

The Mysterious Case of the Disappearing Daughters-In-Law
by Marilyn Reeves

Poor Marvin McCackle simply could not keep a wife. By age 32 he was already on Bride Number 7. The problem seemed to be that his job as an itinerant merchant took him away from home for weeks at a time, and he had to leave his newly betrothed in care of his mother Alice. But whenever he returned, the bride would be gone and his mother would tell him that she had simply run away.

This had happened over and over again, and Marvin was perplexed. Each time, although the girl was sad to see him go, he thought she'd be content to stay with his loving mother while awaiting his return.

He could understand her running off if his mother had been mean, but she was always so kind! Whenever he showed up with yet another bride, Alice would always welcome her with open arms, tell her how happy she was to meet her, and do her best to make her feel at home.

She would take the new bride on a tour of the cottage, then out along the path through the herb garden to the workshop filled with her treasures – stuffed owls and bats, stuffed crows and cats, and even an enormous stuffed bear that always elicited a gasp of fright from the new arrival, as it looked so life-like. Alice McCackle was quite the talented taxidermist!

Marvin would generally stay with his mother and his new bride – whichever one it happened to be – for a week or two, during which time Alice would serve up the most sumptuous meals: home-grown vegetables, heavy breads laden with butter, and rich desserts, as well as her specialty: a mystery meat that tasted a bit like pork. It seemed almost as if the new bride's mother-in-law was trying to fatten her up!

But then the day would come when Marvin had to hitch up his horse to his ornate wagon with all its glittering gizmos, tinkling bells and twirling whirligigs, and load it with wares to hawk along the road. He would kiss his bride a fond farewell, and say to her, "Now my dear, while I'm gone, please help Mother with the cooking and cleaning. I'll be back before you know it, so for heaven's sake, do not run away!"

This time Marvin returned from his trip a bit sooner than usual, hoping against hope that his bride would be still there to greet him at the door. But, of course, she was nowhere to be seen. So he walked out through the herb garden to Alice's shop, hoping she might be out there with her. But, except for the stuffed birds and beasties, the place was empty.

But hello, what's this? A cellar door he'd never seen before. As he crept down the stairs to see what was there, his startled mother let out an unearthly shriek! And there he discovered, all posed as if attending a tea party, their glass eyes staring at nothing, were his brides. All seven of them. And while he was a bit taken aback to be sure, he couldn't help but admire his mother's handiwork. And felt a huge sense of relief that his wives hadn't actually run out on him after all.