



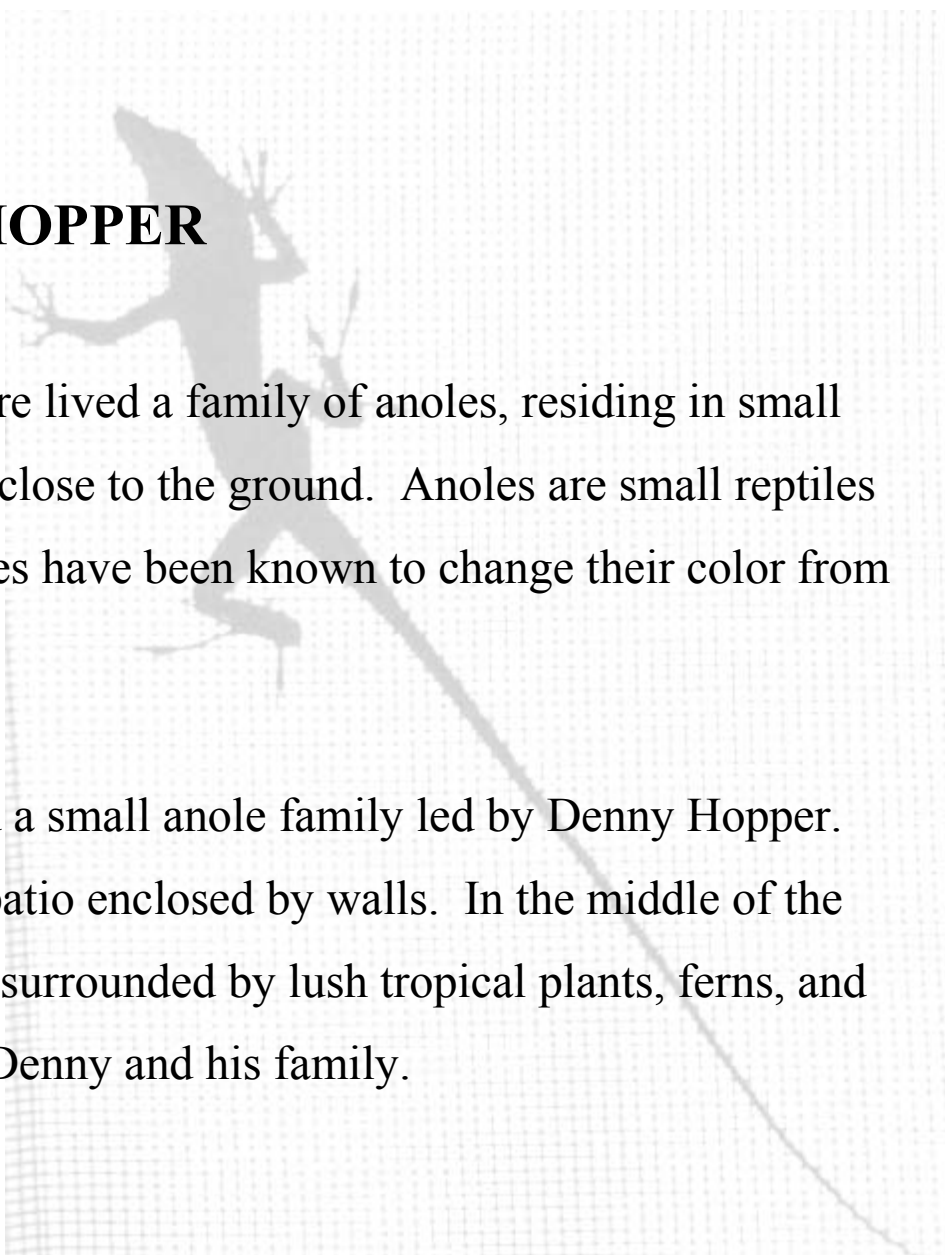
Hopper A short story by Sharyn Germ



HOPPER

Once upon a time, deep in the South, there lived a family of anoles, residing in small groups hidden among the tropical plants close to the ground. Anoles are small reptiles that look like tiny dinosaurs. Some anoles have been known to change their color from brown to green and back again.

