

Love Virtually

By

Lauren Teo

OVER BLACK:

BUTTON-MASHING SOUNDS... IRRITATED CURSING, and underneath, PERSISTENT KNOCKING ON THE DOOR...

INT. ROOM - NIGHT

Close on RAYMOND's illuminated face (30s, unshaven) in a dark room. He's wearing a VR headset, deep in concentration at a blaring source of light before him.

The camera pulls out slowly, revealing hollow noodle cups, empty mineral water bottles, and used tissue scattered about the room. We see that he's playing a computer game -- a completely VIOLENT one from the sound of it -- with his gamepad in the tight grip of his button-mashing hands.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
(knocking on door)
Boy ah! Open the door! Dinner is ready.

Raymond doesn't hear, he's too busy killing zombies.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
(bangs door)
Open the door, oi! PLEASE. Alex brought his girlfriend!

Raymond cheers at the screen -- it's the final showdown! He keeps a firm grip on the gamepad, violently mashes the controls.

The doorknob rattles to the beat of his mashing. Keys JANGLE.

The bedroom door flings open and a flood of light streams into the man cave.

MARGARET LAI (late 40s), menacing silhouette with a plate of dinner in hand, stares angrily at her deadbeat son. She registers the scene before her.

From the back, Raymond's hands shake violently in a jerking-off motion in time with grunts of frustration. Blood and gore on the computer screen.

Margaret SCREAMS.

And it shocks Raymond out of his headset. He turns around, just as ALEX (20s, sterling younger brother) and his new beau, FELICIA, check out the commotion from behind MARGARET.

(CONTINUED)

Mixed looks of disgust from Alex and sympathy from Felicia.

ALEX
(to mother)
You sure he's not adopted?

RAYMOND grabs his plate of food from Margaret, eyes briefly meeting Felicia.

FELICIA
(politely)
Hello.

Raymond manages a small smile at Felicia before he closes the door on them. He returns to the computer table.

ALEX (O.S.)
(to Felicia)
Aaand that was my brother. No job,
no girlfriend, no life.

MARGARET (O.S.)
Enough, please... Be civil to your
brother.

ALEX (O.S.)
He's like this because you're
always spoiling him. Look who's the
least civilized one here.

Raymond puts on his headphones and starts eating.

LATER

A fork returns to a now-empty plate.

Soft knocking on his door diverts his attention.

FELICIA
Bye, Raymond. It was nice meeting
you.

A small parcel slides underneath into his room.

FELICIA
Heard you liked gaming so... I
brought this beta copy for you.
Hopefully you'll like it.

Raymond waits till her footsteps fade. He hears Alex bidding goodbye to his mother.

Raymond inches closer and picks up the parcel.

(CONTINUED)

It's a CD-GAME. In bright red letters, the title '**LOVE VIRTUALLY**' against a cheesy romantic background. He examines the disk, sees the instructions... 'boost your skills'... 'DATING SIM!' and '100% REALITY!'.

Raymond scoffs at the insult. Tosses the cd onto the bed.

MARGARET (O.S.)
Must let me know when you both are
getting married! Bye bye!

Door slams in the distance.

Raymond reconsiders. He grabs the game and loads the CD. He wears his VR headset.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARK - DAY

VIRTUAL WORLD

A colourful park with romantic music. There are couples in the bg with player IDs above their heads.

Raymond isn't taking this disney-esque setting too well.

GAMEMASTER (O.S.)
New player identified.
Registering... Raymond Lai Wee Fuk.

Raymond cringes at the mention of his name. He looks about for the source of the voice.

GAMEMASTER (O.S.)
Calibrating ideal match...

Raymond sees a girl before him. She smiles. Before he can smile back, she changes to another girl, then another, and another. Jump cuts of different girls (and a guy) until finally, it stops at a brunette with an open face.

GAMEMASTER (O.S.)
Match found. Registering date match
for Raymond...

Loo Shi Ning.

As if on cue, Shi Ning grins at him. Sticks out her hand.

(CONTINUED)

SHINING

But sometimes people call me
Shining Loo.

Raymond's lip twitches to the side, but he catches himself
and doesn't laugh.

RAYMOND

Uh... I'm Raymond.

GAMEMASTER (O.S.)

Game session will end when player
team achieves couple status.

RAYMOND'S POV

A love meter appears unobtrusively before him, just at the
side of his vision. Its love percentage is currently at 0.
Raymond notices a small dropdown menu ('RECOMMENDATIONS') at
the corner as well. He points in a gesture to tap it.

GAMEMASTER (O.S.)

(in background)

Love Virtually boasts an 80%
geographical replica of Singapore.
As it is only a beta version,
updates and overseas dating sites
are not yet available.

The dropdown menu expands to show recommended date ideas
according to Shi Ning's preferences: good food; movies;
playground nostalgia.

SHINING:

So where shall we go for our date?

BACK TO NORMAL PERSPECTIVE

Raymond looks back at Shi Ning. Thinks.

