

A good turn

I was alone in the car, having driven my son Peter back to Southampton University for the start of his new term. I was feeling elated and genial (as any normal father would be when he was dumping his son on someone else for a third of the year). In the distance ahead I saw a strange apparition thumbing a lift my way, so I stopped and offered him a seat next to me. (Even in those days you did not encourage strangers to sit behind you.) He climbed in gratefully and put his bundle of junk in the back of my car. After all, I could always fumigate the leather upholstery (it was a posh car – about third or fourth hand on my salary).

He turned out to be a pleasant fellow, apart from his smell – but, as I say, I was feeling in a pleasant mood. As we got talking he expressed his surprise that I had offered him a lift. He knew he was a drop-out. I told him I was not in the slightest afraid of him. “After all”, I said, “some 500 chaps are my best friends and most of them are murderers. In fact, I’m on my way back to Broadmoor now.” He edged closer to the door and further from me, and when we reached the next major crossroads he found that he had to call on someone and would (with many thanks and apologies) have to leave me.