

RESEARCH STUDY #54

Journal Entry: Demetrius

Sunday afternoon

Where are they? They said we'd be out of here in 48 hours. That much time has to have passed by now.

Liv is driving me nuts with her whining.

Hold it together, Dem.

Liv: Where are they?

Demetrius: Chill, Liv. I'm sure they haven't forgotten.

Liv: That's what you said an hour ago.

Demetrius: An hour, huh? How do you get that?

Liv: Argh! You know, you're really starting to bug me.

Demetrius: Right back at you.

Silence

Liv: So what time do you think it is?

Demetrius: *Sigh*. I don't know. They locked us in after lunch on Friday, around 1:00. We had dinner that day—

Liv: If you can call that garbage dinner.

Demetrius: Whatever, Liv. I'm trying to calculate here.

Liv: All right. So, yeah. Dinner. Then we slept.

Demetrius: Which we've got to figure was around eight hours.

Liv: It's pitch black here at night. We might have slept even longer.

Demetrius: Nah. I never sleep longer than eight hours. Usually I'm up after six, seven hours of sleep. I like to exercise before classes.

Liv: Yeah, yeah. *Anyway...*

Demetrius: Okay. We'll say eight hours. Can we agree on that?

Liv: I guess. So...

Demetrius: So, we ate breakfast—and yeah, I know, “if you can call that breakfast”—

Liv: Shut up, Demetrius.

Demetrius: Okay. Sorry. Then we wasted a few more hours—

Liv: Wasted is right. I have a test next week. I shouldn't be sitting in a locked room like some prisoner. Hey! That reminds me. Do you remember that news story about the guy they left in a jail cell and everyone forgot about him over the weekend? He nearly died.

Demetrius: Don't go there, Liv.

Pause.

Liv: They should have let us out by now.

Demetrius: I know. But they haven't. So where were we? Up to lunchtime on Saturday?

Liv: Yeah. I'm looking forward to real food, aren't you? Who do you think chose our meals?

Toaster oven pastries without the toaster, bagels and cheese... How long can you keep cheese out of a refrigerator before it goes bad? And that yogurt? I mean, it tastes okay, if warm yogurt's your thing, but—

Demetrius: I'm sure they had to get approval for everything. They could run into some liability issues if their subjects got sick.

Liv: Ha! And not letting us out at the time we agreed on won't get them into trouble? HEY YOU GUYS! LET US OUT OF HERE!

Demetrius: We've already tried yelling at them.

Liv: Yeah, well maybe they were taking a bathroom break.

Demetrius: I doubt it. They said we'd be under constant surveillance in case of an emergency.

Liv: Which is kind of creepy when you think of it. *Pause*. Do you think they watch us in the bathroom?

Demetrius: I don't know. Maybe.

Liv: Ew.

Demetrius: Anyway, we were calculating how much time we've been here. We're up to Saturday lunch, then Saturday dinner.

Liv: Yeah, basically the same junk we've been eating all along. It's a good thing they included some fruit at least. Then we slept that night.

Demetrius: I didn't sleep that well that night.

Liv: Why? It was dark and quiet.

Demetrius: You snored a little.

Liv: Phuh! I do *not* snore.

Demetrius: Right. It must have been me, then.

Liv: Just... So we woke up on Sunday morning. Had breakfast, had lunch, and here we are. It has to be at least a couple hours after noon.

Demetrius: Well, maybe we ate earlier than we figured. There's no way to tell.

Liv: Yeah, and that bugs me, too. Where's that statement we signed as participants? Do you have a copy?

Demetrius: Hold on. I think I put it in my pocket.

Liv: Oh, *that's* secure.

Demetrius: Stop bitching, would you? I don't see you pulling out a copy.

Liv: All right. Sorry. Just read it, okay?

Demetrius: *A-hem:*

Thank you for participating in Research Study #54. As you know, our study focuses on withdrawal from all forms of electronics: computers in all their forms, obviously, but also the devices we've come to rely upon every day: telephones and televisions, radios, kitchen equipment, even watches and clocks. We're hoping our findings will reveal ways ordinary people might respond in case of a massive EMP (i.e. electromagnetic pulse) regardless of the cause, either natural or manmade.

You'll be spending the next 48 hours together in a small apartment equipped with a bathroom, beds, a table, and two chairs. A generous supply of packaged, prepared foods and drinks is available; you will neither be required nor allowed to cook your own meals. You will not have use of a refrigerator or water heater. You will have no access to electricity. The sole exceptions are two flashlights and two battery-powered lanterns; these are household devices

people might have on hand in case of a massive power outage. Keep in mind that you'll have to ration your use of these, as batteries drain quickly.

We've stocked the room with various items to occupy you during the next two days: books, puzzles, a guitar, and board games.

