

Two people would be discussing something — a movie, a political issue, the economy, the human condition — and then they would turn to him and ask him his opinion. Peter found himself able to talk with perfect ease on any subject at all.

Mrs. Beeche and Otis Bell, for example, got onto China. What did Peter think, Mrs. Beeche wondered. "I really don't know much about it," he said, "but it's a country that has several thousand riots a year, that has a seriously aging population, that is an environmental disaster, that suffers from massive corruption, that has a completely screwed-up banking system, that is seeing speculation run wild, and that is tyrannical. Rather than seeing it as a threat, I worry that it will all fall to pieces." "Exactly," Bernard chimed in. Or, at another point, Thorndale and Isabella were trying to figure out the domestic arrangements of a movie-star couple and became hopelessly confused. They appealed to Peter, who lucidly catalogued the relevant pregnancies, adoptions, marriages, out-of-wedlock births, third parties, divorces, and box office. "The judge said he wanted to give custody to a screenwriter, since that way, with two stars and a director already attached, the kid would have a package." Having gone shooting once in his life, he was able to discuss with Thorndale the tricks of working setters and retrievers together; he made an apposite comment when Bernard, a philatelist, mentioned that he had just acquired a misprint from the Kingdom of Naples.

Later on Bernard and Bell were talking. Bernard asked Bell about measuring the effect of Federal Reserve policy statements on markets. "How'm I going to fool you if I tell you that?" Bell said. "Why don't you ask your colleague here? Or, I'm sorry, Peter, maybe you're off-duty?"

"Never!" said Bernard.

Peter took a sip of wine. "I guess," he said, "you could start by using a Cholesky decomposition to construct some indicators of

how policy expectations change." He carried on for a bit, describing the indicators he might use. "You could follow Kohn and Sack, maybe, and regress the squared values of each of the factors on several dummy variables. You'd get into some equations."

"Gurkaynak, Sack, and Swanson," Bell said.

"Yes, sir," said Peter.

"Jesus Christ!" Thorndale cried from the other side of the table. "If you guys are going to keep this up, you can take your damn slide rules someplace else." He and Kakouilli began conversing in Greek. They knew each other, it turned out, because both were friends with an American poet who had lived in Greece much of the time. They were talking about him and switched to English. What was that very early poem, something about learning Greek? How did it start — smelling the sun? They both turned to Peter. Miraculously, Peter remembered this work and was able to recite it.

"You mean 'Beginner's Greek'? Let's see . . .

*To one*

*Who smells the sun,*

*Eyes shut, and tastes that rain is sweet;*

*Who hears*

*Music, but fears*

*Its presence in empty gardens; or, discreet,*

*Only observes*

*The nerves*

*And fibers of a painting — shade, technique;*

*What is*

*Beyond analysis*

*Is perilous: we must not wish to seek*

*And cry*

*'This is what I*