

Clot

*A brief roleplaying game
by Tim C Koppang.*



Clot

The Second in a Series of Brief Roleplaying Games for Two People by Tim C Koppang.
You will need a friend, a deck of cards, and about 20 minutes.

First, remove the Kings, Queens, Jacks, 3s, and 2s of ♣s and ♠s from a deck of cards. Also set aside the Ace of ♥s. You won't need the rest of the pack. Read through these instructions. Find a comfortable place to play. This will take about 20 minutes.

Second, shuffle the cards and have them at the ready. Place the A♥ face-up where you can both see it. Read the following aloud to your friend:

You don't have time for this. It's 8 o'clock on a Saturday. You came from your expensive job at the bank, working weekends again. Dad is already at the restaurant. He picked the place, Sangué, on the 50th floor downtown. It's ostentatious, but admittedly your style.

Third, your friend should take a moment to define a few things about the main character in this story because, as of now, the both of you know only the sparsest of details. Is this character a man or a woman? Name? Age? Married? Decide quickly. Then read the following aloud:

You walk over to the table where your father is sitting. Before you can sit down, Dad rises with his arms outstretched. There is an awkward embrace; you sit. The chair catches on the carpet as you scoot in. Silence. The waiter arrives to take your drink order. Dad orders a Gimlet. The waiter leaves for the bar, and Dad beams while he starts the conversation: "I called you last night. You didn't pick up. Guess you don't have time for family anymore with your so-called 'job,' huh? Anyway, I'm glad you're here now." You shift in your seat. Before you can answer, the waiter returns. As he is placing the Gimlet on the table, you reach for your cellphone and unintentionally elbow the waiter. The drink glides through the air: slow motion. You feel your blood freeze in anticipation of the inevitable. The glass crashes into Dad's chest. Explosion.

Fourth, ask your friend how the main character reacts. Your friend is playing the main character. You are playing the father. You know how the father will react to the spilled drink, but your friend does not. The father loves his child, but is also manipulative. He hasn't told anyone about his health problems. Will he keep his secret? You and your friend are in charge of defining the familial relationship and why it is so strained. Suss out the details by exploring the situation moment to moment. Introduce new complications. Answer questions such as, "Why are they meeting for dinner?" or "Is the mother still in the picture?" Follow up on new plot developments. Don't summarize, explore.

Fifth, you and your friend should take it from here. If one or both of you aren't feeling uncomfortable during the game, increase the tension. Narrate proactively, and stay in the moment. Try not to make this silly. Tone matters. You each have your characters. Negotiate to define other important details. The action must remain in the restaurant. Either of you may play the staff and other patrons; however, remember that the story must revolve around the strained relationship between child and father.

Sixth, when you or your friend need inspiration, turn over a card. Work together to integrate new details into the story based on that card:

Jack	Lover	♣	Anger
Queen	Mother	♠	Hurtful
King	Money	2 or 3	Quiet Pause

The cards operate like narrative punctuation marks, setting up new events and dividing others. With the exception of the 2s and 3s, you should interpret the restrictions listed above in any way that makes sense. However, you cannot ignore a card entirely. Once a card is turned, it must have consequence. Be creative. When you pull a 2 or 3, ignore the suit. Instead, you or your friend should narrate some detail of the restaurant without dialog. Whatever you choose to describe may reflect symbolically on the struggle between child and father, but don't force it. Create a quiet moment. Once finished, return to the main action.

Seventh, after the the second card in the deck is drawn, and no later than after the fifth, you or your friend may insert the A♥, also known as the *clot card*, into the deck. To add the clot card, one person says that it is time. The other cuts the deck. The person who said it was time, places the card face down on the deck, and the top half of the deck is replaced. From now on, the clock is ticking, the clot is rising to the surface.

Finally, the game ends after you draw the clot card. You won't make it through the entire deck. That's okay. Indeed, when the clot card is inserted into the deck, it's a good idea to start planning for a conclusion. When the clot card is turned, read the following aloud:

Dad pauses, just stops. He waves his left arm above his head and moves it up and down in a circle like a windmill two, three times. With his other hand he scratches at his chest. He coughs, and looks at you eye to eye. And then he collapses, unconscious. You hear the clatter of a fork bounce off the rim of a nearby plate: another guest in shock.

The father has just had a heart attack. The story is ending. You and your friend should finish the current scene, and then narrate an ending. Use all of the details you have discovered so far, but stay in the moment. In other words, do not create an epilogue. Tie up any loose ends — or don't. Unresolved issues can remain, but you should create a satisfying ending. ☞