



the
BOY
project

Notes and
Observations of
Kara McAllister



a novel by
KAMI KINARD

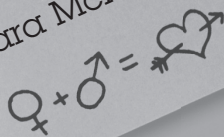


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THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD:

an organized way of finding
answers to our questions
(according to Ms. Sabatino)

Step 1: Ask a Question

Question: How can I find a boyfriend?

Monday, January 1

Bedtime

I am starting this experiment because I have no choice. Well, I have no choice unless you consider being a lifelong boyfriendless social outcast destined to die alone a choice. Which it isn't.

To be honest with you, I probably would have acted sooner if I'd known how truly desperate my situation was. Which I didn't.

I was really in the dark about it. As dark as the closet I went into with Chip Tyler last night after he spun the bottle and it pointed to me.

Chip Tyler is a total dweeb. I've known him since kindergarten. I've grown up a lot since then. Chip hasn't. So I

wasn't exactly hoping that I would end up in the closet with Chip on New Year's Eve, but I guess I was a little excited that I might *finally* find out what it feels like to be kissed. But no. As soon as he shut the door behind us, he took my hand in his. Then he shook it. That's all.

I'm not exactly glamorous, but it seems like Chip Tyler would jump at the chance to kiss anything with lips. I'm kind of outraged, to tell the truth, that he thought he was too good to kiss *me*. (Sometimes you have to be outraged to keep from getting hurt.) I mean, what girl walks away from a game of spin the bottle with a handshake? A handshake!

Even Tabbi, my slightly plump, slightly spacey BFF finally got to experience lip-to-lip contact when she went into the closet with James Powalski, whose parents have apparently lost their senses of smell. If they hadn't, they'd have invested a few bucks in sticks of deodorant waaaaay back in sixth grade. Seriously.

But Tabs, who was completely thrilled by the experience, said his BO didn't bother her because you don't breathe all that much when kissing anyway. Right. Now she's an expert.

Being jealous of Tabbi and her one-minute kiss with someone who smells worse than my dad's genuine lamb's wool slippers (which at this point have both the appearance and aroma of roadkill) is a new low for me.

When I came home after that disaster of a party, it hit me like a broom handle whacking a piñata: I've never had a boyfriend—not even the holding-hands variety—and *practically everyone else* has. And it probably wasn't the healthiest thing to do for my self-esteem, but I made a list. Then created a chart. I didn't like the way they turned out at all.

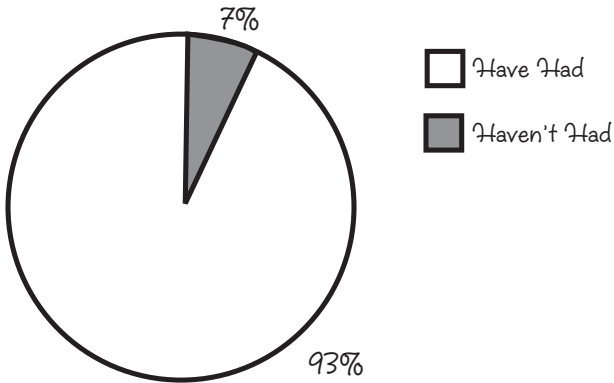
The Boyfriend Status of Girls in My Class

If they've had at least one BF (any grade, even first, like Tabbi), it counts.

| Girls in my class | YES | NO |
|-------------------|-----|----|
| 1. Anna | x | |
| 2. Gina | x | |
| 3. Colleen | x | |
| 4. Tiffany | x | |
| 5. Tabbi | x | |
| 6. Dianna | x | |
| 7. Rosemarie | x | |
| 8. Sara | x | |
| 9. Athena | x | |
| 10. Mona | x | |
| 11. La Tisha | x | |
| 12. Gabrielle | x | |
| 13. Jodi | x | |
| 14. Kara (me) | | x |

Here's what that looks like on a pie chart.

Boyfriends: Who's Had 'Em, Who Hasn't

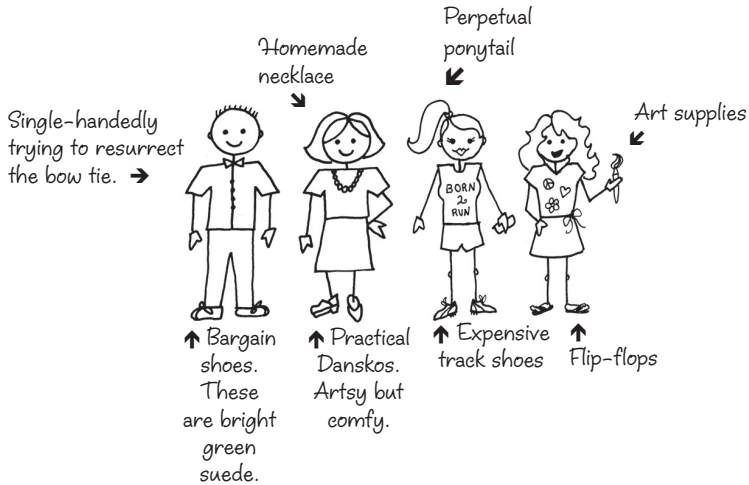


It hurts to be a sliver!

