

## The Scientific Method by Abbie Dalton

It all started in mid-August, because of High School Musical.

Abbie got to stay at Caroline's later than normal, because she was already halfway into the movie when her mom came to get her.

She was *thrilled*, because she loved staying at Caroline's as late as they could, which wasn't usually *that* late, since Caroline usually watched her on school nights. And since her birthday, her mom hadn't been staying very late after work. No, in the last few weeks, they'd been leaving a lot faster. Caroline usually always said stuff like, "Got a ton of work to do tonight!" too.

But it was the week before school was starting again and HSM was longer than the usual shows she watched when she was here after dinner.

Caroline always let her build a big pillow and blanket nest in front of the TV and her mom only let her do it on special occasions. Caroline also wasn't as strict about making Abbie pick it all up herself...

Anyways.

Caroline and her mom sat behind her on the couch, as she laid on her tummy with her head propped in her hands, feet kicked in the air – just how she liked it. She loved humming along to the songs and laughing at Caroline when she sang the wrong lyrics on purpose.

Only, she wasn't enjoying the movie the way she normally did. Because *this* time, she frowned in thought at the movie as it played, she just kept thinking about the part where Troy and Gabriella are about to kiss.

They definitely were, Abbie knew that, 'cuz she wasn't stupid. She just turned ten, after all. She wasn't some little kid, anymore. She knew what kissing looked like.

They leaned in and then – they leaned back super fast because of being interrupted. Like they were nervous and all jumpy.

She'd seen the movie before, tons of times.

But this time, that *moment* kept grabbing her attention and she *didn't know WHY*. She thought about it the whole night, tapping herself on the forehead with the palm of her hand until her mom took a hold of her wrist before she went to bed and asked, "Honey, you've been looking off all night. What's going on?"

But she didn't know!

"Troy and Gabriella almost kissed," she said with a shrug.

It was the truth.

Her mom arched her eyebrows, searching her face and Abbie stared up at her. It was the truth! Finally, her mom sighed and stroked a hand through her hair in the way that Abbie always liked to feel before bed. “Okay, then. Now, go cuddle in. It’s later than bedtime.”

She did. Cuddle up, that is.

And after tossing and turning for *forEVER*, she finally settled and closed her eyes. Okay. Sleep. Good.

In that space between awake and dreams, it hit her.

It hit her brain so hard and so fast, she sat straight up, her eyes staring wide across the room at her lightning-bolt shaped nightlight.

“Oh my god!” she whisper-screamed to herself.

That was it!

She couldn’t stop thinking about the almost kiss in the movie, because...

Because it was *just like* how her mom and Caroline had looked a few weeks ago, the night before her birthday party.

She’d gotten up because she was too excited to sleep! Because Caroline was the freaking coolest! And she’d given Abbie the idea for her cupcake party, and all of her friends were going to be there, and she hadn’t seen some of them in over *a month* since it was summer break. And she’d gotten out of bed to go see all the cupcakes that they’d been baking –

And her mom and Caroline had been standing just like they did in High School Musical when they almost kissed. They were standing so close! And her mom was touching Caroline right above her boobs! Abbie knew *that* was inappropriate touching unless you were in a con-sen-sual relationship.

She started bouncing where she sat in bed at the idea, a smile taking over her face as excitement bubbled through her.

Wouldn’t it be THE BEST THING EVER if her mom and Caroline dated?

“The best thing *ever*,” she whispered to herself in the dark room.

Only.

She frowned.

They *weren’t* dating. They weren’t. She knew it, because they didn’t kiss and they didn’t hold hands and they didn’t say they were dating.

But the thing that Abbie knew – was that grownups were stupid sometimes.

And, just like her mom said, everyone needed help sometimes.

She snuck out of her bed and tiptoed *so light* to the door and opened it enough to peek out. She had to be extra careful, 'cuz this door and most of the other doors in their apartment after they moved out of dad's house squeaked real, real loud.

