

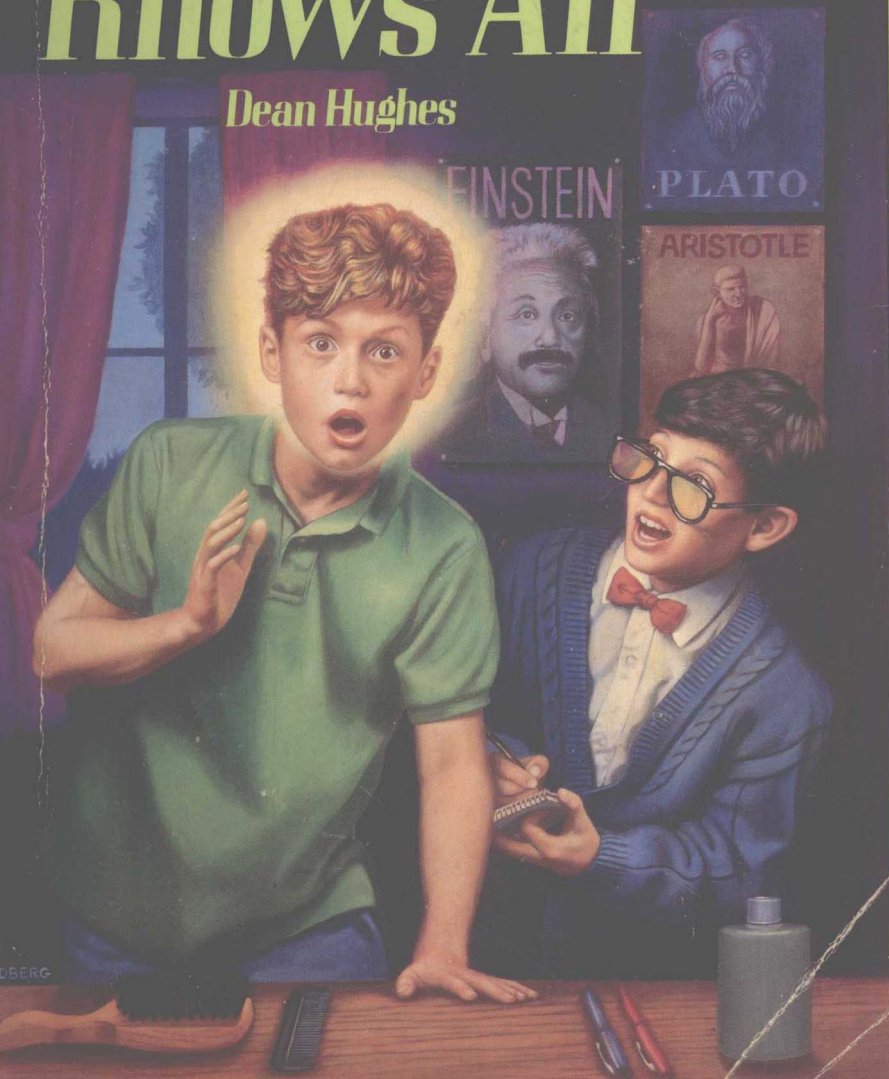
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NUTTY'S SCIENCE PROJECT IS A "GLOWING" SUCCESS!

# NUTTY Knows All

Dean Hughes



# ***NUTTY Knows All***

***Dean Hughes***

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**NUTTY**  
***Knows All***

**BOOKS BY DEAN HUGHES**

*Jelly's Circus*

*Theo Zephyr*

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*Nutty and the Case of the Mastermind Thief*

*Nutty and the Case of the Ski-Slope Spy*

*Nutty Can't Miss*

*Nutty Knows All*

*Nutty, the Movie Star*

*Family Pose*

# 1

"Nutty, what are you doing for your science project?" Orlando asked. "Do you think you can top last year's?" He put his arm around Nutty's shoulder and tried not to smile. But Bilbo and Richie both broke out laughing.

