

Title: Seven Entries in the Midnight Path

Synopsis: After six people are killed in a mysterious outbreak of violence, police find a therapy journal belonging to a woman who vanished during the horror. The woman's former psychologist attempts to make sense of the events recorded, which recount the patient's descent into madness after finding an occult book called The Midnight Path. This story was inspired in equal parts by the short fiction of Laird Barron, Paul Tremblay's "Notes for the Barn in the Wild," Robert W. Chamber's "The Yellow Sign," and John Carpenter's "In the Mouth of Madness."

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Seven Entries in The Midnight Path

By Jeremiah Dylan Cook

Evidence Identification Number 03051970 – 09/13/2019 – 12:00 P.M. – The journal below was written by Ms. Jennifer Tillinghast. Ms. Tillinghast vanished amidst an outbreak of violence at the Board Game Coffee House on 03/13/2015. Ms. Tillinghast was previously sought for questioning in relation to the murder of Lisa Barron, the lover of her ex-husband, Kevin Upton. Ms. Tillinghast’s journal was found in a gas station near Bird City, Kansas, and forwarded to the Hazel Peak Police Department by Kansas Highway Patrol. Ms. Tillinghast’s former psychologist, Dr. Kiste, has made notes between the journal entries to provide greater insight into Ms. Tillinghast’s thinking.

Entry 1 – Saturday, March 7th

My therapist suggested I start journaling. Her instructions were to record a day and then flip the page and forget about it. I’m only supposed to review my scribbles at the end of the week. Hopefully, I’ll see some healing progress in the tapestry of journal entries. It’s all supposed to help me move past the incident, although she objects to my name for that day. She says I’m empowering the event, but I can’t seem to find a better word for “the day you got a text message meant for your husband’s fuckbuddy.” Incident works fine for me.

Whatever you want to call that day, I’ve been solo since. Readjusting to living alone has been strange after five years of cohabitation. At first, I was almost happy. There wasn’t anyone leaving dirty dishes in the sink, losing things around the house, or distracting me from reading, but I’ve been lonely the last few days.

The highlight of my first day journaling was finding an old book called *The Midnight Path* down at Cupboard Books. I've always been fascinated by occultists like Aleister Crowley, and this book is the autobiography of one of his peers. The man's name was Jean Tremblay. He was born in France, but he ended up moving across the English Channel before finding his way into Crowley's circle for a time. Eventually, he ended up residing in New York City. There, Jean grew in magical reputation until famous residents were visiting him. The entirety of Tammany Hall was rumored to attend his monthly parties at the Chelsea Hotel. During the height of his notoriety in 1925, he vanished.

The Midnight Path was found six decades later in a gas station near Bird City, Kansas. Extensive handwriting analysis established the autobiography as authentic, and the book was quickly reprinted by an enterprising small press. Unfortunately, the satanic panic killed any market for the book, and the print run ended up extremely small. All of this is what I remember from the Wikipedia page, but I've always found the topic fascinating, and I was toying with creating a board game based on the subject. It might give me something to do with all my newfound free time. I'm going to try and start reading the book tonight.

Until tomorrow,

J. T.

Dr. Kiste's Notes: Jennifer's situation was not uncommon. I have dealt with many wives who have had cheating husbands. The exercise I assigned was intended to allow Jennifer to work through her feelings and provide the distance for her to reassess her emotions once the week elapsed. Past patients have responded extraordinarily well to this undertaking. Based on this first entry, I don't see any issues in Jennifer's thinking. I should note that Jennifer's journal being

found in the same location as the original version of *The Midnight Path* is unlikely to have been a coincidence. I assume Jennifer left this journal there intentionally.

Entry 2 – Sunday, March 8th

I can't help thinking about what my ex-husband might be doing. As much as I hate that he cheated on me for weeks, I still miss the couple's shorthand we had. The way I could give him a look and communicate how annoyed I was with our mutual friend Carol's latest boy drama. The way he could grab my thigh in just the right spot to let me know he wanted to screw. The sex was great, and what's horrible is that I noticed how exciting it'd gotten during the time he was cheating on me. He was trying all these new moves in the bedroom, and I loved them. It was only after I found out about Lisa that I realized where they were coming from. Now thinking about our sex life makes me want to puke.

Today's been tough. I've been dwelling way too much. I took some time off work to focus on some of my hobbies, relax, and get over Kevin, but I'm quickly realizing all this time alone is a bad idea. Maybe I'll take a trip to grab a good hoagie from that pizza shop downtown tomorrow? They make the best food. This probably isn't the kind of thing my therapist wants me writing in here, but hey, it's my journal.