But Abbie knew what she was doing. She only had to open it juuust enough that she could stick her face out and NO more. That's how she listened in whenever her mom was out there talking to people.

Anyways.

She listened as hard as she could to make sure her mom wouldn't know she was up – she could hear her humming to herself in the living room and the very faint, gentle scratch of a pencil against a notepad. The usual late-night stuff.

Quietly, Abbie went to her closet and dug around for her folders from last year, pulling out the green one for science class.

She had to do this right.

She grinned to herself as she found the paper she was looking for – The Scientific Method printed over the top. When you had a question you needed answered, this was how you did it. Miss Morton said so, and then she taught them how to make electricity from a potato, so... she knew what she was talking about.

Sitting at her desk, Abbie smoothed her hand over the notebook paper and grabbed a pencil. The blue mechanical one, because *that* was lucky.

Question: Could mom and Caroline get together?

Tapping her pencil against her chin, she closed her eyes tight and thought back.

They could have *so much fun* if her mom and Caroline fell in love! They could have so many sleepovers and Caroline could be with them on most weekends instead of just a couple days during the week and only *some* weekends.

Biting her lip, Abbie stared down hard at the paper...

How was she supposed to do science to figure out the rest?!

"*When in doubt, research to figure it out!*" Miss Morton's voice came back to her and she nodded solemnly.

Research.



"Mom?" Abbie asked, the following Sunday as she sat at the kitchen table.

Her mom stood at the sink, washing the dishes from lunch, as she looked over her shoulder. “Yeah, honey?”

Abbie sat as straight as she could and cleared her throat, while that weird butterfly feeling she always got whenever she wasn’t toooootally honest with mom started acting up. “Can I use your laptop?”

“Mmhmm. What do you need it for?” Her mom asked, arching an eyebrow over her shoulder.

Darn the time Abbie put “*way too much!*” on her mom’s card on the app store two years ago. She’d just wanted to get some stuff while she played games... she didn’t know how much money it was going to be!

Feeling her tummy tighten up, she put her hands under her thighs and smiled. “I wanna look up the books on the summer reading list.”

She’d come up with that one last night and was feeling rather proud of herself.

Her mom gave her a confused look, gray eyes inquiring at Abbie over her shoulder. “You already did your summer reading. *The One and Only Ivan*, remember?”

Of course Abbie remembered; they’d gotten the book at the library in July and Abbie had loved it. It made her cry! She’d told her mom all about it, and then Caroline found the movie on DisneyPlus for them to watch a few weeks ago.

Her eyes widened and she was so happy her mom turned to adjust the water temperature while Abbie bounced in her seat, trying to *think*. “I – yeah, but I...”

*Re-framing your situation isn’t about lying; it’s about telling the truth in a different perspective*, she’d heard her dad say once when she sat outside of his office.

“I finished *A Series of Unfortunate Events* a few days ago, though, and I want to find a new one. And Norah said that in fifth grade, she read another one from the list and that she bets my first book report will be one of them and I can read it early.”

There! That *was* true! She did finish her last book and she did want to read another book to be ready for her first book report so that she wouldn’t have to do it later.

Her mom nodded and gave her a smile, one that made Abbie’s tummy squirm in that kinda guilty feeling.

But she was “reframing” for a good cause!

An hour later, her mom was in the shower and Abbie sat with her laptop open in front of her.

She excitedly tapped her fingertips against the table for a few seconds as she bounced in her seat before typing in her first question –

how can you tell if someone is in love

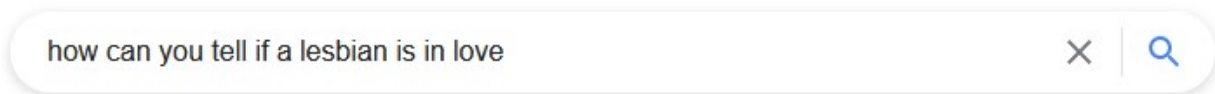


Abbie learned from this search that you can tell if someone is in love in *a lot* of ways –

They remember all the little things about the person they are in love with, they think even boring things can be fun or “worthwhile” just because they are with the other person, they look at the other person a lot, they touch the other person a lot, they introduce you to important people in their lives. You feel safe with them. Something that’s dull and boring with anyone else takes on a new life when you experience it with them.