You will be supplied with a small journal to record your thoughts and responses as the hours pass by. These will be added to our own notes as part of the study. You will be under constant surveillance, even while you're asleep. This should put your mind at ease; if any medical or other unforeseen problem should arise, someone will come to assist you.

Liv: This is so bogus. I wish I'd never signed up for this stupid study. I wish Mr. Golden locks with the bulging pecs and biceps had never come into our Abnormal Psych class.

Demetrius: With Miss India at his side.

Liv: Right. Do you think they were models?

Demetrius: I have no clue. But the \$250 they promised to participants is nowhere near the compensation I deserve.

Liv: What's that supposed to mean?

Demetrius: I mean the stuff we've been talking about. Not knowing when they're going to let us out of here. What else would I mean?

Liv (quietly): N-nothing.

Demetrius: No, tell me.

Liv: No.

Demetrius: Come on. I want to know. What, were you thinking I didn't like being with you or something?

Silence.

Demetrius: Liv? Is that it? Because—

Liv: No! It's not it! I mean, it's nothing.

Demetrius: Well—

Liv: Drop it, would you?

Silence.

Liv: You're such a jerk.

Demetrius: *I'm* the jerk?

Long pause.

Demetrius: So are we okay?

Liv: *Sigh.*

Demetrius: They'll probably be here any minute now.

Liv: Right.

Ten minutes pass.

Liv: You know, I don't really understand why they didn't put us in a room that has natural light. If anything, it seems like people would use only natural light if there were an EMP. They'd save their flashlights for emergencies. Like they said, batteries drain quickly.

Demetrius: Yeah. I don't understand, either.

Silence

Liv: Have you wondered what would happen if they don't come to get us?

Silence

Liv: I mean, it's not like they'd left a ton of food. Or batteries.

Silence

Liv: And I, for one, don't relish the thought of washing with cold water any more.

Silence

Liv: Demetrius!

Demetrius: What do you want me to say?

Liv: *Something.*

Demetrius: We could play another game. Or sing.

Liv: “Don’t Worry, Be Happy”?

Demetrius: I do have Jamaican roots. We are the third happiest people in the world.

Liv: *Groan.*

Demetrius: Risk?

Liv: Not again. I’m going to read.

Demetrius: Fine. I’ll continue my survey.

Liv: Your survey?

Demetrius: Calculating how many holes are in the ceiling tiles. I’m afraid I might be losing count, though. With only lantern light, it’s hard to see the edges up there.

Liv: Whatever.

Journal Entry: Demetrius

Sunday night

We just finished eating our third dinner: cold mac and cheese. Man, I’m seriously sick of this food. That’s not what worries me, though. We’re nearly out of supplies and there’s no sign that anyone will be opening the door anytime soon.

Liv is over on her bed, huffing and repositioning herself every two minutes or so. I really wonder what they were thinking, putting the two of us together. We’d never even spoken with

each other before. Being in the same class means nothing. If there were an actual EMP, wouldn't people more likely spend time with family or friends or people they work with?

Liv: You really think they're going to let us out?

Demetrius: What? Yeah. They have to, right?

Pause

Liv: Well then why haven't they opened the door yet?

Pause

Liv: Demetrius?

Demetrius: Yeah?

Liv: I'm scared.

Movement; Demetrius sits next to Liv on the edge of her bed, his arms around her.

Liv: *Sniffle.*

Demetrius: Don't cry.

Liv: *Crying.*

Demetrius: It'll be okay.

Liv: I hate it when people say that so flippantly!

Movement; Demetrius returns to sit in a chair.

Liv: How is this going to be okay? What about the food? There's barely anything left. And the lights are growing dimmer by the second.

Demetrius: *Sighs.* Let's just get to tomorrow morning.

Liv: Is it night now?

Demetrius: Maybe.

Minutes pass.

Liv: Will you sleep next to me tonight?

Demetrius: Sure. Let me turn the lantern off.

Journal Entry: Demetrius

Monday morning (I think)

We've begun beating on the door. Liv got a little frantic and smashed one of the chairs against the door, but there was still no response. She's hoarse from screaming. She's a wreck. I held her for a long time last night until she cried herself to sleep. Then, halfway through the night she bolted upright and almost knocked me off the bed. "What was that?" Her voice was raw panic. I heard it, too. Someone was wailing. Or someones. The sound/s seemed to come through the side walls our beds are pushed up against. Liv actually climbed onto my lap and practically choked me.

I tried to calm her (I was scared as hell, too, but I didn't want her to know that. "Liv, lie down," I said. "There's nothing we can do now. Let's wait for the morning."

"How do you know it's not morning now?" she said. She sounded really spooked.

Of course I didn't know.

"Shouldn't we do something?" she said.

I had no idea what to do. "Let's just try to sleep a little more."

We lay down, but she was trembling and I think my heart was beating double time. I woke up with her hair over my face and an arm that felt like a mini-van had been parked on it for hours.