Here's something weird. I found a copy of *The Midnight Path* on my bedside table this morning. I've heard about the book before, and I've always wanted to review a copy, but I have no clue how this got here. Maybe it's a parting gift from Kevin? He does still have a key to the house. Anyway, the book was written by an occultist, and he vanished under mysterious circumstances before this autobiography appeared years later. Spooky stuff. So, naturally, I can't

wait to read it. Maybe I'll dive into the pages tonight. It should make for some good bedtime reading.

Until tomorrow,

J.T.

Dr. Kiste's Notes: It is not uncommon for spouses who have been cheated on to still want their partner back. It is a little surprising how open Jennifer is about her sex life above as she would not speak about it in our sessions. This is a significant reason why the journaling exercise is successful. It makes patients discuss their issues as if no one is listening. Of course, the most severe red flag in this entry is that Jennifer has forgotten that she bought *The Midnight Path* the day prior. This is a sign that the stresses of her divorce were more significant than I initially realized.

Entry 3 – Monday, March 9th

Went to the pizza shop, Two Uncles, and got an Italian hoagie today. Tasted great. They make the best subs. The bread is shipped in from somewhere special. Philadelphia maybe? Does Philadelphia have good bread? Anyway, while I was there, the owner asked how my husband was doing. I stammered through an awkward explanation the guy didn't need. I could've gotten out of there with a simple "we split up." Instead, I gave him the whole story. By the time I was done recounting everything, there was a line of people jammed behind me. Completely embarrassing. Why am I so awkward? Ironically, the one person who'd understand this is Kevin. I want to call him, but I can't help feeling like he'd win the battle of wills if I did that. He messed up, and he should be the one to come back to me. He won't, of course.

Since I got home, I've been endeavoring to forget the Two Uncles fiasco. I started working on a board game based on this occultist I always found fascinating, Jean Tremblay. Kevin introduced me to board games, but I went crazy for them, whereas he lost interest. Making my own game has been a dream of mine for a while now. I don't feel like writing Tremblay's entire backstory in my journal, but he's an interesting historical figure. The game puts players in his disciples' shoes, trying to curry his favor, learn spells, and pay off corrupt New York City politicians. If players learn too many evil spells, they start to become tainted by darkness, which means they spend the rest of the game being hunted by The Midnight God. They need to use magic points to keep the creature off their trail.

Well, that's just a rough outline of the game. I started assembling my prototype today. It's all based on real-life occultism, specifically Tremblay's beliefs. I was inspired to start working on the game when I found his autobiography, *The Midnight Path*, on my front doorstep. I must've bought a copy online recently, but I can't recall when. Things have been crazy with the divorce, so this could've slipped my mind. That said, I would love to figure out the company that shipped the book to me because it was beaten up. There are scorch marks and scratches all over it. Regardless, I'm planning to dive into this for my evening's reading.

Until tomorrow,

J.T.

Dr. Kiste's Notes: In this entry, I was happy that Jennifer gave herself a project to focus on. Unfortunately, her memory issue continues. I can only posit that Jennifer was the person responsible for damaging her copy of *The Midnight Path* during the previous night.

Entry 4 – Tuesday, March 10th

Three days gone, and I've avoided looking back at any of my past entries. I can't say it's been that hard so far. Anyway, I'm feeling good now. I'm not going to pretend I haven't thought about Kevin on and off, but my thoughts about him felt a little less dire today.

I continued to tinker on my board game today. The Midnight Path is developing into quite a compelling little project. I might bring it out to the Board Game Coffee House for a playtest soon. The owner is super friendly, and he's great about encouraging new game designers with tips. I never could've done as much work on a project like this if my husband was still here. He always distracted me from my passions. Now I'm free to do what I want when I want. Although, I can't blame anyone else when something's wrong in the house now.

The front door was open when I woke up today. It wasn't swinging in the wind or anything like that, but it was open a fair crack. I spent the early part of the day looking for any critters that might've gotten in overnight. No idea how I managed to leave it open like that. Reminds me of the time I left my car running all night. Unlike that instance, I don't have any drugs to thank for this mistake.

One good thing did come out of the error, though. While I was poking around the house, I found my small, locked safe under my bed. I always kept it in the closet, and I don't know how it got moved under the bed. When I opened it, I found a stack of papers I'd never seen before. At first, I was a little freaked out, but then I remembered Kevin used to have a key to the safe too. He must've moved it and hidden these in there before he killed our relationship.