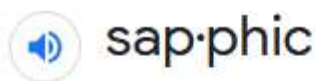
Okay... Abbie scribbled all of this down in her notebook to reference later. This seemed like it would be good.

She screwed her face up in thought before she typed in her next search –



'Cuz Caroline was a lesbian. So, maybe that was different.

She clicked on the link that said *SapphicSpark's Creator Speaks on How You Know if She Really is The One*. Well, after she Googled the meaning of sapphic –



/ˈsɒfɪk/

adjective

1. relating to lesbians or lesbianism.  
"sapphic lovers"

- perfect!

“This dating app has taken the qu...eer world by storm in the last first years, with their multi-faceted approach to connecting women to one another...” Abbie fumbled over a few of the words, before she shook her head.

She didn’t have time for all of this! Scrolling, she moved down to what was important; that was called *skimming*.

*The falling part of the love process is what I'm here for. I facilitate relationships and it's magical to be able to see when it really works. At my events, I can always tell when someone is truly feeling that love connection.*

*It's in the look in her eyes when she sees or thinks about the woman she's falling for. It's seeing the woman who is so put together get flustered. It's seeing the smile on her lips that she can't control, the blush in her cheeks that is unstoppable, the twinkle in her eyes... the signs of a woman in love are unmistakable when you know what you're looking for.*

*And as a professional, I do.*

*When a woman finds her perfect match, you can just hear it in the way she describes her. It's a wonderful thing.*

Well... this seemed easy!

Her mom and Caroline spent a lot of time together. They always laughed and – and they all had a great time. They always liked to sit together on the couch and they talked about boring work stuff but it was never angry like it was between her mom and her dad.

Abbie was bouncing in her seat as she cleared the history in the browser as she grinned brightly and wrote in her notebook.

Hypothesis: Yes. Because they are perfect for each other!

“Ab? You all set?” Her mom asked as she entered the room, toweling off her hair.

Abbie snapped the laptop shut, quickly. “Yep! Everything is great. I know just what to do.”



Experiment  
Data + Part |: Caroline  
Analyze

This part... well, this part was a little harder.

Abbie knew she had to figure out a way to know if Caroline was in love with her mom, but HOW!

She did the smartest thing she could think of and went to the smartest person she knew, a couple days later.

She and Caroline were sitting on the chairs next to the awesome pool at Caroline's condo. It was wicked hot and Norah and some of Norah's cousins were going to come over later to swim here, too, but Caroline had picked Abbie up early to spend the day while mom was at work.

Which was the *best*. She even liked Caroline's pool more than the one at her dad's house, because *this* one had a waterslide. Plus, Caroline always jumped in and played with her even if only for a little bit on days where she was busy. Dad hated swimming, 'cept for when he was doing "his laps" in the morning.

Caroline had given her a pair of sunglasses that matched her own at the beginning of the summer – when her mom had seen them, she'd paused and shook her head but smiled, so no one was in trouble – and they were perfect for Abbie to look at Caroline out of the corner of her eye.

“How do you figure out something really hard? Like, when you wanna know something about someone, but you don't know?”

Caroline turned to look at her, tugging down her glasses to arch an eyebrow at Abbie. “Like what?”

“Um,” she thought back really quickly. “I think, um, that one of my friends has a crush on someone at school,” her stomach got the bad-lying-tingle. What was that! She usually only got that when she lied to mom! “And I might like him too, maybe.” Ew, she didn’t. “But I wanna know, about my friend, first.”

Caroline nodded slowly and looked thoughtful – she always took Abbie seriously. She liked that – before she said, “Well, sometimes the best way to go about it, is just to be direct with your friend. Some questions aren’t the easiest to ask, but it’s the easiest way to avoid miscommunication.”

