



UGORY, DON'T GIVE UP!

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ed Rover, Red Rover, send Ugory over!”

Ugory felt a thrill as his classmates let go of their grips on his hands so he could charge toward the other team. Meghan was on that team. And Phillip and Lacey.

People he liked and wanted to be friends with. He hadn’t made any friends since he moved here last week. This game was the first time he’d been invited to join in. He pawed the ground with one bony hoof and prepared himself to run.

If he went in too fast, he’d break the chain so he wouldn’t get to join Meghan’s team. Then again, if he could bring Phillip back to this team, he’d be a hero! Ugory shook his mane, not sure what to do.

Then someone smacked him on his back and without thinking he dashed forward, startled. Before he could stop himself, he was careening into Meghan’s team, kids flying everywhere. Except for Phillip. He hung by his shirt from Ugory’s long, slender horn.

“Get me down! Let me go!” Phillip shouted, flailing all around.

Ugory quickly bent down, dropping Phillip to the ground as gently as he could.

“You’re a freak!” Phillip said as he jumped to his feet. Soon all the children had gathered loosely around Ugory, pointing at the hole in Phillip’s favorite Harry Potter T-shirt. Ugory spun around, looking for a friendly face, for Meghan or Lacey, but all he saw were people who would never be his friends. When they moved apart to make room for him to pass, Ugory galloped away, running on all fours toward home.



Ugory burst through the front door, which got the typical and immediate response from his mother.

“Ugory! I’ve told you a thousand times—do not slam the door!”

His mom click-clacked into the entryway on her skeletal unicorn legs. She took one look at him and the scowl on her face melted away, replaced with concern. “Oh, Ugory. What happened?”

“No one likes me,” he said, dropping onto his haunches. He hung his head low so his mane covered his eyes.

His mom put her arm around Ugory’s bony shoulder. “You’re different. You have the strength of a gorilla and sometimes break things you don’t mean to. You still don’t know just how

long and pokey your horn is.” She pushed at his matted mane. “And what are we going to do with this mess of hair?”

“Gee, Mom. Don’t forget my crackety-wackety bony body.”

She squeezed him, making his bones creak. “The point is, yes you’re different. On the outside. But they’re different, too.”

Ugory looked up at his mother, her kind eyes smiling down at him.

“Everyone is different from everyone else, Ugory. You just show your differences on the outside, while most people keep their differences on the inside. But none of us are the same, no matter how it might like seem that we are.”

“But I want to be the same as them,” Ugory complained. “I want them to like me.”

“Then show them all the ways you are the same. Show them your sense of humor, your love for games, your kindness. Show them what a good friend you are.”

“But what if they don’t let me even try?”

His mother stood and sighed as she straightened the apron over her chest. “Just keep at it.” She looked down at him, her horn pointing directly at his forehead and making him go a little cross-eyed. “And don’t give up trying.”

Ugory sat by the front door for a long time thinking about what his mother said until a plan began to form. He’d show them what a good friend he could be. He’d make sure of it!



The next day at school, Ugory began to put his plan into motion.

He decided to start with Meghan. She was the most popular girl in school and he knew if he could get her to like him, then everyone else would like him, too. He got to school ten minutes early just to make sure he wouldn’t miss her before school started. He waited by Meghan’s locker, his backpack in his hands, shifting his weight from foot to foot.

She came down the hall from the opposite direction than he was expecting, so when he heard her voice behind him he whirled around. “Hi Meghan!” His horn caught her on the side of the head, throwing her against the locker. Meghan grabbed her head and her friends screamed.

Ugory dropped his backpack, the container of cookies he’d baked for her spilling onto the hall floor, and ran away.

Ugory spent the rest of the day trying to stay out of everyone's way—especially Meghan's. It wasn't hard since no one wanted to be near him.

After school, Mom asked how Meghan liked the cookies, but Ugory didn't have the heart to tell her they'd been crushed on the ground and no one got to find out how good they were. Still, she must have sensed it didn't go so well, because she kissed the tip of his horn and said, "Don't give up, Ugy."

All night and all day passed and Ugory still didn't know what he could do to get Meghan to like him. In science, his last class of the day, Mrs. Styles taught about state changes, and how one thing can sometimes become something else. Like how water can become ice when put in the freezer. *What if Meghan needs to be forced to see that I'd be a good friend? What if I can make her change?* he thought.

The more he considered it, the more he was sure this was the answer he'd been looking for. He could barely sit still in his seat until the bell rang when he sprung into the hall and toward his locker, anxious to try Plan B.