Within the veranda of a large home lived a small anole family led by Denny Hopper. This veranda was a screened-in outside patio enclosed by walls. In the middle of the veranda was a sparkling swimming pool surrounded by lush tropical plants, ferns, and small palms that made a great home for Denny and his family.



Sometimes, from atop one of the statues in this small garden, Denny would watch The Owner and his family play in the pool, making sure he stayed very still so they would not see him. Denny was bigger than the others in his group, so he protected them. The



smaller ones, though, were daring and would often run across the screen in full view of The Owner.

Even though he spotted one from time to time, The Owner didn't know how many anoles were living in his veranda but felt sure that there couldn't be more than two or three. He was wrong, of course, but even Denny was never

sure how many members of his clan lived there.

One day, as he was walking along the top of the veranda wall, Denny came upon his cousin Johnny Darter basking in the sun on the other side of the screen. Johnny and his family lived outside the veranda, deep in the thick brush surrounding the house.



“Denny Hopper, how are you and the family doing? Do you find enough to eat in there?”



“Oh, Johnny, you don’t have to worry about us. We have a great life living in here with lots of bugs to eat! The Owner seldom ever bothers us. I can even sun myself without worrying about snakes sneaking up on me!” Living outside, without the protection of a screen, Johnny always had to keep a watchful eye out for snakes that may sneak up and eat him or his family.



Later that day, Johnny told his family about his conversation with Denny. They had always felt sorry for Denny’s group, thinking they were trapped inside the veranda. But now they began to think that maybe they were missing out on a good thing.

Putting their heads together, they worked on a plan to get into the veranda so they could join Denny's family and live the good life! They were going to ask grumpy Ned Squirrel for ideas, but he was always busy and never had time for them. But they remembered seeing Ned using an overhanging palm frond to jump from a nearby tree to the screen and back. Johnny decided that with several anoles riding a palm frond, they might be able to use the sharp tip of the frond to cut the screen. Although anoles are great jumpers and climbers, they still had to figure out a way to break through the screen.

One windy day, Johnny and a few of the bigger anoles mounted a palm frond extending over the screen. Using teamwork, they tried to rock the frond back and forth so that the pointed end would pierce the screen. But their combined weight wasn't enough. "Oh dear, what are we going to do?" they asked anxiously.

Along came Margie Mourning dove. She had been watching them from the neighbor's roof and decided to find out what they were up to. When Johnny explained what they

