

## CITY DIARY

"You're stupid," the middle-aged wreck of a man yells incoherently, staggering onto the subway at Pape station. "Hey ugly, give me your seat."

He swirls in a big circle, nearly falls over and then leans menacingly over me. I vacate my hard-earned seat, others follow. He laughs giddy and manic as he inhales noxious fumes from a piece of Kleenex.

He fumbles for a large container of turpentine among his bag of empty Colt 45 cans and pours recklessly over his tiny Kleenex. Turpentine spills everywhere. Long strands of drool fall from his anguished mouth as he inhales. Everyone appears concerned turpentine will splash into some baby's eyes or something equally horrific.

The Friday morning commuters find this behaviour so beyond the pale that the topic of inhalant abuse breaks the code of 10 a.m. silence. "Inhalants are very addictive. I saw an episode of *Intervention* about this once. The girl inhaled all these cans of computer duster," says an older woman.

Several people complain to the driver, the emergency is announced and thousands of westbound passengers on the

Bloor-Danforth line are going to be a little late for work.

A custodian arrives. A man of action, he says to the turpentine-truffer, "Hey man, you mind getting off the car?"

"Smatafaldoo," he snarls, meaning, "As a matter of fact I do." He howls an inhuman laugh. Black shades hide his eyes, but from watching another turpentine-fiend in Allan Gardens this summer I can speculate that they glow with otherworldly dissociation.

The practical janitor invokes a potential alternative: "Either you get off or someone is going to come and haul your ass off."

He stumbles off. Lacking any sense of self-preservation he promptly sits down on the platform and inhales again from his turpentine Kleenex.

TTC workers empty the car, remove the soiled seat and clean the floor as we cross the Bloor viaduct. We were stopped for less than 10 minutes. When we get to Bloor station, the clean car fills with new, better-behaved commuters. The turpentine addict is probably still laughing a little, desiring that next hit of the most self-destructive habit imaginable.

Mike Sauve, *National Post*