This time he waited for Meghan under the tree in her front yard. Before she could unlock her front door, though, he rushed forward, grabbed her up in his strong gorilla arms and galloped into the woods behind her house.

Meghan screamed, but their neighborhood was under construction and the noise from the trucks and workers was too loud. Ugory took her to a small cave, down by the stream behind his house. It was the first cool place he found when he went exploring right after moving in. He was pretty sure no one else came down there—at least, not often.

He set Meghan down on a blanket he'd laid on the floor, beside a picnic basket filled with cookies and brownies. He always baked a lot when he was stressed.

"Hi!" he said, crouching down in front of Meghan.

She stared at him with wide eyes, tears spilling onto her cheeks.

"Why are you crying?" Ugory couldn't bear to see her so sad. The picnic was supposed to make her happy.

"B-b-because you k-k-kidnapped me. And now you're gonna k-k-kill me!"

Ugory jumped to his feet and Meghan screeched, cowering away from him. "I'm not going to kill you!" he shouted, a bit too loudly. "I made you cookies!"

He turned away to hide his face so she wouldn't see him cry, but Meghan slipped out of the cave behind him. He spun around and called out, "I only wanted to be your friend!" But Meghan didn't stop running.

Ugory quietly entered the back door of the house and slumped down at the kitchen table. Mom patted his head and just said, "Don't give up."

But Ugory had already given up. He'd never try to make a friend again.



At school, Ugory kept to himself. He ignored Meghan and Phillip and Lacey when they came into the cafeteria. He tried not to notice how much fun they were all having. He kept his eyes down. He didn't even go out onto the playground at recess, and hurried right home after school.

Weeks went by and Ugory was lonelier than he'd ever been—but at least no one was calling him a "freak" anymore. No one was running away, screaming.

On Tuesday afternoon, three weeks after his picnic-turned-kidnapping with Meghan, Ugory was almost home when he heard a girl screaming. "Rover!" she screamed. "Come back here!"

"Meghan?" Ugory said to himself as he turned to face the direction the voice came from.

Barreling toward him, its tongue hanging out and its giant puppy-paws slapping the sidewalk pavement, came a golden retriever puppy. Behind him, a leash and collar flapping in her hand, ran Meghan.

"Stop him!" Meghan shouted. Ugory looked toward the dog, but before he could make a move to grab him, the puppy dashed into the street—right in front of a giant dump truck moving way too fast down the steep hill.

Meghan stopped dead in her tracks. "NO!" she screamed. "Rover!"

Everything seemed to move in slow motion then. Ugory swung around. There was the dump truck, speeding along. The driver had a submarine sandwich in his mouth and his radio on so loud it buzzed in Ugory's ears.

And there was Rover, stopped in the middle of the road, looking back at Meghan as if daring her to chase him.

Everything came together like an explosion in Ugory's mind and he knew what he had to do. He threw his backpack to the ground and ran into the street—directly in front of the truck.

Rover looked up at him, totally unaware that he was about to be crushed by a two-ton truck. There was no time to grab the dog and get out of the way, the truck was too wide. So Ugory did the only thing he could think to do. He turned and faced the truck.

When the truck's bumper slammed against Ugory's thick gorilla paws, he was ready. His hooves slipped on the road, but he was strong, stronger than strong, and he held on. The driver jerked the wheel, and Ugory could hear the brakes squealing, but now the truck was heading straight for Meghan's house. Behind him, Rover yelped and ran toward Meghan. Ugory could hear her crying and sobbing over Rover's safe return.

The truck had slowed, but when Ugory glanced over his shoulder he saw Meghan's house was close. Too close. He didn't know if he could stop the truck in time. Then he heard something that filled his whole heart with happiness.

"Ugory! You can do it, Ugory! Don't give up!" It was Meghan's voice, and Rover barked his encouragement, too.

Joy fueled him with added strength and Ugory put all his power toward stopping the truck. He dug his claws into the pavement, which left deep gashes as he kept moving. Finally the truck came to a stop.

Meghan ran toward him and threw her arms around Ugory's bony neck. "You did it, Ugory! You saved Rover and you stopped that truck!"

When she pulled back, her smile lit her face and shone right into Ugory's hungry heart.

Meghan turned toward Rover who sat at her feet, his collar around his neck and his leash safely grasped in Meghan's hand. "Rover," Meghan said to the dog. "I'd like you to meet my hero, Ugory." She smiled up at Ugory then added, "Actually, he's more than just my hero. He's my friend."