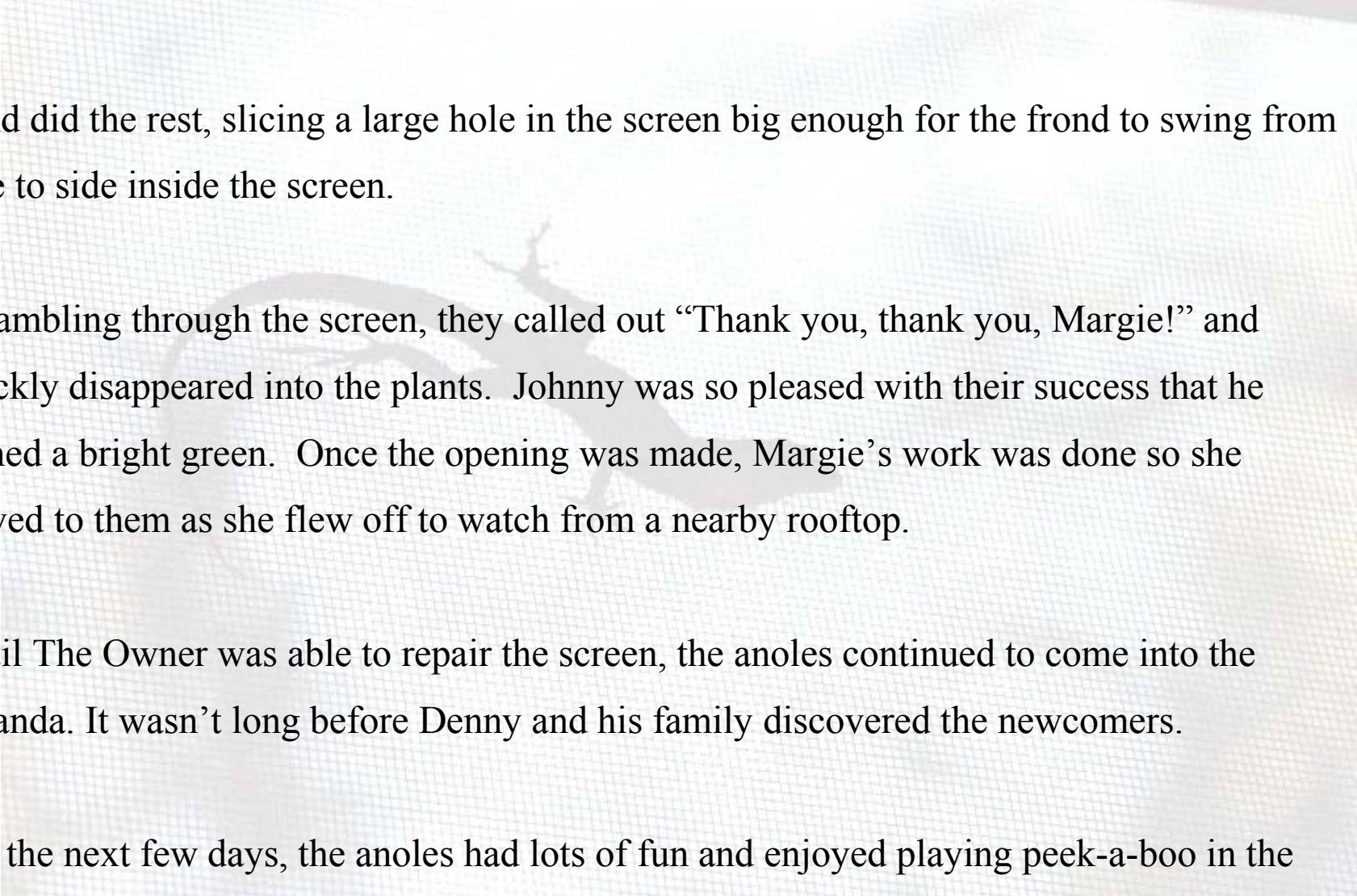
were trying to do, she said “Johnny Darter, sometimes what you wish for is not what’s best for you.”

The group continued to plead with Margie to help them. “Denny Hopper and his family have a great life in there and we want to go there, too.” Realizing that she was getting



nowhere, she ruffled her pale grey feathers and said, “You know I’ve always watched out for you and your family, even warning you when a snake is close by. I’ll help you because of all the times you’ve pushed seeds out from under the bushes to make it easier for me to find them. But I still think you will be disappointed once you get in there.”

As soon as she landed on the frond along with the anoles, it dipped straight into the screen, poking a small hole in it. Flapping her wings to keep the frond down, soon the



wind did the rest, slicing a large hole in the screen big enough for the frond to swing from side to side inside the screen.

Scrambling through the screen, they called out “Thank you, thank you, Margie!” and quickly disappeared into the plants. Johnny was so pleased with their success that he turned a bright green. Once the opening was made, Margie’s work was done so she waved to them as she flew off to watch from a nearby rooftop.

Until The Owner was able to repair the screen, the anoles continued to come into the veranda. It wasn’t long before Denny and his family discovered the newcomers.

