

The story in this ballad exists in many versions in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East -- perhaps illustrating the universal theme called the battle for the sexes. Goodman and goodwife are terms once applied to married men and women, something like Mr. and Mrs. today.

The story takes place around November 11 - Martinmas, or the feast of St. Martin of Tour, which was usually celebrated with a sumptuous meal. As you read, imagine a husband and wife bickering during the preparation of a large meal-- perhaps a modern Thanksgiving dinner.

Get Up and Bar the Door

It fell about the Martinmas time,
And a gay time it was then,
When our goodwife got puddings to make,
And she's boild them in the pan.
5 The wind sae cauld blew south and north,
And blew into the floor;
Quoth our goodman to our goodwife,
"Gae out and bar the door."
"My hand is in my hussyfskap,
10 Goodman, as ye may see;
An it should nae be barrd this hundred year,
It's no be barrd for me."
They made a paction tween them twa,
They made it firm and sure,
15 That the first word whaeer should speak,
Should rise and bar the door.
Then by there came two gentlemen,
At twelve o'clock at night,
And they could neither see house nor hall,
20 Nor coal nor candle-light.
"Now whether is this a rich man's house,
Or whether it is a poor?"
But neer a word ane o them speak,
For barring of the door.
25 And first they ate the white puddings,
And then they ate the black;
Tho muckle thought the goodwife to hersel,
Yet neer a word she spake.
Then said the one unto the other,
30 "Here, man, tak ye my knife;
Do ye tak aff the auld man's beard,
And I'll kiss the goodwife."
"But there's nae water in the house,
And what shall we do than?"
35 "What ails ye at the pudding-broo,
That boils into the pan?"
O up then started our goodman,
An angry man was he:
"Will ye kiss my wife before my een,
40 And scad me wi pudding-bree?"
Then up and started our goodwife,
Gied three skips on the floor:
"Goodman, you've spoken the foremost word,
Get up and bar the door."

