

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

Thanksgiving Day

LYDIA MARIA CHILD

Page | 1

Lydia Maria Child (1802–80) was an American novelist, journalist, scholar, and activist. Born to an abolitionist family, she was influenced by the anti-slavery beliefs of her brother, a Harvard Divinity School professor and Unitarian minister, and the prominent abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, and would advocate all her life for the abolition of slavery. In 1826, she founded a children’s periodical, Juvenile Miscellany.

This famous poem, written in 1844, describes, in stages, the journey and eager anticipation of children traveling once again, over the river and through the wood, to the traditional Thanksgiving dinner at their grandparents’ home. Imagining yourself in their place, what do you think makes the journey and the day so special? For what things do the children sing “hurrah,” and how are they related? What role do memory and the repetitions of tradition play in the delights of this holiday? How does the structure of the poem convey those delights?

Over the river and through the wood,
To Grandfather’s house we go;
The horse knows the way
to carry the sleigh
through the white and drifted snow.

Over the river and through the wood
Trot fast, my dapple-gray!
Spring over the ground,
Like a hunting hound!
For this is Thanksgiving Day.

Over the river and through the wood—
Oh, how the wind does blow!
It stings the toes
And bites the nose,
As over the ground we go.

Over the river and through the wood,
And straight through the barn-yard gate!
We seem to go
Extremely slow—
It is so hard to wait!

Over the river and through the wood,
To have a first-rate play—
Hear the bells ring
“Ting-a-ling-ding!”
Hurrah for Thanksgiving Day!

Over the river and through the wood—
Now Grandmother’s cap I spy!
Hurrah for the fun!
Is the pudding done?
Hurrah for the pumpkin pie!