For the next few days, the anoles had lots of fun and enjoyed playing peek-a-boo in the lush tropical garden surrounding the pool. They even ventured closer to the home, climbing up the patio furniture when The Owner wasn’t around.



One day, while The Owner's young child was playing in the pool, she came face to face with Johnny and one of his tiny cousins. They had been so busy catching and eating bugs, they hadn't noticed her until she came up upon them. For a moment, they stared unblinking at each other.

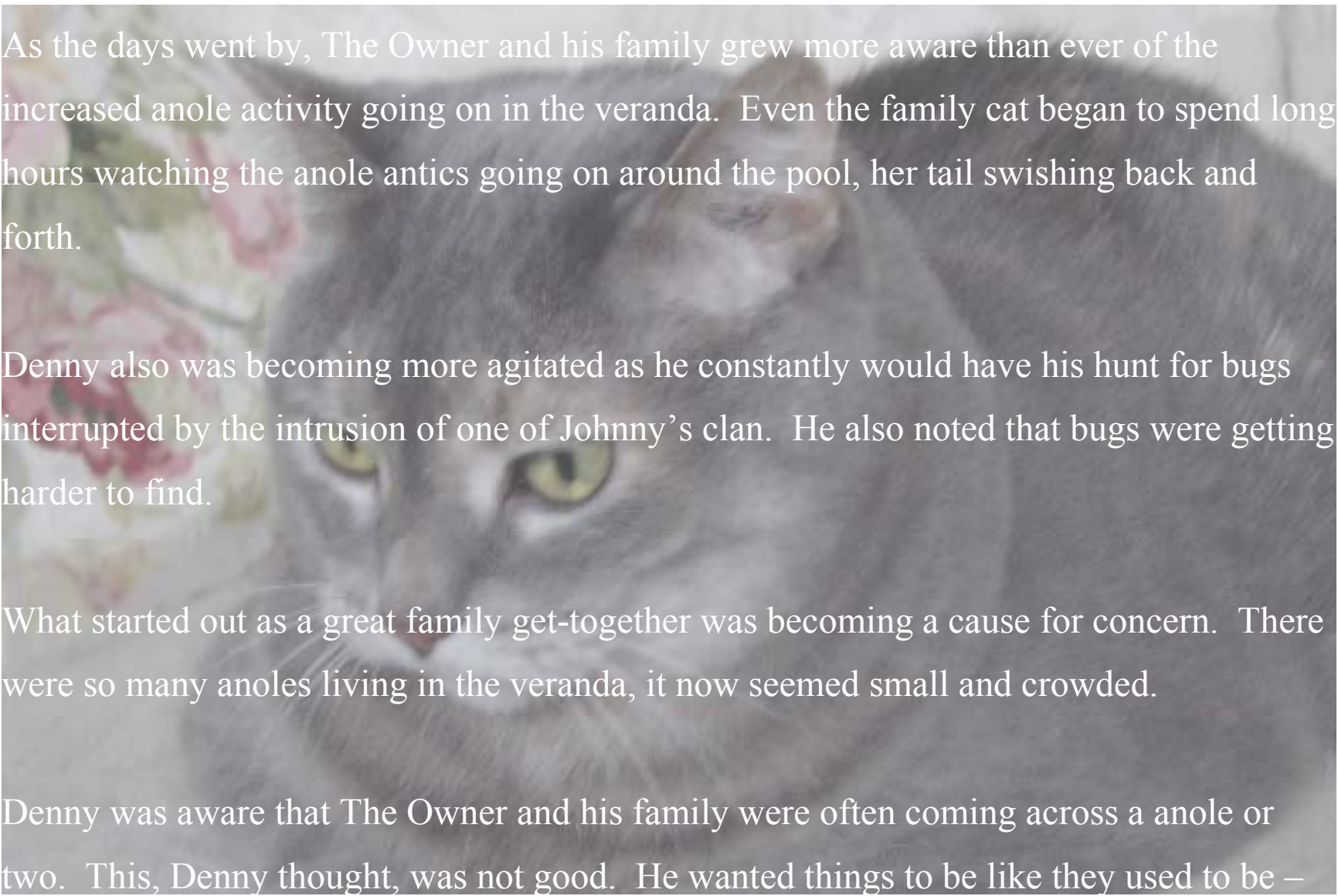
"Hello, little anoles," she said in soft voice so as not to frighten them away. Johnny's cousin turned his head in order to see her better. Johnny stood motionless for moment or two then plunged into the underbrush hoping his cousin would follow. A few moments later, she slowly moved away so the little anole would follow the big one into the plants.

