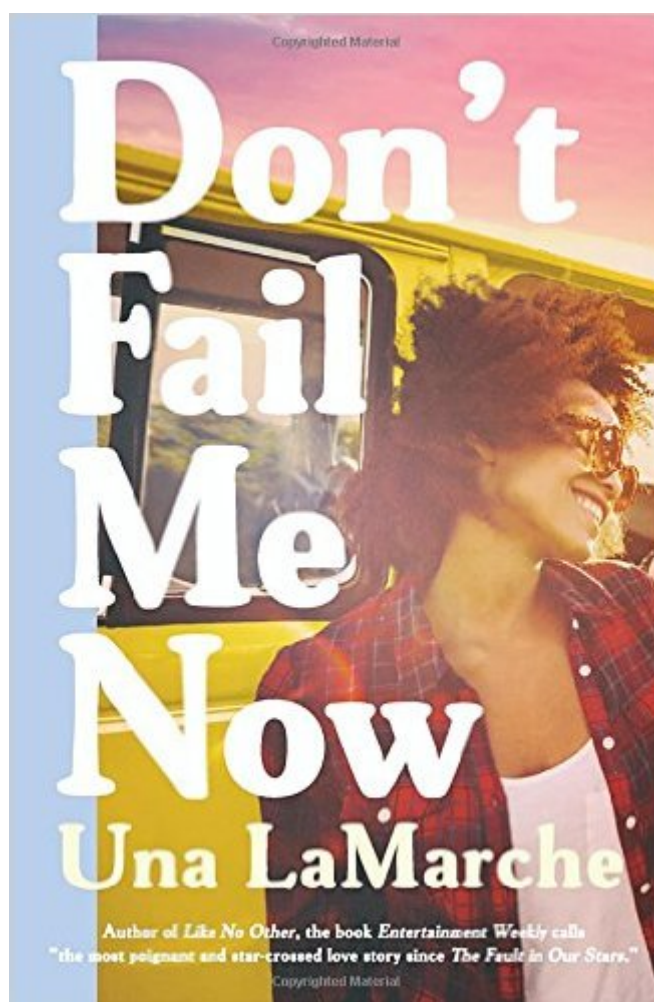


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# Don't Fail Me Now



## Synopsis

From the author of *Like No Other*, the novel *Entertainment Weekly* calls "One of the most poignant and star-crossed love stories since *The Fault in Our Stars*": "What if the last hope to save your family is the person who broke it up to begin with?" Fans of John Green, Rainbow Rowell, and Sharon Flake will find much to love in *[Don't Fail Me Now]*. --School Library Journal

Michelle and her little siblings Cass and Denny are African-American and living on the poverty line in urban Baltimore, struggling to keep it together with their mom in jail and only Michelle's part-time job at the Taco Bell to sustain them. Leah and her stepbrother Tim are white and middle class from suburban Maryland, with few worries beyond winning lacrosse games and getting college applications in on time. Michelle and Leah only have one thing in common: Buck Devereaux, the biological father who abandoned them when they were little. After news trickles back to them that Buck is dying, they make the uneasy decision to drive across country to his hospice in California. Leah hopes for closure; Michelle just wants to give him a piece of her mind. Five people in a failing, old station wagon, living off free samples at food courts across America, and the most pressing question on Michelle's mind is: Who will break down first--herself or the car? All the signs tell her they won't make it. But Michelle has heard that her whole life, and it's never stopped her before.... Una LaMarche triumphs once again with this rare and compassionate look at how racial and social privilege affects one family in crisis in both subtle and astonishing ways. From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Running away in young adult novels nowadays isn't quite the same as it was in the pre-GPS/Amber Alerts/social media days. (Can you imagine what would have happened to Huck and Jim if someone had installed a monitoring device in their cell phones?) This is something seventeen-year-old biracial Michelle Devereaux soon discovers when she takes her younger brother and sister and leaves home to seek out their estranged, dying father, Buck, who supposedly has a "heirloom" for them. As her drug addicted mother is currently in jail, and their aunt doesn't want to host them unless they provide rent money, few people are looking for Michelle and her siblings, but complications arise when they are joined by their half sister, Leah, and her stepbrother, Tim, both white and affluent and therefore, more likely to be searched for. With varying degrees of success at remaining off the grid, the group deals with car trouble, Michelle's sister's health issues, and lack of spending money as they attempt to reach Buck in California. Michelle is also surprised to find herself falling for Tim, even as she worries about keeping her part time job when she returns, as well as her siblings' problems.