Abbie pursed her lips in thought. Hmm.

Okay, she couldn’t just ask Caroline if she was in love with her mom! She couldn’t do that, because it would get way too *obvious*.

Nope.

Instead, she decided she would *be direct* but... a little less direct than that.

“Caroline, do you think my mom is pretty?” She asked the next time she was at Caroline’s.

School was starting in less than a week and she had to get a move on. Soon, she might have actual homework and stuff on her plate!

They had a setup – Caroline sat at one side of the table with her laptop and work stuff out while she worked from home some afternoons and Abbie had her side of the table. During the school year, she would do her homework there or read or whatever else.

Today, she was working on her plan.

Caroline coughed, fingers stopped their tapping on the laptop, as she stared across the table at Abbie, “Excuse me?”

“My mom,” she spoke slowly for Caroline to hear her. “Do you think...” She paused, staring at Caroline, “She is pretty?”

Caroline’s eyebrows drew together as if Abbie was asking her a hard question, before she let out a weird laugh. “Why are you asking me that?”

“Why won’t you answer my question? Is it because you don’t think she is?” She asked back, before her bottom lip poked out in a pout. What if Caroline really didn’t think so?

Caroline quickly shook her head, though. “No, no, your mom is... she’s beautiful,” she said, and her voice got really quiet in that moment. “She’s one of the most beautiful women I’ve ever seen. She’s,” Caroline coughed again, before she blew out a deep breath and looked at Abbie. “Which is why you’re so darn cute yourself, Abbacado. But why are you asking?”

It *was* there.

Abbie gaped at Caroline for a few seconds, because – oh my god! That lady from the dating app article was so right! It was on her face!

Caroline joked at the end, but – but Abbie could *see* it. Caroline thought her mom was the most beautiful woman she'd ever seen, and her voice didn't sound like any other time when Caroline *ever* spoke. Nope! That was something completely new.

Excited, she had to bite her lip to stop from smiling too much, as she prepared the story she'd come up with.

She tapped her fingers on the table. “We got an assignment on our student portal and it said that the first thing we're going to do in class is write about someone we love and why we love them. We have to describe their *traits* with examples. What do you think mom's are?”

Abbie held her breath in her chest. This was *it*.

Caroline gave her a look before she let out a deep breath and sat back in her seat. “Your mother is... she seems simple to understand, but she's actually a very complex woman.”

“You like complex things, that's why you're a lawyer.”

Caroline laughed. “You're right.” She ran her eyes from Abbie down to her own hands, as she spoke, “Hannah, she's beautiful, for sure, but that's not what you should start with when you talk about your mom. She's really strong. So determined, and she's smart enough to be able to make all of the things she wants come true. That's – it's something really special, Ab. She's so, so funny, in quiet ways. And talented. She knows a lot more than people give her credit for.”

Oh!

My!

God!

The dating app lady was right about *everything*!

Caroline couldn't stop smiling and her cheeks were turning a little red and, and her eyes looked all mushy.

Holy CRAP!

Caroline cleared her throat, her cheeks getting even more red when she looked back up.

“Anyway. Your mother is beautiful. But she's a lot more than that, so make sure you are going to put everything else in your paper, too.”

Findings: Caroline totally loves mom!!!





## Experiment Data + Analyze Part 2: mom

All right, it turned out that Caroline was the easy one.

She was already a lesbian! And she was always honest with Abbie, way more than her mom was a lot of the times.

But... Abbie had no way to know if her mom liked women, she realized. Her mom was tougher to know that stuff, 'cuz she was married to Abbie's dad and she didn't ever date anyone else.

She'd tried the way she did with Caroline, at first, the night her mom picked her up.

"Do you think Caroline is pretty?" She asked on the drive home. She could just see her mom's face in the rearview mirror, and she watched closely.

