

They're suffocating you.

You sit at the bus stop, your bleached skin peers pulling at their eyes. Their elbows scrape your ribs as they poke through your windbreaker. They've got you surrounded, one on each side, blue eyes cold and blond eyebrows sharp.

They think your teeth are too crooked. They think your skin is too tan. They think your hair is too spiky.

They don't understand your accent. They are confused when you say you're not from China.

*But you're Chinese?*

Yes.

*But you're from England?*

Yes.

You fold your hands in your lap, knees pressed tight together and tongue against the roof of your mouth. It's cold in San Francisco. They see you shiver.

*How are you so skinny?*

You're not.

*Aren't all Chinese people fat?*

They're not.

*Just eat more rice.*

They round their vowels and jut out their front teeth. They shake their hands through

your hair and complain that it feels like steel wool.

You tangle your fingers together, locking your hands still. Your fingertips turn red. Maybe you'd be better off walking the ten miles to school.

You try to adjust your elbows but they laugh and force you motionless. You try to move your legs but they squeeze them closer. Your shoulders start to ache. You shut your eyes.

They're suffocating you. They're closing in on you.

You try to move your arms but they're pinned to your side. You try to speak but your teeth are too crooked and your skin is too tan and your hair is too spiky. They're closing in on you. They want you to go back to your country and you wish you could.

The yellow school bus arrives.

They jump on and your lungs expand with the air they stole from you. You hand the driver fifty cents and take the last open seat.

Close your eyes. Take a breath.

The bus lurches forward.



*image: Alberto Giacometti*