**Pros:** I really liked Michelle as a heroine. She was flawed but likeable, and the author did a great job in depicting how the oldest child in a dysfunctional family can have an over-developed sense of responsibility for her siblings. I also loved that she managed to fix the car with Leah on her own, which she was inspired to do by watching her single mom tinker with it.

**Cons:** I felt like it was a bit of a cop out not to resolve any of the issues that Michelle was fleeing in the first place. Obviously, you can't put a storybook ending on everything, but I would have at least liked to know if she kept her job.

**Overall:** An engaging road trip/coming-of-age novel that handles issues like racism skillfully.

Michelle Devereau has seen and experienced a lot in her short life. She has a heroin addicted mother (who has been recently jailed); a troubled, younger sister; a baby brother who some would consider a bully; an indifferent aunt; and less than \$200 dollars to take care of her siblings. So when a white teen (Tim) shows up and claims that they share a sister (Leah), she is shocked to say the least and isn't sure how she wants to react. But when she learns the reason for the visit....apparently her very absent, white biological father (Buck) wants to see her and her half-sister before he dies. In a moment of clarity or maybe panic, Michelle decides to head to California with her siblings, and see what her father has to say. Of course a bonus would be any inheritance he

might leave. As the kids travel cross country, in an jalopy (nicknamed Goldie...the only thing she has from her father)...they must sleep in the car, live off samples or returned food in the mall food court, elude the authorities, and learn to accept each other. Ironically, they eventually learn that they have more in common than they first thought. This was my first Una Lamarche novel and I must admit I really enjoyed it and wouldn't hesitate to read another. Her writing style is clear and easy to follow. And while there were times that the story seemed somewhat unbelievable (five kids traveling cross country with no real resources or adult supervision), it was still entertaining and compelling. As a parent, I believe that this story will resonate with teens and inspire discussions about everything from drug use to bullying. Overall, it was a wonderful read...4 stars.

Okay, sorry, but I just couldn't. I've heard rave things about Una LaMarche's writing but it's never appealed to me till now. When I first got word of *Don't Fail Me Now*'s premise, I was like, "GIMME NOW PLS." I mean, hello. Just look at that synopsis. Michelle, Cass, and Denny find themselves under the gaze of CPS when their mother is yet again arrested. Still only seventeen, Michelle has no idea where to turn until Aunt Sam comes to rescue, taking in Michelle and her younger siblings, and asking for a chunk of Michelle's Taco Bell paycheck to pay half her rent. It's either Aunt Sam's dingy apartment or foster care. Michelle's hands are tied. One day, while working her daily Taco Bell shift, she's approached by a Caucasian teenager, Tim. He's immediately startled to find that Michelle is African-American, but he drops his revelation, anyway. Her long-gone father - his former stepfather - is wanting to see her. Michelle is less than thrilled. She's further perplexed when her half-sister, Tim's stepsister, Leah, is hesitant to meet her. Michelle takes the initiative, then grabs her siblings, Denny and Cass, miraculously snatches Tim and Leah, too, and begins the roadtrip to LA to find their daddy. \* Technically, not Tim's daddy, though. Honestly, I just hated this cast. Michelle would throw spontaneous outbursts, say the s\*\*\*tiest things to everyone, and be automatically forgiven a second later. Tim tried to be Mr. Rogers 99% of the time, but his only method of comfort was, "Oh, that sucks." and "Jesus. Sorry about that." I'd hated Leah, at first, too, but rethinking it, she's a mostly realistic gal. And while Tim and Leah are close-knit, Michelle isn't quite the same with her biological siblings, Denny and Cass. Then, when the unthinkable happens to Cass, she's shocked while Leah seems to be the one who holds down the fort. Instalove occurs. Another tragedy. The calamity is calmed just in time. The ending is a teeny bit open-ended but with a happy note for Michelle's family. This is practically a mashup of *This Raging Light* and any Lifetime movie of your choice. Though I loved the concept (and the diversity, of course), I can't say I was a fan of this.

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