Her mom hummed under her breath as she turned off of Caroline's street. "That's a weird question, hon, why do you ask?"

"Uh," her mom looked at her student portal with her; she knew Abbie didn't have that assignment! "I was just wondering. *I think she's pretty.*"

She stared at her mom closely.

"Well, I do, too. Caroline is very pretty," her mom confirmed as she fiddled with the radio and kept driving.

Abbie deflated. It wasn't her mom's lying voice; she definitely thought Caroline was pretty. But she didn't get all soft, the way Caroline did about her mom!

Ugh.

Her latest Google search told her that people can be nervous to date after a divorce and that might cause them to "hide their feelings."

signs someone is in love but hiding it



This meant Abbie had to do more *watching*, because her mom wasn't going to just say it the way Caroline did.

Mostly, she watched for touching. That was the first thing the internet said was a dead giveaway.

But it was hard! Because her mom did touch Caroline... like a *lot*. Whenever they watched movies and shows, they always sat close or if they went out, they brushed shoulders and arms.

But, her mom was always touching *her*, too! What if she just like to do that kind of stuff?

Abbie got her first clue when Robin came over one night for dinner. Her mom sat close to Robin at the table as they talked and Abbie ignored their words for once. She was too set on watching her mom's body language to listen in.

Her mom always put her hand right on Caroline's thigh during dinnertime or movies at Caroline's house. Always.

She stared and stared as her mom leaned in close to Robin as she laughed at something she said, and her hand fell –

Abbie caught her breath in her throat –

And her mom patted Robin's arm, before she put it back on her own lap.

Abbie's heart *soared* and her fork clattered to her plate loudly as she smiled super bright. Finally! A good sign!

Her mom looked at her, "Is everything okay, honey?"

Abbie nodded quickly, "Yes! Everything is *great!*"

It wasn't everything she needed to know; there was still more research she needed before she could conclude her findings with her mom. But she had a good start!

Until Norah totally blew her findings up after a couple weeks at school. They shared a recess now that Abbie was in fifth grade, which was *awesome*.

"You wanna come over this weekend? I can ask my dad?" Norah asked while they sat under the play escape.

Abbie nodded. Sleepovers at Norah's were so much fun. The only thing that made them better were when – "Do you think we can have it at Caroline's?"

Norah smiled excitedly. "Yeah!" Before she deflated in a frown. "Oh, wait, I dunno. My dad said she was going on a *date*. I don't know if it's this weekend or not?" She shrugged. "I can ask though."

As Norah kept talking, Abbie stared at her.

A DATE?! No!

Time was running out. What if Caroline liked this new lady, and fell out of love with her mom?! With *them!*

With a whole new sense of purpose, Abbie waited only until her mom came into her room to say goodnight to bring it up.

"Did you know that Caroline's a lesbian?" She asked, looking up from where she lay in bed as her mom tucked her in.

She felt her mom freeze as she tucked the blanket in. “I... do know, yes.” Her voice was soft and questioning as she looked down at Abbie.

Abbie let out a relieved breath. Okay, good. This all would have been real hard to figure out, if her mom had been *that* clueless.

Still, she stared up at her, unwavering, her eyebrows drawing together as she asked, “Did you know that she went on a date?”

The light grip her mom had on the blankets went so tight instantly, Abbie could see her knuckles turn white.

“Did Caroline talk to you about her date?” Her mom asked, and her voice sounded really weird. Like, tight.

“You knew?!” Abbie was *outraged*.

If her mom knew Caroline went on a date, how could she not just tell her she loved her, then! If her mom knew they could lose her, how could she!

Unless... unless she really didn't love her.

Everything inside of her deflated at the thought and it made her heart hurt.

Her mom cleared her throat roughly before releasing the blanket and smoothing it over Abbie.

“Caroline and I are both adults and friends, so yes, I knew.”

“Caroline said the lady was nice,” she grumbled, huffing out a breath and pushing her head back against the pillow extra hard.

