again before closing its eyes and burying its snout in the mud.

“You think so?” Lance replied. “But what do you know? You’re only a hog. Besides, I work by consensus. I’ll ask the others.” He trudged across the pen. “Trouble is, I feel foolish asking pigs for answers,” he grumbled. “They’re not as smart as they look. What do they know of life beyond the pen? Better for me to leave this farm, see the world, expand my horizons, and become a credit to the

human race. Besides, I want to read Virgil in the original.”

So he made plans. The very quest that had convinced him to buy his pig farm was now pulling him away from the security of his pens and propelling him into the world of men, women, dogs, and commerce. But would he be able to study Latin or read Virgil and Ovid in such a world?

On Tuesday morning, he packed his suitcase, left the farm in the care of his aged parents, locked his front door, and marched down the country road.

Soon he passed a farmhouse. An old man was sitting on a rocker on the front porch. Lance had seen old men, but this one was older by far. He drew closer to look him over: torn shirt, baggy overalls, gnarled fingers, white beard. “Who are you?” he asked.

“I am the god of tooth-fillings,” the old man told him.

“My teeth are fine,” Lance said, “but my life is full of holes. How did you sleep last night?”

“I never sleep,” the old man answered. “I watch the stars. My cousin was a star. So was my uncle. I was one too, I think. Now I’m a professional Old Man. I make house calls, visit hospitals, pick up the mail.”

“I don’t get mail,” Lance complained. “People only write to my pigs.”

“Hire me,” the Old Man advised. “You’ll see mail pile up to your ceiling.” He hitched up his suspenders. “Tell me, son, why do you want to get mail?”

“I’m looking for a goal,” Lance answered. “Maybe I can find it in the mail.”

“You need a commitment, son.” The Old Man raised his arm, swatted Lance across the face, and sent the pig farmer flying off the porch.

“What the hell’d you do that for?” Lance yelled when he got up.

“I want you to pay attention to your pigs, son.”

Lance rubbed his chin. “I feel like punching you in the mouth.”

“I wouldn’t do that, son.”

Lance clenched his fist. “Okay. What do you have to teach me, then?”

“I already did,” the Old Man replied. “But there’s more. Go back to your pigs. Wait for the next mail. It’s coming tomorrow.”

from Carlos the Cloud

Available on Amazon and BN.com, or visit [www.jimgold.com](http://www.jimgold.com)