

The Tree Frog, the Toad and the Chameleon



*A Purple
Parable of our
Times*



Charles Harris

www.charlesharrisbooks.com

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Episode 2: Uncle Joey's Turn

Three years later, almost two dozen Blue Party animals battled among themselves to decide who would run against Big Donnie when his first term ended. Uncle Joey decided he had to run.

The Blue Party primary race was wild, and Uncle Joey struggled to compete. One Blue Party candidate was a chameleon named Kammy who lived in the far-left side branches of the Great Tree. She attacked Uncle Joey in a debate and damaged him badly. But that was her high point. She soon quit the race. For a time, everyone thought another frog from the far-left branches would win, maybe even a crazy old progressive frog named Bern.

When it looked like Uncle Joey would have to drop out, he remembered the strengths that had propelled his political career: Go where the voters are and tell them what they want to hear. He jumped to the center of the Great Tree and pledged to bring the garden together. He promised to bring calm and stability to the garden instead of the chaos that would come from Bern or Big Donnie. Just to be sure he could win the critical next primary, he pulled in the support of a respected old African frog named Cly, who delivered the African votes.

Uncle Joey's plan worked! He won the primary and quickly wrapped up the nomination—not because he was necessarily the best creature running, but because he was *not* Bern, and he was *not* Big Donnie.

Uncle Joey would remember that lesson. So would Kammy.

But Uncle Joey still had to face Big Donnie, who had no intention of losing.

Uncle Joey knew what he had to do. He would attack Big Donnie's character, which was easy, and make all the frogs afraid of what Big Donnie and the other frogs on the far-right side of the Great Tree would do to destroy the peace and beauty of the garden. Uncle Joey would be the garden's savior. When Uncle Joey was finished, no one would want that ugly, rich, narcissistic toad to continue to be their president. Uncle Joey was confident the ravens would help spread his message of fear and chaos, and they were happy to do it.

Still, Uncle Joey worried. He knew Big Donnie had received millions of votes when he was elected the first time. Uncle Joey had to be sure he could rally all the Blue Party creatures, especially the growing number who lived on the far-left side of the Great Tree. So, he cut a deal. He would stay in the center of the tree, where he could say he would bring people together. But he would promise Bern and his supporters to adopt many of the policies from the far-left branches of the Great Tree. And, as a final demonstration of his loyalty to Bern and Cly, he would name Kammy as his vice president, so the Blue Party would not only have the first African woman but also the most progressive senator in the Grand Convocation as their vice-presidential candidate.

The presidential race was bitter and tight. Big Donnie was impeached by the lower house of the Convocation just weeks before election day but found innocent by the upper house.

Once again, Uncle Joey's political instincts were right. He won the presidential election! The vote was extremely close, but the Blue Party barely swept both houses of the Grand Convocation as well. Uncle Joey was in control.

Big Donnie was not amused. He and his supporters claimed fraud and set out to overturn the election. It was an ugly, dangerous time in the garden. Big Donnie and some Red Party members did some very foolish things. There were violent riots at the Capitol. Big Donnie was impeached a second time, just days before Uncle Joe was sworn in as president. Again, Big Donnie avoided being convicted. Ultimately, democracy prevailed, and Uncle Joey was inaugurated as president.

Although Uncle Joey promised in his inaugural address to bring the garden together, just as he had during his campaign, his Blue Party friends on the far-left side of the Great Tree had other ideas. They moved rapidly to collect on the deal Uncle Joey had made with them. They knew the election had been close and their margin in the Grand Convocation was very thin, but they pressed Uncle Joey to govern like the election had been a progressive landslide. They wanted to use their victory before the Red Party or even the Blue Party's own members could put up any roadblocks.

Still croaking that the election had been stolen by Uncle Joey, Big Donnie refused to help the Red Party mount an effective opposition to Uncle Joey's legislative agenda. For Big Donnie, everything was all about him. Policy fights fell to the wayside as Big Donnie croaked and croaked about the stolen election.