As soon as Johnny's cousin ducked behind a nearby flowering bush, the little girl called out to her father, "Daddy, oh Daddy! Come see the little lizard by the pool." At the sound of her voice, he came out onto the veranda and immediately spotted two anoles on the screen and another on the wall.

'Funny,' he thought. 'I don't remember seeing so many anoles in the veranda before. They must have gotten in when the screen ripped.'

With so many anoles moving around inside the veranda, he worried that they might get into the house. Anoles definitely do not belong in the house, he thought.





As the days went by, The Owner and his family grew more aware than ever of the increased anole activity going on in the veranda. Even the family cat began to spend long hours watching the anole antics going on around the pool, her tail swishing back and forth.

Denny also was becoming more agitated as he constantly would have his hunt for bugs interrupted by the intrusion of one of Johnny's clan. He also noted that bugs were getting harder to find.

What started out as a great family get-together was becoming a cause for concern. There were so many anoles living in the veranda, it now seemed small and crowded.

Denny was aware that The Owner and his family were often coming across a anole or two. This, Denny thought, was not good. He wanted things to be like they used to be –

when The Owner was hardly aware they even lived within the lush plants surrounding the pool.

Denny, an easygoing and happy anole, had grown up inside this lanai. He's seen many things and experienced more than a few close calls; for even within these protected walls, an anole can encounter danger. But now he felt regret that he had bragged to Johnny about how great it was to live here, because obviously, it changed everything. He went to find Johnny so they could figure out a solution to this problem.

Around this same time, The Owner was also becoming more nervous about all the anoles he and his family have spotted in the lanai. One evening when The Owner and his family came out to enjoy a dip in the pool, they surprised several of the little critters playing around the patio furniture and playing peek-a-boo in the barbeque grill. As the anoles scattered, The Owner exclaimed, "This has got to stop!"

Fearful that the anoles would get into the house, but not wanting to hurt them, they decided right then and there that all the anoles should be captured and removed from the lanai.

The next day, The Owner began hunting them, which wasn't very difficult with so many of them around. Right off, he caught four and then released them just outside the veranda wall. Within a few days, most of the Darter family had been moved outside.

Yes, some of the anoles that were put outside were Denny's family members. However, they were rather enjoying their new surroundings, including a wider selection of bugs to eat. The sun shone brighter when its rays didn't have to go through a screen. There were actual trees to climb in this outside world! Yes, they decided, this was a good place to live, as well. Often they would call to their kin in the veranda to come visit at the screen so they could tell them all about their new life.

Some of Denny's family remaining in the lanai practically jumped into The Owner's hand so they too could experience the "outside."

The hunt stopped when The Owner could no longer easily find even one anole. It didn't take long for everyone to settle down and enjoy their surroundings. Denny remained in the veranda, sharing his limited space with only a few anoles. Soon, the bug population was back to normal.

Denny had come to appreciate that the veranda was a great home for him. Johnny learned to appreciate his outdoor home, where there was plenty of everything they needed, including Margie's protection from snakes and other animals. He would no longer feel sorry for any other anole, including Denny Hopper because he now realized that they each have a great place to live.

THE END