As far as I can tell, the papers are from the autobiography of Jean Tremblay, the guy whose life I'm basing my board game off. Kevin must've intended to bind them and give them to me for my birthday. I know I should probably feel sad to have found a lost present from my ex-

husband, but I'm just so excited to get to read this. Copies are incredibly hard to find. I remember coming across one in Cupboard Books at some point in the past. I can't remember why I didn't pick it up at the time. Well, I'm spending my night reading this.

Until tomorrow,

J.T.

Dr. Kiste's Notes: It is exceptionally odd that Jennifer remembers working on a board game based on Jean Tremblay's work, but she cannot recall buying his book. There are also suggestions that Jennifer was having some sort of intense nighttime episodes. It appears that The Midnight Path was seriously worsened from its condition the previous night.

Entry 5 – Wednesday, March 11th

It's raining outside today. I've only managed to make it from my bed to the couch. Kevin would always talk me off the ledge when I fell into these moods before. Now, I've got no one to call. I left all my friendships on the side of the road when things got serious with the lost love. This serves me right, I guess.

I thought about tinkering with my board game, but I found it smashed to pieces. I'm not sure what the hell happened to it. Maybe an earthquake in the night? Big gust of wind? My own shoddy craftsmanship? I don't think Kevin is so vindictive that he'd break in just to smash something that was bringing me joy. At least, I hope he isn't. Probably for the best anyway. It was a complicated game. Who was I kidding? Why did I think I had any talent or ability to make something anyone else would enjoy? I'm destined to stay working in an office as a wage slave until I drop dead.

This world tells you that you can do whatever you want, but that's bullshit. You can only go as far as your family's status and wealth will allow. Born middle class? Tough luck, you'll be working a menial job until you drop dead to pay for the college degree you needed to get the menial job. It's all one big trap, and I can't help thinking we deserve a button to stop the ride and let ourselves off.

Fuck. I miss Kevin. Why did he cheat on me? Did he tire of being with someone who wasn't a bubbly, cookie-cutter member of consumer society?

I guess the only thing of interest that I can write about today, besides the black hole in my chest swallowing my happiness, is the fact that I found a few scattered pages of a book near the couch. I think they might be excerpts from the autobiography I was basing my board game on, *The Midnight Path* by Jean Tremblay. I'm not entirely sure yet, but if I can get myself off the couch, I will try to see if there are more pages around. The only weird thing about this is that I don't remember ever owning or bringing home anything related to that book. It's ridiculously hard to find. Maybe I'll call Kevin today, just to make sure he didn't stop by and drop it off without me realizing.

Until tomorrow,

J.T.

Dr. Kiste's Notes: Here, Jennifer slips into a depression. It appears her already fragile mood is impacted by the weather. Once again, Jennifer seems to have tried to harm *The Midnight Path* between entries and forgot she owned it. It's not impossible that Jennifer wrote this journal with the intention of confusing those who read it, but my opinion is that she was suffering through nightly fugue states.

Entry 6 – Thursday, March 12th

Well, per my therapist's instruction, this is the last entry I need to record before reviewing the previous pages to look for catharsis. Tomorrow, expect me to write something profound about what this breakup has meant. While I know I've still got a long way to go, I'm feeling better today than yesterday.

I woke up on the couch around midnight and realized I'd wasted my entire day feeling miserable. Time is the one thing you really can't get back in this life. It's the one personal resource we shouldn't undervalue. So, when I woke up in the middle of the night, I brewed some coffee and went about setting things right.

First, I rebuilt my board game. I even made some excellent modifications to it. I think people will really respond to this version. Then, I quit my job. Yeah, I know it's a bold step, but I just can't go back to that place and act like a drone for the rest of my life. Game designing is my passion, and I will sink or swim in that field. Lastly, when the morning arrived, I gave Kevin a call. I know. Not a good idea.

But the conversation was amicable, and I think enough time had passed that we were able to really discuss what happened. He'd said my anger and depression at where I was in life had started to rub off on him. I apologized. Oddly, the conversation took a sexual turn near the end. He told me Lisa didn't please him, and he was really missing our time together. I was advised to make these entries entirely honest, so I'll admit that I met up with Kevin this afternoon, and we were intimate. God, it hadn't been that great since we'd first met. And I felt so empowered knowing that he was now cheating with me.

Afterward, I even showed Kevin my game. He loved it. He's never loved any of my projects before. After playing, Kevin seemed different somehow. Calmer maybe? I asked what our fling meant, and he told me he planned to end things with Lisa and return tomorrow.

I've won him back, and he won't leave me again. Not after everything we've gone through. He's even agreed to support me while I create games. It's going to be better than ever.