A couple of fifth-grade girls, who were also just coming out of class, heard Orlando and started laughing too. "He'd have to set off an atomic bomb to top last year's," one of them said.

Nutty pulled away from Orlando and kept walking. Some mistakes were funny after a while, but not the famous papier-mâché volcano. He knew he would be teased about the stupid thing for the rest of his life.

"It was a great volcano," Orlando said. "It just had lousy aim."

"Oh, I don't know. It hit everything in sight. That's pretty good shooting." Richie had a silly sort of laugh, kind of a giggle, and he wasn't even trying to hold it back.

Bilbo grinned at his agreement, but then added, "Hey, don't knock it. It was the most exciting thing that happened all year—the only time that the whole Warrensburg fire department showed up at school."

"It was just two trucks," Nutty said, mostly to himself. The image all came back. The volcano was supposed to ooze lava, but as Nutty had dumped in the last of his chemicals, everything suddenly went crazy. The little mountain vibrated and started jumping around, and the papier-mâché sort of melted and caught fire, and then hot green stuff started shooting all over the place. Lava hit the ceiling and floor, and everything in between. In a couple of minutes the gym had filled with smoke and the chemical smell was spreading through the whole school.

"Did they ever make you pay for that table you ruined?" Richie asked. He and the other guys were walking fast now, trying to catch up with Nutty.

Nutty spun around, his blond hair flipping down over his forehead. He was taller than the other guys, but skinny, and when he put his hands on his hips to look mad, he looked like a stick man,

not fearsome at all. "Lay off, you guys. I didn't ruin the table. It was just stained a little. They still use it."

"Yeah, down in the janitor's shop," Orlando said, his dark eyes full of mischief.

"Well—so what? Mr. Skinner needed a table down there."

"What else does he need, Nutty?" Richie said. "Maybe you can blow up something else for him this time around."

The guys liked that one. Bilbo leaned over on Richie and both of them laughed. Nutty couldn't help it. He started to smile too. "Well, maybe I've got something a lot better this year." He turned and walked quickly to his locker and went to work on his combination. He really wanted to get off this topic as fast he could.

But all three guys followed him. Orlando leaned against the locker next to Nutty's and said, "Oh, yeah? What is it?"

"Why should I tell you?"

"You haven't even started anything yet. You told me that on Friday," Orlando said.

"You don't know what I came up with over the weekend," Nutty responded as he fouled up the combination and had to start over.

"Nutty, you never did any school work over a weekend in your whole life, and you know it."

Nutty didn't respond to that one. The truth was, Orlando was right, but Nutty wasn't going to



admit it. What he wanted to do—even decided to do—was to keep his mouth shut, but as usual the next thing he knew his mouth was moving before his brain had given it permission. “I’ll tell you this much, guys. If you show up at the science fair with your little windmills and ant farms, you’re going to be embarrassed. I’m not doing one of those ‘I visited my uncle’s farm and found out where milk comes from’ kind of jobs. I’ve got something amazing this time.”

“You don’t either,” Orlando said. “You’re bluffing. There’s no way you can come up with something that great in five days.”

Five days? Was the science fair this Saturday? Somehow it hadn’t hit Nutty that the thing was coming up quite that soon. “Orlando, has it ever occurred to you that I *wanted* you guys to think I didn’t have anything? Did you ever stop to think that I might have been working on it for *weeks*?”

“No. It never occurred to me, and I never stopped to think of it. And not only that. I *know* you, and I know you haven’t done a single thing.”

Nutty was getting in deeper every second. He never knew why he did these things, but his lips were moving again, so he was sure he was about to make things worse. “Hey, this is all I’m saying for now. If I don’t win the top award for the best project in the whole lab school, I’ll be very surprised. It’s

going to take something *spectacular* to beat me out.”

“Well, what are you going to do that’s so hot?”