We've heard nothing since getting up.

Most of the food is gone. There are a couple of gnarly-looking bananas left, some hard candies that neither of us likes, instant coffee and a bunch of little creamers, but you can't drink coffee all day and expect to sleep at night. Whenever night is.

I'm beginning to wonder if this is some kind of psychological test. The only thing is, I've participated in other research studies—lots of them, actually. For skin, smoking, sleeping, self-selected music behavior, metabolism, neurobiology, and anxiety predictors. They're always interesting, and the compensation is good, especially when you need a few extra bucks. The researchers are always careful. Their questions, procedures, reporting, consent forms—everything has to be approved.

I seriously doubt the researchers of this study would deliberately trick. I know we don't have watches or any other way to tell the time or even the day, but it sure seems a lot longer than 48 hours.

So what gives? I'm not saying anything to Liv, but what if something happened out there on the other side of that door? The noises we heard last night were real. What if there was some horrific terrorist attack? Or mutagen or something else? I don't know. Maybe we're safer in here than out there.

Liv: Demetrius?

Demetrius: Oh, hey Liv. Did you have enough light to wash up with?

Liv: No. The flashlight you're using is the only light that's still going strong. You think we should save it?

Demetrius clicks off the LED flashlight and shuts his journal.

Liv: Did you ever watch those old *Star Trek* shows?

Demetrius: *Star Trek?*

Liv: Yeah. The ships had these crawl spaces behind the walls for maintenance. Jeffries Tubes, they called them. If there were problems, people went inside the tubes so they could fix whatever was wrong.

Pause

Liv: I noticed a vent in the ceiling the first day we were in here.

Demetrius: Yeah, I saw it, too. But that space is way too small, even for you.

Liv: Oh.

Pause

Liv: How are we going to get out of here?

Demetrius: You think the mirrors in here are really mirrors?

Liv: You don't think so? Wait. What? You think this one and the one in the bathroom are actually two-way glass?

Demetrius: Maybe.

Liv: I think we should find out.

Demetrius: Me too.

Journal Entry: Demetrius

Monday afternoon

We've been in here for what seems to be roughly 72 hours and there's no sign of life outside this room. We thought maybe they were observing us through two-way glass. The mirrors in this room and the bathroom were both attached to the wall. On the off chance they were serving as something more than mirrors, we threw the already-broken chair at them.

Unfortunately, they left us with no broom or dustpan; cleaning the shards of glass out of the sink and finding tiny slivers on the floor took some time. Not that we lack that at this point.

We've slipped notes under the door in the hope someone will see them. No response yet. We've also jumped and screamed and waved our arms at two little surveillance cameras hung in the corners of the room by the ceiling.

Lunch was half a mushy banana and three nasty hard candies that I think were stored next to soap.

Liv has been pacing. Her hands are jittery and I occasionally hear her muttering to herself.

I need to figure out how to get us out of here.

This flashlight isn't going to last forever. Most of the time, we sit in darkness.

Why won't they come for us?

Journal Entry: Demetrius

Wednesday evening

The food is gone, although I thought I heard the sound of a cellophane candy wrapper when Liv was lying on her bed facing the wall this afternoon. When I confronted her, she just started crying.

A piece of candy isn't going to do much for me, anyway. It's just the idea that she'd be hiding it from me.

She's stopped talking to me, although she wanders over to see my progress in digging through the wall. I'm doing most of the work in the dark. The outside wall is brick, so I figured I'd have more luck with an inner wall. They made them thick in these old buildings. My only

tools are the silverware they left for us. I've mangled both ends of two forks and a knife already. That leaves two spoons—the handle end works pretty well—and a knife. I'm baffled as to why they only gave us that much silverware.

Unless they expected—or planned on—this scenario.

I flash between moments of rage and despair; neither serve me or Liv well. She's scared when I flare up and covers her head and ears with her arms.

I think Liv must have gone through some kind of traumatic incident as a child. I mean, I'm no psychologist and I have no hard evidence, but she's really a mess. She'll let me hold her at night. There's nothing sexual about it. I think she just needs human contact. Besides, we both stink.

I take a lot of breaks from digging. It's hard work and I have no strength.

Journal Entry: Demetrius

Friday morning (I think)

I'm almost through, I can feel it. The sound is different. After a rest, I'm going back.

Demetrius: I'm through, Liv, I'm through!

* * *

Demetrius clicks on the flashlight and asks Liv to hold it. With his hand wrapped in a towel, he punches through loose plaster.

A hand grabs his wrist.

* * *

Foreign voice: *Weakly.* Hello? Are you here to open the door?

Demetrius: *Yanking his hand back.* Gross, man. What's that smell?

Foreign voice: Kate. *Kate!* Wake up. They're here to rescue us. *Kate!*

Demetrius and Liv exchange glances.

Foreign voice: Kate's been asleep for a long time.