

studies in comparative matchmaking methods

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by [casualbird](#)

Summary

“Made for each other,” Tanaka asserts. “Gay volleyball coaches. It’ll be just like you and Suga, but like, a little weird ‘cause they’re our dads.”

Sawamura looks at them knowing there is so much to unpack, there, but he’d rather throw it all away and live ascetically.

Hinata, on the other hand, is awed. Nebulae burst in his eyes, his mouth hanging slack. This, he understands, is true love.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single schoolteacher in possession of a good volleyball team must be in want of a husband. Karasuno helps.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Shimizu is the first to make the discovery, knowing full well what a man sunk with love looks like. The first of anyone—before sly-smiling Sugawara catches on, before even Takeda's realized that his wiles are truly setting in. Certainly before Ukai, who labors on and on under the delusion that there is a heterosexual explanation for whatever he is doing.

It's obvious to her. The way Ukai chews his cheek at the start of every practice, like he needs a cigarette badly; the way Takeda's laugh pitches just a half-step sweeter for him. The way they purse their lips, wring their hands; the absurd amount of attention they pay to making sure their jacket collars sit just right.

The way they watch each other watch the boys—it's nearly luridly domestic. Nestling right in, even as Takeda apologizes on every third breath, even as Ukai insists that this arrangement is *temporary* and *oppressive to him*.

Shimizu demurs, when she sees them at it. Leafs through her little notebook, diligently taking down the scores. It's not her affair, after all, not her place to intervene. Even if it was, she wouldn't.

Let sleeping dogs lie, and wait 'til they wake up—because she is certain that they will.

Not that it's any of her business.

Still, if one was to watch her closely during practice, they might catch the vestige of a smile, her ankles crossing and uncrossing with just the smallest sign of a spark.

After all, it's the same way she is for Michimiya.

It is several weeks after Shimizu's revelation that the same comes knocking for Sugawara—at five and change in the morning, over a bleary bowl of cereal, and then *oh, goodness*.

They've got it bad, he notes, with all the certainty and glee of a true scholar. They've got it bad, in the middle of practice when someone makes a move Takeda hasn't seen yet, and Ukai turns and explains it to him, always unprompted. Which is precious in and of itself, he thinks, but the crux of the matter is the way Ukai looks at him while he's at it, that twist of flusterment that's met only with avid interest, a dogged little smile.

Sugawara, being an intellectual, recognizes Takeda's face as the one Sawamura wears sometimes, while he's being helped with higher math, or just when he loves him particularly much.

It is a fascinating synthesis to be made.

If they were his juniors, if they were just people on the street? Well, it's already nigh-impossible not to ruffle old Take-chan's hair.

Alas. It is not to be—not if he cares about his dear captain's blood pressure, which he does, immensely. So. He keeps mum.

Read: he only tells Sawamura. And Azumane. And he only gets a *little* kick out of their flabbergasted faces.

Azumane's eyes widen while Sawamura's narrow.

The peer review board, then, is unanimous on Sugawara's findings. And on what must be done with them—they declare, in almost perfect unison, “no.”

Of course, Sugawara could have figured as much. Of course, it was to be expected. Still, he flicks Sawamura on the nose, makes his moue and tells them they're no fun, to which they respond that they are aware.

So. He leaves it be—save for the occasional knowing smile, incisive sidewise glance.

About a month passes like that. Takeda will raise his hand to the back of his neck, and Sugawara will beam bright until his boyfriend rolls his eyes. It is enough.

And then Tanaka stumbles upon an astonishing revelation: Coach Ukai is among his simpering brethren.

He feels, of course, like a soldier called to war, a patriot, a good comrade. Heroic like a firefighter, a crusading genius like Dr. Salk.

Not that he knows who Dr. Salk was.

Still.

At his earliest opportunity, walking home from practice on that fateful eve, he calls a conclave on this matter.

“We gotta *help him*,” he exhorts, eyes wide and fingers salute-stiff. “He's *one of us*.”

Sawamura just sighs, a requiem for any peace there might have been in his life. “I thought it was your mission to love Shimizu-san from afar.”

Tanaka and Nishinoya fix him with twin glares, resolute like heavy metal poisoning.

“Of course you wouldn't understand,” boasts Tanaka, moving as if to flip the hair he doesn't have. “Noya and I are *brothers*, and that means that neither of us gets to hog Kiyoko-chan.”

“Also,” Nishinoya cuts in, matter-of-factly, “we know we don't have a chance. But *Coach and Take-chan*...”

“Made for each other,” Tanaka asserts. “Gay volleyball coaches. It'll be just like you and Suga, but like, a little weird 'cause they're our dads.”

