

By Katrina Dart McPheters

(Based on a true story)

"I help you, and you help me, and that's the way that it's supposed to be" (Children's Songbook, 263).

Isabel set the table with special plates and napkins. The smell of her favorite rolls filled the house. But she didn't feel hungry. She wished she could skip dinner and play with her two chameleons, Flicker and Blink, instead. Or at least play with Flicker. Blink wouldn't come out from under the leaves in her cage. She was shy.

Isabel felt shy today too. She'd never met anyone from Russia, and now three people from Russia were coming to dinner! What if she couldn't understand them? Isabel wished she could hide like Blink.

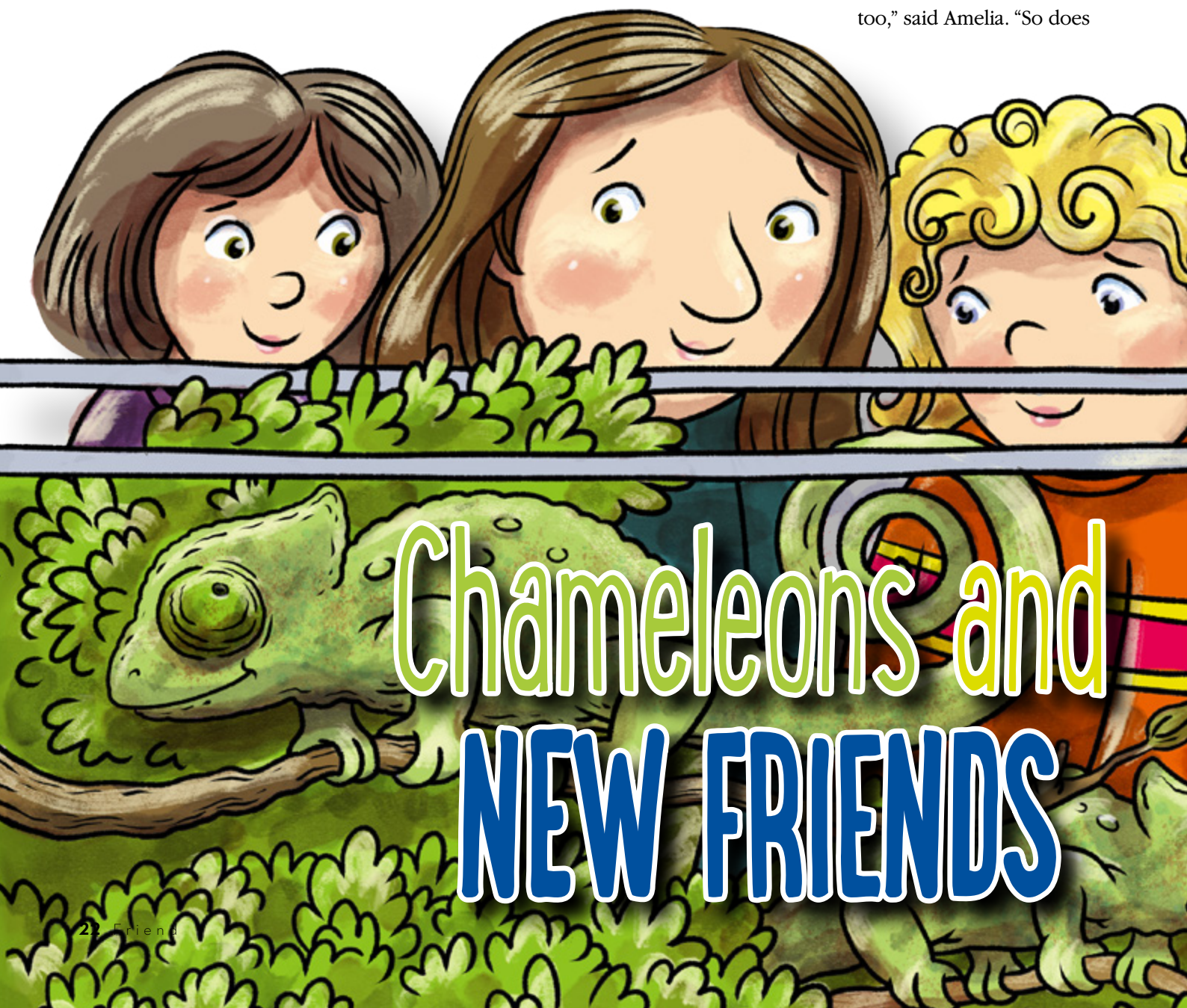
Isabel's older sister, Amelia, set out the cups. "Are you excited to meet my friend Natalia?" Amelia asked.

"No," said Isabel. "How am I going to talk to her?"

Amelia raised her eyebrows. "The same way you talk to me."

"But Natalia speaks Russian."

"Natalia speaks our language too," said Amelia. "So does



her dad. Her mom only knows a few words, but she's learning."

Isabel decided she would stay away from Natalia's mom.

The doorbell rang, and Amelia ran to answer it. Isabel could see Natalia and her parents waiting on the porch. Natalia's dad held a bowl of salad. Her mom had a big, friendly smile.

Isabel spent dinner hunched in her seat so only her head poked over the edge of the table. She didn't know what to say, so she didn't say anything.

Natalia's mom didn't say anything either, but she smiled and nodded. Sometimes Natalia translated for her.

After dinner Isabel slipped away and wandered over to Flicker and Blink's cage. To her surprise, Natalia and her mom followed. Inside the cage, Blink scuttled under her leaf again.

"Can I see?" said Natalia, pointing to the cage.

Isabel nodded. She reached into the cage and Flicker climbed onto her hand. She handed him to Natalia.

Isabel felt shy around Natalia's mom. They didn't speak the same language.

Flicker licked Natalia's hand. Isabel laughed. So did Natalia's mom.

Isabel reached in the cage again, but Blink wouldn't come out. "Come on, Blink," Isabel said. "You're missing all the fun."

Natalia's mom said something to Natalia in Russian.

"She wants to help you get the lizard," Natalia said to Isabel.

Natalia's mom placed her hand out flat. It looked like she was asking Isabel to move her hand next to Blink's hiding spot. Isabel thought about how Blink was missing out by hiding.

I'm not going to be like Blink, Isabel thought. She looked at Natalia's mom and then held out her hand. Natalia's mom placed a drop of water and some of Blink's food on Isabel's hand.

Blink turned her big eyes toward the food. Her tiny green leg stretched onto Isabel's open palm. "Good," said Natalia's mom. Blink's tail curled in a loop, and her tiny feet tickled Isabel's arm.

When it was time for Natalia's family to go home, Natalia's mom waved at Isabel and smiled. "*Poka,*" she said.

"That's Russian for 'bye,'" whispered Amelia.

It didn't matter if Natalia's family didn't speak the same language she did. They could still understand each other. And maybe she could learn some Russian for the next time they came to dinner.

Isabel grinned and waved back at Natalia's mom. "*Poka!*" ♦

The author lives in Utah, USA.



One time I was playing with my friends, and out of the corner of my eye I saw a kid crying. I didn't know who he was, but I went to help him and said, "What's wrong?" And I was able to help him!

Parker H., age 7, Utah, USA