No Small Talk
By Mel Lavine
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When I was a student at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, I once shared a cab with George A. Barrett, a star reporter for the New York Times. He'd had many adventures over a long and distinguished career.
☐ Anxious to take advantage of the chance encounter, I asked Barrett if he could cite the most memorable of all his assignments. Without a moment's hesitation he said the two days he spent with William Faulkner, the American novelist and short story writer and Nobel laureate.
☐ Surprised, for I had expected something on the order of wars, assassinations, revolutions and the like, I said, "You're kidding?"

☐ He remained a Democrat because he never forgot what life was like under the Republicans who believed the acceptance of federal money undermined a man's self-respect. He was more in tune with the New Deal philosophy as paraphrased by Frederick Lewis Allen in his book about the 1930s, "Since Yesterday:" The millions who are out of work "are not to be considered paupers. They are not to be subjected to any humiliation which we can spare them. They are to be regarded as citizens and friends who are the temporary victims of an unfortunate economic situation for which the nation as a whole is responsible…"
☐ I sometimes wondered what people thought of Kirk and me in restaurants where we met for conversation, no small talk: two old fellows discussing personalities and issues from the present back to a long ago when giants walked the earth.
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