CUT TO:

EXT. MONTAGE (PARK)

TITLE CARD:

DATE #1

Quick cuts in monotony:

1. Raymond serves Shi Ning cup noodles at his home.
2. Raymond and Shi Ning watching a movie in his room.

3. Raymond and Shi Ning awkwardly sailing down from the slides at a playground (on separate sides). Shi Ning looks bored as hell.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Both are resting at the bottom of the slide.

RAYMOND'S POV

The love meter has barely moved. Only a 10% increase.

RAYMOND

Huh?

Raymond checks the dropdown menu. The recommended dating ideas have been striked out.

BACK TO NORMAL POV:

RAYMOND

(mumbling)

But I followed the walkthrough...

SHINING

What walkthrough?

RAYMOND

Oh, no... nothing.

Awkward silence.

RAYMOND

Will you be my girlfriend?

SHINING

(incredulous)

What? No!

RAYMOND

Why?

SHINING

I barely know anything about you.
It's too soon.

Raymond sighs.

REALITY IN RAYMOND'S ROOM

Real-life Raymond moves to take off his headset.

(CONTINUED)

GAMEMASTER (O.S.)
Warning: Sudden abandonment of
current game session may compromise
hard disk data on computer.

Raymond freezes.

RAYMOND
what the--

BACK TO VIRTUAL WORLD

RAYMOND
--fuck?
(to gamemaster)
This game sucks!

Raymond stands up. Shi Ning follows suit, a picture of
disappointment.

SHINING
You're giving up already?

RAYMOND
Um, I just want to leave the
game...

SHINING
But you did nothing!

RAYMOND
Well I didn't really want to play
anyway.

SHINING
(sighs)
Okay, fine. If you *reeaally* want
to leave, at least give me a good
date. Okay?

RAYMOND
Didn't we have one earlier?

SHINING
(chortles)
Are you serious? That was nowhere
close to enjoyable.

RAYMOND
But that's cos you've been very
hard to please!

(CONTINUED)

SHINING

Who'd be pleased with such a
thoughtless date! You barely spoke.
It was at your house. I can just do
these kind of things myself, you
know. The whole point of going on a
date is to get to know each other.

RAYMOND

Okay.. okay, I get it.
(scratches head)
Let me try again.

EXT. MONTAGE (PARK)

TITLE CARD:

DATE #2

1. Raymond and Shi Ning at a coffeeshop. He awkwardly orders food from a stall. Both dig into spicy Ayam Penyek and regret it instantly. They share a laugh at each other's faces.

2. Raymond and Shi Ning cycling at the park. He almost collides into her. Shi Ning teaches him how to ride.

3. Raymond and Shi Ning chilling at the beach. By now, they have warmed up to each other.

EXT. BEACH

Waves lapping gently over two pairs of feet.

RAYMOND

Are you enjoying yourself?

SHINING

I am! It's a nice date.

(pauses)

Are you enjoying yourself?

Raymond considers this question.

RAYMOND

(surprisingly happy)

...Yeah.

Silence.

(CONTINUED)

RAYMOND

Besides the toilet, I don't think
I've ever been out of my room
before...

(gestures to the beach)

Unless this counts.

SHINING

It definitely counts!

They enjoy the lulling murmur of ocean tides.

SHINING

Why don't you leave your room?

RAYMOND

I... I'm not so good with people.
Being in my room, I feel safe.

SHINING

Yet here you are with me.

RAYMOND

Maybe it's because you aren't real.
I'm not too afraid to speak.

SHINING

In this game, I am as real as you
want me to be.

Shi Ning looks at the waves gloomily.

SHINING

Unlike you, I would love to leave
this 'room'...

(gestures to the space around
her)

I want to experience life as fully
as I can. Travel the world, meet
people... like how I am here with
you today.

Raymond considers this.

RAYMOND

I could always come and visit you.
Bring you around.

SHINING

Really?

(CONTINUED)

RAYMOND

Really.

(shyly)

I'll try to get out of my room
more... go to the places the game
hasn't added geographically yet.

Shi Ning smiles, touched.

SHINING

I would love that. Tell me about
your adventures outside the room!

They share a laugh.

SHINING

(looks skywards, addressing
GAMEMASTER)

I think he can go back now. I want
to be his girlfriend!

Raymond's jaw drops.

SHINING

You'll come back, right?

Speechless happy nodding.

RAYMOND

See you.

GAMEMASTER (O.S.)

Endgame. Session has closed.
Logging out Raymond Lai Wee Fuk...

Raymond fades out. He's gone.

GAMEMASTER (O.S.)

... And cut!

Shi Ning relaxes, rubs her shoulders and groans
exhaustingly.

GAMEMASTER (O.S.)

Good work, Dr. Loo. Rehabilitation
rate seems high.

SHINING

If he returns for a few more
sessions, he should be able to
function normally in society again.
I'll make sure he shines!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

10.

GAMEMASTER (O.S.)

Extremely likely. I will relay the
good news to Margaret. It's a
wonderful recovery speed for her
son.

BLACK

END TITLES:

LOVE VIRTUALLY ('VIRTUALLY' gets a strikethrough, is
replaced with 'THERAPY')