

I had known Giovanni da Col for about four years when he assaulted me at the end of 2014. We had met at a conference in Cambridge in 2010 and since then he had kept in contact with me. I had considered him very emotionally unstable and tried to keep him at arm's length without breaking off all contact. Partly this was because I felt a bit sorry for him and partly because I picked up on the not very well concealed element of aggression at the core of his personality. Without fully reflection on it, I think I considered it the path of least resistance to humour him rather than to provoke any disagreement or rupture in the relationship. I think I am not alone in having had an ongoing 'friendship' with Giovanni on that basis.

When Giovanni arrived in [REDACTED] in the autumn of 2014, it created a difficult situation. He immediately began antagonising junior colleagues with unconcealed contempt and rudeness. As the only person who knew him from before I felt myself placed in the uncomfortable position of having to defend him behind his back for behaviour that I knew to be rude and increasingly unpleasant. I understand now that, on a small scale, that this is symptomatic of the situation that many people who end up being pulled into Giovanni's orbit end up having to negotiate. At the end of the semester, we had our annual Christmas Party. Afterwards several of us went to a bar in a nearby part of town. Giovanni was drunk and was clearly making people uncomfortable; in particular two female postdocs that he was paying a lot of attention to. I suggested to him that he might be jetlagged and it might be a good idea to leave. I escorted him from the bar and gave him directions for how to get to where he was staying. A few days earlier, he had asked me if he could stay in my apartment over Christmas when I was going to be back in Manchester. I had been reluctant to say yes, but as I could not think of a good excuse to say no, I reluctantly agreed. As he left the bar, we agreed that he would come to my apartment shortly after noon the following day and I would give him the keys and show him the place. I asked him if he wanted to give me his phone number in case there was a problem (he had only just got a Norwegian phone a few days earlier- thanks in part to my help). He said not to bother, and just to email if there was a problem.

After the bar shut, a few of us went to a friend's house for more drinks. I stayed overnight on a friend's couch and when I woke up I realised that I might be late to get to the apartment. I emailed Giovanni telling him not to come yet and that I would email again when I was ready. Obviously, I was just too late as just over an hour later, I received a reply. It was not addressed to me or signed by Giovanni. All it said was- 'You are in serious trouble.' Again, I tried to be conciliatory. I sent an email saying that I would be in the office at around 4pm to pick up my boarding pass and suitcase for Manchester the next day. I knew he would be in as the next issue of *Hau* was due out a few days later. He agreed.

I went in at 4pm. It was the last Saturday before Christmas and the corridors were deserted. Giovanni had the office next to mine. I knocked on the door and he said 'come in'. He was working at his desk facing the wall. Without turning round, he pointed over his shoulder at the sofa against the wall behind him, and said, 'take a seat'. The tone and nature of the interaction was clear. He was acting like a headmaster about to tell off a naughty student. I had become sick of

it by this point and I was in a hurry. I replied very calmly that I was in a hurry and I wasn't going to take seat and did he want the keys?

At this point, Giovanni spun round on his chair and his face was twisted in rage and he began screaming. He was literally foaming at the mouth- both corners of his mouth had foam coming out. He began screaming over and over again that I was a 'selfish piece of shit'. I'd had enough by this point. As he had begun insulting me, I decided to reciprocate. I replied, again in a calm tone- 'you know Giovanni I'm doing you a favour here, letting you stay rent free in one of the most expensive cities in Europe over Christmas, so why don't you just go fuck yourself.' He looked stunned and asked me what I'd said. I repeated it, and turned to leave the room. Turning my back on him was my mistake. As I went to leave, I heard a commotion and as I turned he was pretty much right on top of me. He grabbed my throat with one hand and threw me up against a wall. He's a strong guy, obsessed with working out and physical strength, and he was able to pin me against the wall easily. He began squeezing on my windpipe. I couldn't breathe. He was screaming over and over again. 'You don't tell me to fuck me. You don't tell me to fuck me.' It's the only the second time in my life when I thought I might die. As he continued squeezing my windpipe, I still couldn't breathe. I remember hearing a voice seeming to come from the back of my head, saying calmly- 'oh you might be dead in five minutes.'