“I told you, I’m not saying anymore right now. You guys probably wouldn’t understand it anyway. It’s too scientific for you.”

“Try me,” Bilbo said. He had put his own hands on his hips. He was not quite as tall as Nutty, but he was stronger and, as Nutty also knew, he was smarter. He was always reading. In fact, he had gotten his nickname because he liked *The Hobbit* so much.

“Bilbo, I know you’re pretty good in science, but I’m breaking new ground with my project. I’m—”

“Are you sure you’re not breaking new table?” This was from Orlando, not Bilbo, but everyone laughed again.

“Okay, guys. Laugh all you want. Laugh until you cry. But when the fair is all over and I have that big purple ribbon, you guys will be the ones wishing you had thought up something as great as I did.” Nutty stuck his books in his locker, pulled his blue Kansas City Royals jacket out, shut the door, and turned to walk away. But his first step took him into a head-on collision with Sarah Montag. He caught her in his arms, so she wouldn’t fall backward, and for a moment, there they were, locked together like lovers on the cover of a romance novel.

Nutty jumped back. "Excuse me," he said.

Sarah's two friends started to giggle, but Sarah only smiled. "That's all right," she said.

Orlando let out with a long wooo-wooo. "Nutty, did you hear that? If it's all right, do it again."

"Shut up, Orlando." Nutty's face was now bright red. He liked Sarah, and everyone knew it. Besides that, Sarah liked him—and everyone knew that, too.

Richie said, "You'll have to excuse Nutty, Sarah. He's got his mind on some pretty heavy stuff, so it's hard for him to know where he's walking. He's thinking about his science project."

That's all it took. Sarah and the other girls immediately cracked up. "Not another volcano," one of them said.

"What is it this year, Nutty?" Sarah said. "An earthquake? Would you warn us this time before the building starts to shake apart?"

Nutty tried to smile. He could tell Orlando and the guys to jump in a lake, but he knew he had to show the girls he could take a little ribbing.

"Actually, I've got a very good project this year. I am sort of into science."

"Since when?"

All the girls were giggling, and Orlando was hooting, "Right, Nutty, right. You're always probing into the great mysteries of science."

"No, really. I like science." Nutty was speaking to Sarah, not to Orlando, and he was feeling like a bigger idiot every second. He could see that she wasn't taking him seriously. She had that flirty look on her face that she always used these days. Nutty liked her pretty smile, her dimples, even her funny laugh, but he didn't want her laughing at *him*.

"I think maybe you'd better stick with basketball, Nutty," Sarah said. "You get dangerous when you get chemicals in your hands." She reached up and patted him on the shoulder, even winked to show she was just teasing, but she walked away, and Nutty felt like a world-class jerk.

Nutty glanced at Orlando, who was sounding another one of his wooo-wooo's, and he decided to get out of there.

"You still haven't told us what your hot project is," Orlando yelled down the hallway after him.

Nutty didn't say a word. He had already said too much and he knew it. He was heading for the front doors.

"I know you don't have anything started, Nutty," Orlando yelled after him.

Nutty just kept walking.

"You'll start working on it Friday night."

No comment.

"And then your mother will end up doing most of it."

Nutty told himself not to answer, but his feet

quit walking and his mouth was suddenly off and running again. "You just keep thinking that, Orlando. But then I want to hear your apology when I show up with the best science project this school has ever seen."

Nutty went on out the door. He was mad. What did Orlando know? Why were the guys—and the girls—all so quick to assume the worst about him? They all seemed to think he couldn't do anything right—and they had no reason to judge him that way.

Of course, it *was* true that he had not started his project, had no idea what he was going to do, and had not even given it much thought. But they didn't know that; they were just jumping to conclusions.

Nutty continued to steam as he walked home. But as he was nearing his house his anger cooled a little and he started to admit something to himself: he was in trouble. "I've got to prove to those guys that I can do this," he muttered to himself. "I've got to show them I'm a lot smarter than they think. I've got to show them what I can do—on my own."

