

Afternoons in Borough Park

by [Diane G. Scholl](#) in the [August 2025](#) issue

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The man on the bus is raging in Yiddish again.
His anger swells; he spews a mouthful
of wet, noxious words.

Across the aisle, a woman says
in an urgent stage whisper,
“He was in the camps,”
and people turn to their business,
the newspaper, homework,
the gray November sky,
fog settling like a prayer shawl
on gaunt shoulders.

She might be a high school teacher,
a nurse in a doctor’s office,
or somebody’s mother, with her plain
brown coat and scarf,
her sensible shoes. She knows
what she’s doing, primed to calm
a frightened child; she signals
the others “Give him space,”
until they take her hint,
Syrian, Jew, Italian or Swede.

When somebody finds him a seat
he subsides, filling the bus
with slow, steady sorrow, his grief
a sharp and permeable scent

that curls its way around corners,
down streets of autumn trees
done shedding, where the Red Sea

drifts and rises in a fitful wind
before it lets us through.