Suddenly, I kicked back into life. I'd had some martial arts training before and I think without that I would have just folded. Giovanni knew that I had trained in martial arts, though I suspect nowhere near as seriously as he had. I think that was part of his desire to be friends with me. He had this idea that one day we would have a 'kung fu fight on top of a glacier' once he got to Norway. It was a joke and we had exchanged emails about it. Looking back on it now, I think that Giovanni's grasp of the distinction between reality and fantasy is so tenuous that that joke prefigured something real. I snapped back to life, and reached out and grabbed his throat, squeezed lightly and began to push him away. He let go and began screaming at me- 'do you know what you've done? Do you know what you've done?' I replied 'Do I know what I've done??' He was blocking my path to leave the office. I told him to get out of my way or I would call the police. He looked incredulous. Why would you call the police??? 'Because you just assaulted me Giovanni', I replied. The mention of the word 'assault' was like a bucket of cold water being thrown in his face. Suddenly he changed character, and was saying- [REDACTED], come on we need to talk.' There was no way that I was staying to talk to him with no-one else around after that. I left picked up my suitcase and boarding pass from the elevator. He tried to follow me down the corridor still pleading that we needed to talk. I replied that we were done and left.

Following that, I reported the assault that evening to my head of department and to [REDACTED] who was editing a special issue of Hau that I had a piece in. I had a flight booked to Manchester the next day. I was shaken up and in a state of fear. I felt like I needed to get out of [REDACTED]. I didn't feel safe there at all. On my return to [REDACTED] after Christmas, Giovanni was still there in the office next to me. I couldn't go into work. I had to creep around the campus to give lectures and

meet people in coffee bars, hoping not to encounter him. It was a horrendous period. Every time I had to get a subway or tram, it was unbearable. I was convinced that he was behind me waiting to push me in front of the train or tram. Rational reflection did not help. It was a terror written into my nerves. There's nothing quite like being strangled with no-one around to help to make death seem concrete.

I hadn't slept for weeks after getting back. One day I was giving a lecture to a hall of around 80 students, and I was aware that I had no idea what I was saying. I could hear a voice, I was consciously aware that it was mine, but I didn't feel it and had no idea what it was talking about. I stumbled through to the end and made an appointment to see a doctor. The doctor signed me off with PTSD and I was off work for nearly three months following this. The doctor also encouraged me to report the assault to the police as a means of trying to take control of the situation back and to give it some resolution and closure, even if Giovanni had by now left the country.

Since then, the only contact I have had from Giovanni, has been a letter from his solicitor, threatening to sue me, for having had the temerity to report his violence. Naturally, that retraumatised me at a point where I was trying to pull things together again. Presumably that was the point- to shake me up to the point where I would be too scared to speak out. Three years on and I feel broadly ok with the situation. I still feel that I can't go to professional conferences as a consequence of this ongoing situation, but I am already in a permanent position and my career advancement does not rely any more on being seen in these kind of events. For more junior colleagues who have suffered at Giovanni's hands however, these considerations are far more serious. I don't particularly blame Giovanni for the situation. He is clearly very emotionally disturbed and has no way to deal with that internal disturbance other than attempting to externalise it and pass it on to other people. I felt sorry for him on occasion when I first met him and on occasion I still do. It can't be fun be so consumed with anger and self-hatred that the only coping mechanism that you have is to act out like this. But this doesn't mean that we can allow this to continue. Too many people have been damaged and hurt by this situation and at some point it is senior colleagues - who enable this ongoing regime of violence and abusive behaviour to continue because they value publishing a journal (that now is not even open-access) over the mental and physical health of junior colleagues - those senior colleagues are going to have to decide if they wish to keep enabling this behaviour or not.