

A Woman's Guide to Staying Alive

Charlize Miranda

Step 1: Stay with a friend for as long as possible. Fresh tomatoes were nestled in the bottom of my canvas tote bag next to a transparent container of honey. My friend hugged me goodbye as we parted ways in the shadow of the Queen Victoria Market. The streets were quiet, except for the gust of wind rolling a Pepsi can along the gutter, and the tree branches shaking their autumn leaves off. The sun had hidden, so a sense of evil loomed over Melbourne.

Step 2: Trust no one. The wickedness could live in the tall lanky man in the Adidas hoodie running alongside his husky. Or maybe it lived in the moustached man in the navy suit speeding his BMW through the red light. To be honest, it's still in the air during the day. Hell, it circulates the halls of Parliament House. Through the smudged lenses of my glasses, I took in every slight movement of my surroundings.

Step 3: Notice everything. I waited patiently for her to get into the Uber, taking a mental note of the license plate. Looking into the rear-view mirror, I memorised everything about his face, as if I would be taking an exam on it later. His brows were furrowed, and sat under the wrinkles of his pale forehead. There was a mole on his left cheek which he lazily tried to hide with his long, blond fringe. I think that was enough.

Step 4: Give the police something to work with. With her left hand she waved me goodbye, and with the other she plucked a strand of her hair out and placed it onto the seat. I hope she got its root. My own black locks rested on my shoulders, an indentation in its middle from where it had been tied. Across the road, my tram was already coming to a halt on its tracks.

Step 5: Draw as little attention to yourself as possible. Hurriedly, I tiptoed across the road to the tram, but its yellow doors rushed past my face, mocking me. Thankfully my feet were enclosed in sneakers, had they been my heels or Doc Martens the entire city might have heard my sprint. I huffed and slumped onto the cool metal seats. It was the last tram of the night.

Step 6: Keep in touch. My phone vibrated in my rain jacket pocket, its light blinding me when I opened it. My friend had turned on her location, reminding me to turn on mine. It's chilling how the time written at the top of my screen, four numbers split in the middle with a colon, frightened me. A train was to arrive at the station in fifteen minutes.

Step 7: Grab your weapons, or whatever you've got. Be resourceful. It's not like you can freely parade around a knife in Melbourne. I slipped a key between each of my knuckles: my school locker key, a house key, and a collector's key I bought in Tasmania. If I'm being frank, I did not see how it would ward off an attacker. Thankfully, I took a women's self-defence class a couple weeks back. It didn't transform me into a black belt, but taught me more than enough to get by. Sandra Bullock in *Miss Congeniality* taught me a thing or two also. Solar plexus, in step, nose, and groin. I had yet to put it into practice.

Step 8: Stay in well-lit areas. My light washed jeans hung loosely around my calves. A black leather belt kept them from falling down from my waist. I wondered if it could be used as a weapon. Probably. It was a comfortable outfit, and thankfully a baggy one too. The tall lamp posts brightly lit up the footpath underneath them, providing a safe haven for me.

Step 9: Walk with purpose. You are a busy woman with places to be. You have one focus: getting home. I had photos sitting in my camera roll begging to be posted on Instagram. But they could wait. I had my favourite Spotify playlist and my tangled pair of headphones. But they could wait. A slight distraction from your phone, a possum, or a tune escaping your headphones is viewed as an open invitation for them to advance on you.

Step 10: Make them think there's someone waiting for you at home, particularly a man. I pinched my phone out of my pocket by its corner and pressed it against my ear. "Yeah babe, I'm coming to you right now. Yeah, my location is turned on so you'll be able to see how far away I am. I hope you're hungry from your gym sesh; I bought us dinner. My dad's going to meet us at home, too." I don't have a boyfriend. And my dad's probably sound asleep right now. But the eavesdropping lurkers tend to be scared of male figures.

Step 11: Keep your distance. There were heavy thuds approaching my direction, and instinctively I crossed the street. I clutched my bag closer to my chest, its contents swaying from side to side as I quickened my pace down the street. I only realised I had made it to the train station when I unconsciously tapped the back of my Myki on the reader. The rumbling of the train shook the platform. I made it. I survived the first half of my journey home. I sunk into the blue and green felt of the seat.

Step 12: Hope you don't become tomorrow's headline. Hope that your name and face isn't broadcast to the entire nation, accompanied by some blurred Instagram selfie you took in a moment of happiness, now juxtaposed with a moment of horror, with a smile never to be seen again. Hope that flowers and cards aren't dedicated to you. Hope you get home safe. Hope you get home alive.

Charlize Miranda is a year 10 student at Suzanne Cory High School. This is her third published piece. Charlize enjoys reading and writing pieces (both fiction and non-fiction) that delve into social issues, such as racial inequality and climate change. She hopes to explore different writing styles such as screenwriting. Charlize is an avid music lover, particularly of musical theatre, as she is a member of the Young Australian Broadway Chorus.