Sawamura looks at them knowing there is so much to unpack, there, but he'd rather throw it all away and live ascetically.

Hinata, on the other hand, is awed. Nebulae burst in his eyes, his mouth hanging slack. This, he understands, is true love.

And it makes sense, too, now that he thinks about it. Lately when they decide to call time-outs—it's a silent, mutualistic thing, like the freak quick.

Which makes him think of Kageyama. Which makes him blush.

But there is something *more important* at stake, just now, and Kageyama would just call him *numbnuts* anyway.

(Affectionately.)

(He thinks.)

Anyway.

“What do we do?” The words spill from him at a bright patter, like a dog who’s just realized it’s being taken for a walk.

Tanaka beams.

“Easy,” he says, as though it is as obvious an impulse as whipping off one’s shirt.

“We lock them in the equipment room.”

Sawamura swears, in that moment, that he can feel himself greying. He shuts the enterprise down with all the impunity of a health inspector deep-sixing a rancid restaurant and resolves to re-evaluate the choices that he’s made.

He tries it, when he gets home, once he’s washed away all the day’s volleyball grime. But just before he huddles up in bed--

Sugawara, 10:36 PM: babe~~~

Sugawara, 10:36 PM: how do you feel about harm reduction?

Sawamura, 10:38 PM: I thought I could trust you.

Sugawara, 10:39 PM: oh you can <3 <3 <3

He mummifies himself in blankets, and commits himself to re-evaluating his boyfriend’s choices instead.

It gets worse in the days that follow, not least because Sugawara is clearly plotting something. Hinata has taken it upon himself to spread the good word, witnessing about it to anyone who’ll give him the time of day, not to mention the people that won’t.

“How about this?” he asks, trying to spin the ball on the end of his finger. (The operative word is ‘trying.’) “I ask Coach to come and help me with something, and then I tell Take-

chan the same time and place, and then??”

His eyes slit, conspiratorial and clearly proud of what seems to be the first brainwave he’s ever had.

“I *don’t* go.”

It’s almost an elegant solution. Tanaka remains wedded to his seven-minutes-in-hell stratagem, while Nishinoya clamors that some situation must be contrived to see Coach and Takeda ride into the sunset together on Takeda’s little Vespa.

“Wait,” Tanaka says, snickering. “Take-chan drives a Vespa?”

“Well, yeah. You’ve seen the little green one in the parking lot? Whose else could that be?”

“Fuck. Take-chan is *so* cool.”

Even new arrival Yachi has her own theory, and Sawamura supposes he at least ought to be glad that she feels she can contribute.

It’s difficult, though, when that idea is pooling their money to send them to a hot spring.

“I-it’s romantic!” she says, but acquiesces quickly after that to the idea that they are all high school students, and that volleyball means none of them have jobs.

It is romantic, though. They all have to give her that.

All except Kageyama, really, who persists in his objection to the union on grounds that Coach will not make them better at volleyball if he is busy being gay. And Tsukishima, who simply believes that romance is dead.

And so it goes for days. Hypotheses are dreamed, debated, never tested. The committee talks itself in spirals, down byways of flash mobs and romcom anime hijinks until they are thoroughly sick of being clueless teenage children surrounded by clueless gay adults.

“I think it’s our duty to just fucking tell them,” Nishinoya says, at a strident sergeant’s bark.

This proposal is abandoned as quickly as Sawamura can roughen up his voice, make existential threats to Nishinoya’s neck.

“What about harm reduction?” Sugawara says, as self-satisfied as a purse dog.

Sawamura only sighs. “What’s your idea?”

A smile curls across Sugawara’s face then, glittering fey. “Oh,” he says lightly, “nothing. It’s only Suga-Senpai’s Idiot-Proof Matchmaking Scheme.”

The forum is instantly silent, instantly rapt.

“Patent pending,” Sugawara adds. “I tried it a few times in middle school, and I swear, forty percent of the time, it works every time.”

They are more than willing to take the odds.

“Do tell,” deadpans Sawamura, with a love that could abide the end of the world.

“Well,” says Sugawara, with the air of a stage magician. “First I bake at least two dozen cupcakes. The ones with the Oreos in the bottom of the wrappers?”

Sawamura knows these cupcakes, and is very nearly swayed.

“And then I eat half of them with you, because I love you, and Asahi can have some, and maybe Tsukki if he behaves himself—”

“The point,” Sawamura presses.

“The point is, I go up to Take-chan, and I say this, I say ‘oh, I made these cupcakes for my boyfriend—’ it’s very important that I say *boyfriend*—’but I made too many. Why don’t you share the extras with Coach?”

