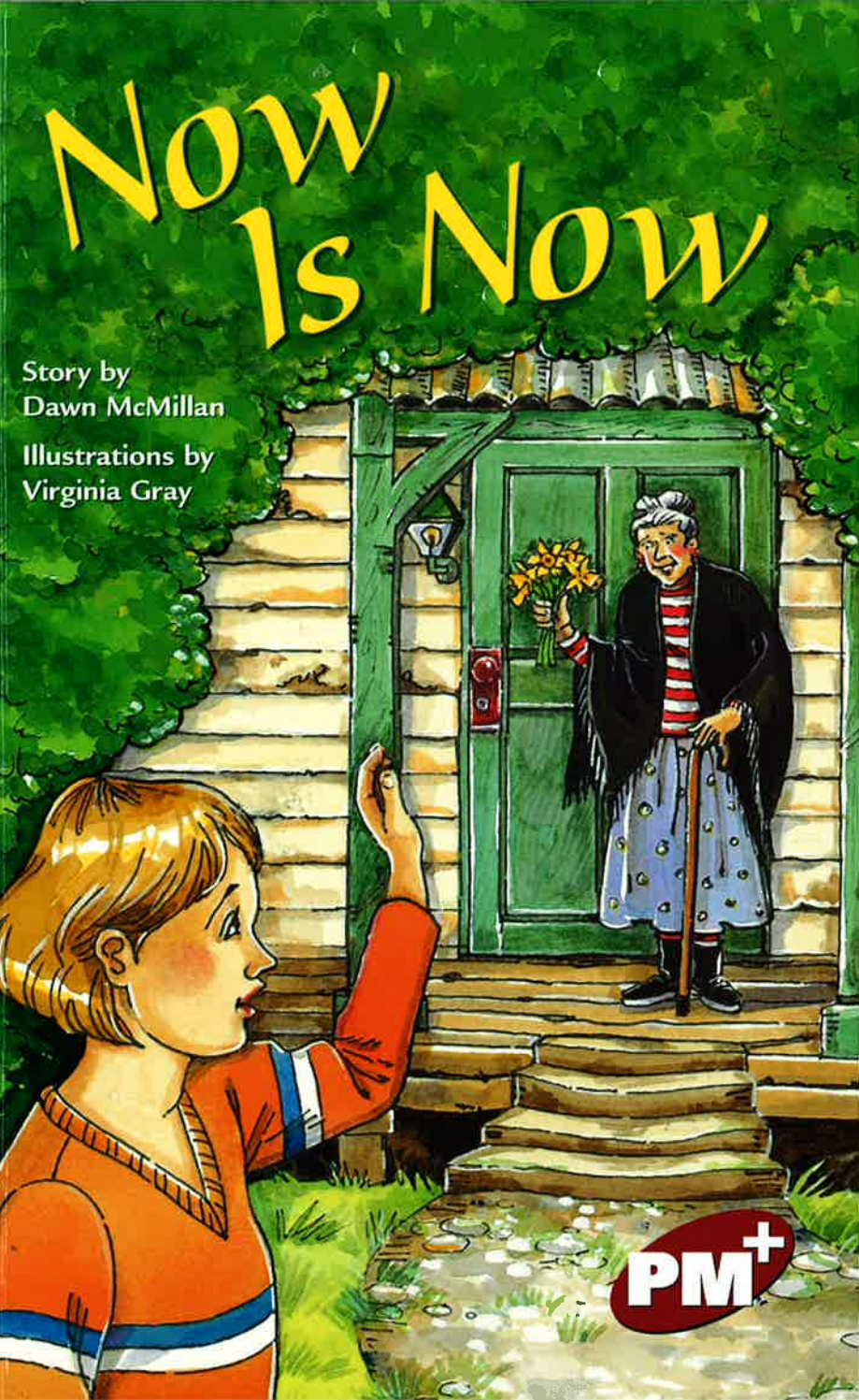
Now Is Now

Story by
Dawn McMillan

Illustrations by
Virginia Gray



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CHAPTER 1

The Hole in the Hedge



There's a very old house at the far end of our street. Paint peels from its walls, and dark windows look out towards the road. A stone path leads from the tilting veranda out to a rusty gate. Every day, on the way home from school, Marcie and I peer at the house through a hole in the hedge. We think the place is empty. We look into the dark garden and we are a little afraid.

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Today we hear something. Our eyes follow the path to the veranda, and we see the heavy wooden front door swing open! Someone is coming out of the house! A shadowy figure stands on the veranda. It is a woman, bent over and leaning on a stick. Around her shoulders there is a black wrap, and her grey hair is coiled high up on top of her head.

Marcie and I watch in silence, our hearts beating in our ears.

Then I whisper, "Quick! Let's get out of here!" And we run home to my place.



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Mum laughs when she sees us. "You two look like you've seen a ghost!"

Marcie and I look at each other. I take a deep breath and say, "We've just seen someone at the old house! She came out through the door and stood on the veranda!"

Mum laughs again. "Theresa!" she says. "Don't tell me you're afraid of the old lady who lives there! That's Miss Albright. She's been there for years!"

"Well I've never seen her before!" I snap. "I didn't know *anybody* lived there!"

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Mum puts her hand on my arm. "Not many people see her these days, Theresa," she says gently. "Miss Albright is very old now, and she has trouble with her hip. She stays in the house for most of the time."

Suddenly I feel ashamed. "She must be lonely," I whisper. I wonder if that's how I'll feel when Marcie moves away.

Marcie and I sit down to eat the sandwiches that Mum has made us, and I think about how hard it must be to live in a big dark house all by yourself.

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CHAPTER 2

Flowers for Miss Albright



This afternoon Marcie and I walk straight past the house. Suddenly it doesn't seem right to be staring into Miss Albright's garden.

"I wouldn't know what to say if we did see her!" I say to Marcie.

She nods and adds, "I'd feel embarrassed if she caught us looking through the hedge!"

Marcie goes straight home and I go to my house to talk to Mum.