He let the implications of all that settle in for a time, and then he told himself, "I'd better go see William Bilks. I need help."

# 2

That afternoon when William Bilks got off his bus—the one he took from the private school he attended—Nutty was waiting for him at the bus stop. “Nutty,” he said, “what brings you here?”

“I’ve got a problem.”

“Yes. I suppose I should have known that. Walk home with me, and we’ll see what we can do.”

William looked the way he always did—like an eleven-year-old escapee from a retirement home. He had on his heavy coat, buttoned up to the throat, his warm woolen scarf wrapped twice around his neck, and furry little mittens. Spring was coming on rather fast now, and most kids were wearing light

jackets. But then, William wasn't like most kids. Most kids weren't geniuses.

William may have looked like his usual self, but he didn't sound like himself. Nutty was picking up something strange in his manner. "Are you all right?" he asked.

"Yes. I suppose."

"You don't sound very happy."

"Oh, Nutty. Happy. What is happy? Most people live for such trivial purposes. For them a birthday party or some silly social event is reason enough for happiness. I require something more than that."

Nutty put his arm around little William's shoulder. "Gee, William, I know what you mean. I'm kind of depressed today too."

William glanced up, sort of rolled his eyes around, and then let his lungs empty out in a long, loud breath. Nutty wasn't sure what all that meant, but he decided to keep his mouth shut until they reached William's house. Nutty needed help, and he didn't dare get William in a bad mood.

When the boys reached William's bedroom, William removed his coat and hung it up in his closet; he folded his scarf and placed it neatly alongside his mittens in a drawer; he removed his shoes and slid on a comfy little pair of slippers; and then he walked around the room and gave a nod to each of the philosophers and scientists whose pictures were hanging on his walls. He greeted them all by

name—from Plato and Aristotle down to Einstein. (William called him Albert.)

“Those are my friends,” William said, and again his voice seemed unusually solemn. “They are the ones who understand me. I wish they could speak to me.”

“Gee, William, you’re really acting weird. Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Yes, yes. Now—what is this great problem of yours? Did you quarrel with your little sweetheart?”

“Come on, William. I don’t have a sweetheart, for crying out loud.”

“Well, you have some sort of infatuation, as I recall. I believe you’ve fallen head over heels, as they say, for that little cheerleader with the dimples—Sarah something or other. Isn’t that ‘big stuff’ with boys your age?”

“William, you’re my age. You talk like you’re an old man.”

Actually Nutty knew that William always talked more or less that way, but he was pushing it today, going out of his way to remind Nutty of the gap between them. Nutty hardly needed any more of that sort of thing.

“Never mind me. What’s the big problem?”

“Well, it’s the science fair. I need to come up with something good this year.”

William smiled for the first time, and then he chuckled in that grandfatherly way of his. He sat



down on his desk chair, pushed up his glasses, and leaned back and folded his arms over his soft, round chest. "From what I heard, last year you gave your classmates something of a fright."

"Who told you that?"

"Orlando, I believe. Didn't you try to make a volcano erupt and end up—"

"Yeah, yeah. Never mind that. This year I've got to come up with something a lot better than that. Something really—you know—scientific."

"Well, yes. I think a science-fair project works out well if it's . . . scientific."

"I'm serious, William. I want to have something that will knock everyone's eyes right out."

"You came very near that last year."

"Lay off, okay? I've got to do something really intelligent. You know, brilliant . . . creative . . ."

"And that's why you want me to think it up."

"Well, not exactly." Nutty sat down on William's bed, leaned forward, and gave William his most serious look. "I don't want you to think it all up—or do it for me—or anything like that. I just need a hint, an idea, or something. I've been thinking and thinking and I can't come up with anything."

"My goodness, what a surprise! How long have you been working on it?"

"For more than an hour—ever since school got out today."