



The Incident at Naples (Chicago Shorts)

Francis Steegmuller

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Born in Australia, novelist Shirley Hazzard first moved to Naples as a young woman in the 1950s to take up a job with the United Nations. It was the beginning of a long love affair with the city, in which the Naples of Pliny, Gibbon, and Auden constantly became reanimated by new experiences, as Hazzard was joined in her travels by her husband, the editor and critic Francis Steegmuller. In *The Incident at Naples*, a classic essay first published by the *New Yorker*, Steegmuller recollects on how he was, as a tourist to the city, robbed and injured and then treated in a series of hospitals. What can *The Incident at Naples* teach us? A town shadowed by both the symbol and the reality of Vesuvius can never fail to acknowledge the essential precariousness of life—nor, as Hazzard and Steegmuller discover, the human compassion, generosity, and friendship that are necessary to sustain it.

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