Her mom gave her a serious look. “Did Caroline tell you about her date?” She demanded again.

Abbie shook her head slowly. “Um, not really. Norah told me! So, I asked Caroline.”

Her mom blew out a deep breath, but she looked... different. Her shoulders were tense and she didn't give Abbie the look she normally gave her at bedtime. All warm and soft and cuddly.

Instead, she looked – she looked sad.

“Okay. Good. Caroline shouldn't talk to you about grown up things.”

“Why is Caroline going on a date a grown up thing? I know people date; I'm ten! And Caroline is my friend,” she insisted, because it was true. Even if her mom didn't want to date Caroline, it didn't mean Abbie didn't get to love her.

“She is, but...” Her mom closed her eyes tightly, taking in a deep breath. “You know, you can talk to Caroline about whatever you like. She *is* your friend.”

Her mom lifted up her hand and stroked through Abbie's hair. It wasn't as soft as usual and she didn't stay in her room for as long, before she said, “Goodnight, I love you.” And left her bedroom.

But Abbie couldn't sleep. Caroline went on a date. And her mom knew about it. And she didn't know why her mom was so weird tonight, either.

She definitely couldn't sleep when she heard her mom in the kitchen. Normally, her mom was super quiet after bedtime, but – Abbie frowned as her eyes opened.

Her mom was *not* really quiet right now.

The drawers and cabinets in the kitchen were closed much louder than normal and her mom was muttering to herself. Abbie couldn't hear the words from her room, but she knew it was happening.

Confused, she waited for it all to stop and then even longer – for everything to be all quiet – before she rolled out of bed.

She slowly opened her door and peeked her head out. “Mom?” She whispered, but didn't get an answer.

Abbie padded into the living room, seeing that the light was still on, and saw that her mom was asleep on the couch, still dressed and everything. She had her sketchbook in her lap.

This happened sometimes, when her mom was really tired. But it actually hadn't happened that much in the last six months; mostly, it happened when they'd first moved here.

Still, Abbie knew what to do.

She pulled the blanket from the back of the couch and put it over her mom's lap before she slid the sketchpad out of her hands.

There.

Only – she froze.

It was Caroline. In the sketch, it was CAROLINE!

And she looked... her mom didn't have to *say* she thought Caroline was the most beautiful woman in the world, 'cuz she drew it.

Abbie stared down in amazement at the sketchpad before she gave her sleeping mom a quick look. Still sleeping.

She quickly glanced through some of the pages and had to hold back her SQUEAL.

Her mom never drew people! The only person she *sometimes* drew, was Abbie. And that was only because “I love you more than life itself,” her mom would say.

But there was more Caroline in here than there was of even Abbie!

Which *had* to mean...

YES!

Findings: I think mom loves Caroline!



Report: Hypothesis CORRECT!

She and Norah watched *The Parent Trap* at their next sleepover and Abbie was enraptured.

She guessed she wasn't the first person to come up with this whole plan! Though, hers was a little different... she still watched with rapt attention. Any little bit could help.

Norah turned to her, eyes wide. "You know what would be the *coolest* thing?! If we got your mom and my dad together! We could be like the movie! We could be sisters!"

Abbie nodded slowly. What was the word she was thinking of? Delicate. Yes, she had to be *delicate*. "That would be cool," she said slowly, before shrugging. "But, I don't think it could work."

She hoped the look on her face wasn't a dead giveaway; she was trying to be nice.

Norah's face fell. "Why not?"

"My mom... she really likes someone else," Abbie hedged. "They just aren't together."

Yet, she silently added on, a slow grin sliding over her face as Norah shrugged and turned to watch the movie again.

After all, Abbie had just made plans to go to her grandparents house next weekend so that her mom could go away with Caroline.

Every website said couples needed alone time together, and if that meant a weekend without Abbie so that they could profess their feelings and kiss and stuff... she was going to do it.

She was going to do whatever it took.

Mission ~~Match~~maker is a GO!!!