I know that making lists and charts is kinda geeky, but I faced the fact that I *am* kinda geeky a long time ago. How could I avoid coming to that conclusion when every adult in my life keeps telling me I'm smart, nice, and artistic? Smart, nice, artistic girls recognize these compliments as things adults can say when they *can't* say you're pretty, graceful, or cute—and they're too polite to say the opposite. Unfortunately, when you're twelve, being smart is small consolation for being the **ONLY** girl in your class who's never had a boyfriend.

To make matters worse, I'm also the only person in my **ENTIRE** family who has never been kissed.

The McAllister Family



I drew this picture of us in the stick-figure-rear-window-decal style, thinking I'd convince Dad to let us put one on the car like everyone else in America. My plan didn't work. "No good can come out of the general public knowing that two young ladies ride around in this particular vehicle," Dad said.

I think he's wrong about that. I think *a lot* of good can come out of it, especially if some of the single males in the general public notice it and decide to follow our car! What's wrong with a little advertising? It's not like I want to put a BABES ON BOARD sign in the back window!

Anyway, I was just pointing out that EVERYONE else in my family has been kissed. And, okay, it's a given

that all parents have kissed and more. (Not that I want to think about that!) But do I have to have a cute older sister who's left a trail of boyfriends in her dust ever since second grade?

It's not fair! Particularly because Julie and I actually kinda look alike. We really do! People are always saying stuff like "You two have *got* to be sisters." It's kind of funny, but they act like they've just solved a big old mystery worthy of Sherlock Holmes when really they just glanced at us and noticed some similarities. Neither of us has straight hair, for example, but Julie's hair is usually described as wavy. Actually, since she keeps it in a perpetual ponytail, it's more like one big curving swoop. My hair, on the other hand, is often described as frizzy. Like clown hair. Or a witch's broom.

And lucky Julie got Dad's green eyes. Mom tries to fool me into thinking *I'm* the lucky one because my eyes are "the best of both worlds," meaning I got some of Dad's green and some of Mom's brown. Most people describe this color as *hazel*, which is a word for green with brown dots flecked in it. Like mud.

So while I admit that I'm not exactly as cute as Julie, at least I'm similarly cute. Plus, sisters have something like 99.9 percent of the exact same DNA! And Julie is obviously attractive to the opposite sex, so I must be at least 99.9 percent as attractive. Since she's had tons of boyfriends, it only stands to reason that I'd have had at least one.

Unfortunately, it looks like reason has very little to do with having boyfriends.

There has to be a *scientific explanation* for this!

See, I know all about scientific explanations. After all, Ms. Sabatino started blabbing about the “scientific method” back in December so we could “use the whole winter break to work on our science fair projects.” Come on. They aren’t due until February. Even geek girls don’t use vacation time to study stuff like velocity. (Unless the experiment involves measuring how fast a desperate girl can run toward a cute boy.)

Still, I was trying to pay really close attention in science before the break, because Mom and Dad said if I could pull off all A’s this semester, they’d get me unlimited texting! Apparently they “can’t comprehend” how I can have A’s in my other classes, and a C in science.

“You love reading,” my dad said. “Science is just reading and memorizing.”

The man has a point. But he doesn’t get that I read because I want to *escape to* all kinds of cool places. Science is one of those places I’d like to *escape from*.

I try to concentrate, I really do. I sit there dutifully taking notes with my brain train chugging along just fine toward some place like Destination Understanding Plant Life. Then Ms. Sabatino will mention some word like *chloroplasts* and it’s like she’s thrown a switch. All of a sudden my engine is

steaming off in another direction, like to Destination How to Make a Bracelet from Plumbing Hardware.

But luckily when Ms. S talked about the science fair this year, she used a word that I always tune in to: *project*. And when she said that word, I suddenly imagined myself winning the entire science fair! Then I realized that if I could bring home that big blue ribbon, it would practically *guarantee* me an A in science, therefore unlimited texting! So I made it my New Year's resolution to WIN the Spring Valley Middle School science fair!

That was two weeks ago.

Now I am officially abandoning this resolution.

My new, more important resolution is this: I, Kara McAllister, will change my image before the end of the school year. By “change my image” I mean “get a boyfriend.” And I know exactly how I'm going to do it:

I'll apply both my smart-girl brains and the scientific method to the project. Hey, if the scientific method helped real scientists figure out the structure of an atom, surely it can help me figure out how to find a boyfriend!

Ms. Sabatino made us write down the steps of the scientific method so we'd be able to follow them for our science fair projects. I copied them onto a note card, then taped it in here so I wouldn't lose it.

THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD

Step 1: Ask a Question

Step 2: Do Background Research

Step 3: Form a Hypothesis

Step 4: Test Your Hypothesis

Step 5: Interpret Your Data

Step 6: Draw a Conclusion

Step 7: Publish Results

Step 8: Retest

The small size of index cards makes them perfect for inconspicuously taking notes on my subjects (boys) in their natural setting (school). The scientific term for this is *unobtrusive observation*. To tell the truth, I was glad to learn that this was a real method, because I was pretty much going to use this strategy anyway. What method of research could *possibly* be easier? All you have to do is be a little sly while looking around and make sure not to gawk or anything. Hopefully my observations will help me figure out what I need to do to change my status.

Piece of cake!

I'll be the seventh-grade version of Jane Goodall, except I'll be observing boys instead of chimps. Not that there's a huge difference.