He says this very sweetly, very coyly, as if he has no idea what he is doing. It only makes him sound more suspicious, really.

“And then, Take-chan shares my *delicious* cupcakes with Coach, and there you have it—I don’t think you could eat cupcakes with someone and not end up in love.”

The gallery is overwhelmed with the genius of this. The simple elegance, the coquetry, the tantalizing promise of Sugawara’s pastry.

Sawamura still says no—but doesn’t resist for long.

It’s better than any all-fired speech Nishinoya might make, after all. Better than imprisoning them together in the rank equipment room. And he really does wonder how Sugawara manages to make the cupcakes so perfect every time. Even though they’re from a box mix, even though the frosting’s always kind of lopsided.

So. He gives his grudging, grumbling assent.

Sugawara smiles, and lofts his cupcake in a toast to ingenuity, to gay volleyball, to the shine in Takeda’s smile when he handed over the cupcakes. Sawamura humors him, and lifts his own as if to clink a glass, because that is how love works.

Come practice time, Takeda’s still grinning when he hands back Sugawara’s tupperware. Sugawara’s heart bounds, exclaims *eureka!* fingertips vibrating with the excitement, the great scandal of it all.

“Did you like them, Sensei?” His head cocks, his eyes crinkle. The innocence on his face is as thin, as transparent and flimsy as cellophane, but it does not matter.

“Oh, absolutely! Thank you for thinking of me, Sugawara-kun!”

He has *won*, and perhaps he can start hawking Suga-Senpai’s Idiot-Proof Matchmaking Scheme as *fifty* percent effective in the future.

Also, he is going to be able to kiss Sawamura’s nose and lilt *I told you so*.

“They were a huge hit in the staff room!”

The penny drops from the height of the Empire State. Sugawara follows the force of it, boring through the ground at terminal velocity, toward a stygian despair.

Sawamura shall have to kiss his nose, then, and he shall wear it as a stigma of defeat.

He wallows so deeply in it that evening that he does not notice the tiny smear of pink frosting at the corner of Ukai’s mouth.

You see, gentle reader, before the cupcakes were ever abandoned to the coffee-fueled feeding frenzy of the staff room, Takeda girded, gussied up, hopped on his Vespa with precious cargo in tow. One pink-frosted cupcake to the Sakanoshita store, where he would often waste his lunch breaks.

Just the way he’d gone there weeks before, blazer buttoned and heart clenched in hand, to deliver to his colleague a bit of news.

“Ukai-kun,” he’d said, with shake and sunshine in his voice, “tonight I’m taking you to the community center.”

Ukai’s teeth, in that moment, clenched around the filter of his cigarette. “The community center,” he repeated, flatly. Not without interest, and with fondness only very thinly veiled.

“Yep!”

“Sensei, I, uh, I gotta watch the store tonight. Much as I’d like to... go... do whatever it was you were gonna do.”

A smile, a smug little shake of the head. “No you don’t! I’ve already spoken with your mother, and she says she’ll watch the store from eight to ten today and for the next *several* Wednesdays,” this last bit shimmering with pride, “so you and I can go take a very thorough first aid class!”

If it was possible for a person’s face to be blank and blushed at the same time, Ukai’s was. If it wasn’t, then he was making a very good effort of it anyway.

“A first aid class,” he said.

“Mhm!” A little trill, that, the kind of noise that made him want to form his palms to Takeda’s narrow shoulders. “So we can look after the team!”

Ukai's tongue gravitated, slowly, to the nick in his front tooth: the one he'd gotten on a face receive his second year, the one Coach Ukai Senior told him to walk off.

"I'll buy you a nightcap, after," sang Takeda, as if mistaking this hesitation for... hesitance.

He wasn't. He was only speechless, only choking on affection, only trying to muster up a *yes* that wouldn't sound so breathless, so much like *reading in*.

It didn't work, of course, but Takeda never seemed to mind. Just smiled even wider, chirped that it was *a date*.

And it was.

End Notes

hello hello! i really hope you liked this, it was a total blast for me to write. i'd never written an outsider pov fic before, but it was a great time and i'd definitely consider doing it again.

it is important to note that you too can make box mix cupcakes as excellent as suga does. simply use melted butter instead of oil and add an extra egg. an oreo in the bottom of the cupcake wrapper never goes amiss either. this is a tried and tested recipe--i used to make it for my friends in high school, and they were met with much acclaim!

please, do leave a comment if you enjoyed this, and come hang out with me on [twitter \(18+\)](#). if you like, i'm always looking for new hq pals!!

much love!
mye

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