



# The Itchy Jumper

by Lucy Thorpe, St John Paul II College - Shortlisted Year 11-12 category, 2025

1. Everyone in our town wears jumpers. It doesn't matter whether the sun is too hot, or the rain is pouring down. Everyone in our town wears jumpers and we never take them off. Not even when we're bathing or swimming or sleeping. Never. No one can remember where the jumpers came from, just that they've been there as long as anyone can remember.

2. But I have a problem. A problem that began roughly a year ago. As I turned to look at my reflection in a mirror, the jumper began to itch. It began as a small itch but it quickly spread across my entire body. The itching became agonising, like my very body was screaming for help. And for a split second, I wanted nothing more than to take off my jumper, until something stopped me. After all, I didn't know what would happen if someone took off their jumper. And so, I decided to find out.

3. Three weeks later, it was me, my mother and total silence. "Mum?" I asked. "What would happen if I were to take off my jumper?"

She looked at me as if I was mad. "Please don't," said my mother.

"Just keep it on. Unless there's something I'm missing." She stared at me. "Is there something I'm missing?"

"No," I said quickly. "I was just curious."

"Good," mother continued. "You remember the rules. Everyone must wear their jumpers."

4. It had been a few months since the itching began. Throughout those months, it felt like something was stuck on the tip of my tongue, and trying to keep it there along with trying to hide the itching of my jumper was quickly becoming exhausting.

5. The next few hours are a blur. TV blaring, Grandma wheezing and dad yelling at me over a tired misunderstanding. The street lights fly past; I am in the car in tears with my dad and sister, with that thought still on the tip of my tongue.

6. My dad turns around to look at me. I'm a mess of tears and snot, and he asks the dreaded question. "Is something wrong?"

I feel it now. Those seven words waiting to leap out of the throat. "I want to take off my jumper."

But the fear cancels out the temptation. Because by saying those words I am risking it all. The close bonds I'd made with others could all come crashing down. People may come for me. People who want to try and get that jumper back on me.

7. I'm in my room now, not knowing what the future holds for me. But I do know one thing. One day I will become brave and one day I will take off my jumper regardless of what others might say about me. I would indeed be risking it all, but I would be risking it all to be the person I want to be. Everyone in our town wears jumpers, but maybe just maybe. There are others out there who don't. A new society waiting to be found.

8. Well, it's two months later and... I finally did it. I've only had the jumper off for a few hours and I still don't really know how to feel about it. Last night, mum told me that she'd noticed the itching and... she understands, although I'm still not certain that she does. I was too distressed to properly spell it out for her. But, as I write this, one thing is for sure. I finally feel like me.