

## Karen's Brothers

# ANN M. MARTIN ILLUSTRATIONS BY HEATHER BURNS SCHOLASTIC INC.

### This book is for my goddaughter, Rachel Andrea Eichhorn, born July 2, 1990. Welcome, Rachel Ann

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## $G_{ m otcha!''}$

"No, you didn't."

"Did too. Now you're It!"

Ricky Torres and his friend Bobby Gianelli were fooling around in our classroom. They were playing Kleenex tag, which you can play with almost anything. If you play with a paper towel, then the game is called towel tag. If you play with an eraser, then it is called eraser tag.

Kleenex tag is very easy to play. All you need is some Kleenex. Instead of tagging someone with your hand, you tag them with a piece of the Kleenex. The problem is that you can't always *feel* a Kleenex tag. Which is why Bobby said that Ricky had not tagged him.



"Do over!" called Bobby.

"No. I'm not going after you again," said Ricky. "I already got you."

"Did not."

"Did too."

Bobby leaned over a desk and swiped at Ricky's arm with his Kleenex. "Okay. Now I got you, so you have to get me back!"

Ricky ran after Bobby. Both of them ran into a desk.

#### CRASH!

It was a good thing that our teacher, Ms. Colman, had not arrived yet.

I looked at my best friends. We rolled our eyes. Boys are *so* silly. I can say that even though I am married to Ricky. He might be my pretend husband, but he is still a boy.

I have two best friends — Nancy Dawes and Hannie Papadakis. Nancy lives next door to Mommy's house. Hannie lives across the street (sort of) from Daddy's house. Nancy and Hannie and I call ourselves the Three Musketeers. We are very glad that we are all in the same second-grade class at Stoneybrook Academy.

I am glad Ricky is in my class, too. (Well, usually I am glad.) Ricky and I and another girl, Natalie Springer, sit in the front row because we wear glasses. I sit next to Ricky, which is good. But Hannie and Nancy get to sit in the back row.

There are some people in my class that I do not like. One of them is Pamela Harding. She thinks she's so great. Two others are Pamela's friends, Leslie and Jannie. They think they are so great, too.

I am not sure how I feel about Bobby Gianelli these days. I used to like him okay. Even if he is a bully. I liked him a lot when he was in the wedding that Ricky and I held on the playground. He wore a suit to school and everything. Still, I was a little cross. It seemed that lately Ricky was spending more time with Bobby than he was with me. I guess that was not Bobby's fault.

Then I thought of something. Maybe it was *my* fault. Maybe Ricky felt I spent too much time with Hannie and Nancy. Or maybe I had done something wrong. Maybe I had done something to make Ricky angry.

But what? What could make him mad at his very own wife?

I looked at Ricky. He and Bobby had stood up. They had straightened the desk they had fallen over. (And they had checked the hallway to make sure Ms. Colman wasn't coming.)

Now Ricky stuffed the Kleenex in one of his pockets. He pulled an eraser from another pocket. "Eraser tag!" he shouted.

Ricky had not even said hi to me that morning. Was he too busy? Had he not noticed me? Or was he angry?

I sat down at my desk to think.