I spent the rest of the day cleaning up the house in preparation for his return. Thankfully, I hadn't yet thrown out any of the stuff he'd failed to take with him when he left. I restored it all to its rightful place. In the process of cleaning up the house, I collected a ton of pages from a book I think might be *The Midnight Path*, the basis of my board game. I have no idea how they ended up in my house, but I'm attempting to reassemble them. There are burn marks on some of the pages, and a few are cut up. It looks like someone went through a lot of effort to wreck and scatter these throughout my home, but I've been here for a week and haven't noticed any signs of a break-in. Why would someone risk jail just to hide ruined pages anyway?

Since Kevin and I were back on good terms, I called him about the book scraps. He told me I needed to read through the pages. Kevin said the game I'd made managed to convey the book's message to him, but I needed to fully understand it myself. I was a bit perplexed, but I loved that he suddenly shared my passion for Jean Tremblay. So, I'm stapling this book back together and diving into it tonight.

Until tomorrow,

J.T.

Dr. Kiste's Notes: This entry is exciting to start with because Jennifer seems to have come out of her depression ready to re-take control of her life. Unfortunately, reaching out to

Kevin appears to have been a significant step backward on her road to recovering from the divorce. Kevin's actions are typical of a serial adulterer as he jumps at the chance to cheat on his current lover with his ex. It's odd that Jennifer didn't seem to have any negative feelings about this. Once again, Jean Tremblay's book appears as if Jennifer has no recollection of buying it. Furthermore, it seems as if she'd tried to violently exorcize the book from her life the night before. Jennifer's continued attempts to rationalize what is happening are extremely concerning. It appears she may have slipped into a severe delusion. As is popularly accepted, people with serious mental disorders don't often recognize that they have them, and this journal clearly illustrates Jennifer was unaware of her own growing instability. As to Kevin's newfound interest in Jean Tremblay, I believe he was lying to get back into the good graces of Jennifer.

Entry 7 – Friday, March 13th

What the fuck? I just reviewed my previous entries. I don't remember buying *The Midnight Path* in Cupboard Books. I don't remember ever trying to read it. Everything else in the pages is precisely what happened, but all my mentions of Jean Tremblay's book are total mysteries to me. Am I losing my mind? Was someone else breaking in and swapping my journal with a forged one? Could this have been Kevin's doing? I guess that would fit, considering what happened last night.

Kevin went back to Lisa after our time together, and he took a power drill to her left eyeball. He must've been having a breakdown for a while. His cheating could've been the first sign, and I completely missed it.

Of course, the cops seem suspicious of me. I'm sure they think we conspired to get Lisa out of the picture, but they aren't arresting me yet because Kevin made no attempt to conceal the

murder. He apparently killed Lisa with the front door wide open, and the neighbors phoned the cops. Kevin didn't resist when the police arrived, but they said he looked like he was coming off a manic episode. I'd never noticed him having mood changes like that before. I was always the one whose emotions swung like an amusement park pirate ship. They think something snapped inside of him. Apparently, he kept babbling about my board game. I showed it to the cops and told them everything about our day yesterday. I even showed them my sixth journal entry. They said they'd be back soon with further questions, and they'll need to collect my journal and game as evidence. No way in hell I'm letting that happen. The game is the first thing I've ever made that anyone's liked.

So, I'm going to bring it straight to the Board Game Coffee House and get as many people as possible to playtest it. Jean Tremblay would want me to spread his message.

I'm shocked at how invigorated I feel by this decision and everything that's happened today. Lisa is dead, and Kevin will be locked up. A fitting end for a woman who took what wasn't hers and a husband who cheated.

I'm cured. The source of my pain is gone, and I have a new passion in my life. Hell, there are plenty of blank pages left here for me to start my own gospel. It will be the beginning of my own version of The Midnight Path.

Until tomorrow,

J.T.

Dr. Kiste's Notes: This entry is, of course, the most concerning. Initially, it appears Jennifer is facing the delusion she has created regarding her copy of The Midnight Path, but then she is consumed by it. Her excitement over Lisa's death shows latent sociopathic tendencies, and

she appears to adopt Jean Tremblay as her personal prophet. It should be noted that this fascination with Jean Tremblay may be why she only wrote her name out as J.T. in the journal. Perhaps, she wanted to revel in the fact that she had the same initials as the object of her obsession. Of course, while this journal points to a deranged mind, it is unknown how Jennifer Tillinghast managed to convey her insanity to others. Six customers were killed by people who played her board game version of The Midnight Path on 03/13/2015. In addition, Jennifer and her game have yet to be located. Procuring and reading a copy of Jean Tremblay's The Midnight Path will allow me to gain further insight into Jennifer's mind. I have already ordered a copy to review.

End