The far-left Blue Party members were delighted with their wins in the Grand Convocation and demanded even more. The independents and Red Party voters who had crossed over to support the Blue Party were furious, believing they had been misled by Uncle Joey's pledge to bring the garden together. As he moved farther into the far-left branches of the

Great Tree, Uncle Joey began to see himself as a hero, perhaps the most important and influential president the garden had ever seen. The far-left Blue Party members fed that delusion, encouraging Uncle Joey to govern even more toward their side of the Great Tree. Uncle Joey obliged by doing exactly that.

Uncle Joey's election as president is a strange story, made stranger still by the disruption of the Great Virus that swept the whole world toward the end of Big Donnie's first term, the supply chain issues and soaring inflation that followed and the bitter political and social divides that grew out of school closures, vaccine mandates, massive layoffs and wildly expensive government support and recovery programs.

Some of the best political observers in the garden (mostly old owls plus an eagle or two) say the partisan divisions fueled by the Great Virus were the final blow to the social and political cooperation that had enabled the garden to grow and prosper and become the envy of the world. If strike one had been the Red Party's concerted efforts to make Barac's presidency ineffective and strike two had been the even uglier efforts by the Blue Party and the raven media to sink Big Donnie's first term, strike three was the viciously-divided political, cultural and social reaction to the Great Virus.

In a garden where science had always been respected, everything became politicized. Facts and assumptions that one side or the other had decided were "settled" could not be discussed and those that dared to do so were effectively canceled, usually by the raven media and the tree frog elites. "Following the science" came to mean following the *political* science that your side wanted to be true. And it was not just the Great Virus. Climate change was even worse.

Politics suffered. Instead of working together to find common ground and compromise on realistic solutions, the Blue Party and the Red Party both adopted a "winner-take-all" approach to governing the garden. Once heralded as the mark of a great statesman, seeking compromise by negotiating with the opposing party became viewed as disloyal, almost an act of treason.

As this winner-take-all attitude permeated the garden's politics, it drove two political strategies: 1) winning at any cost; and 2) eliminating constraints that reduced or delayed the spoils of winning. Both of these strategies resulted from how closely divided the garden's voters were. Out of many, many votes cast, just a few could make the difference between winning and losing. So, it made sense to do everything possible to win.

But the garden was not a pure democracy, it was a republic that included three branches of government and multiple checks and balances to safeguard the minority from the majority and, particularly, from hotheads and mob rule. These constraints, which had protected the

garden for decades, could get in the way of politicians who won a slim majority and expected to be able to do anything they wanted to do as a result.

Many of the Blue Party tree frogs wanted to eliminate the garden's structural impediments so they could pass even more sweeping legislation with their narrow control of the Grand Convocation. Uncle Joey held back on some of the most controversial changes, knowing that the Blue Party might be on the wrong side of the changes someday. A few of the Blue Party members of the Grand Convocation agreed, but it was very close. The threat of these changes hung over the garden's politics like doom itself.

By the time mid-term elections to the Convocation took place, the Red Party was out for revenge. Uncle Joey's move to the far-left side of the tree was out in the open and the Red Party was expecting big wins, partly because the incumbent president's party typically loses Convocation seats in the mid-terms. But Big Donnie was still croaking about the stolen presidential election. Worse, he was throwing his weight around by endorsing Red Party candidates he thought were loyal to him and railing against the others. Once again, Red Party politics became all about Big Donnie. Unfortunately, the best Red Party candidates were often not the ones that Big Donnie liked. Seeing this, the Blue Party supporters donated to the candidates loyal to Big Donnie in the primaries, knowing they would lose in the general election.

And then there was the issue of abortion—a difficult matter to explain in the context of the garden. Suffice it to say that the Blue Party and the Red Party had very different views and many female creatures strongly supported the Blue Party's position.

So, instead of a Red Wave sweep of the mid-term elections, the Blue Party retained control of the upper house of the Grand Convocation. It also flipped several governorships and local legislatures. The Red Party gained a slight edge in the lower house, but (unlike the Blue Party) struggled to rally their members to take a common stand on legislation, especially when Big Donnie created havoc by throwing in his two cents from a distance.

Big Donnie was still around, croaking about his stolen election and doing his best to impose a personal loyalty test on all the Red Party members of the Convocation. Two years into Uncle Joey's first term, Big Donnie still believed Red Party politics was all about him.