



# HIGH SOCIETY

B O O K S

**Once Upon a Time** by Slim Aarons (Harry N. Abrams, \$25) In his 50-year chronicle of high society, photographer Slim Aarons passed no apparent judgment on the opulent lifestyle of his subjects. In his postwar work for magazines such as *Look*, *Life*, *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and, most famously, *Town & Country*, Aarons ranged from Monte Carlo to Palm Springs, Acapulco to Newport, capturing wealth and power, as well as physical and sartorial perfection, as if these qualities were simply a matter of photographic fact. Aarons put it best

when he described his purpose as depicting "attractive people doing attractive things in attractive places."

*Once Upon a Time* certainly brims with attractive people and places. Though some of those people are instantly recognizable—Truman Capote, Katherine Hepburn, Sir Laurence Olivier—most are anonymous in their social status. Whether earned or inherited, privilege can be read in their faces and body language.

This new collection represents an overdue rediscovery of Aarons, who began his career as West Point's official

photographer. He was hired away by film director Frank Capra to shoot for World War II military magazines, a job that sometimes placed him in harrowing combat situations. As if to change the subject, after the war he entered the rarefied world exemplified by this beautifully studied photograph, in which a Palm Beach socialite poses with her son and dogs at poolside on her oceanfront estate. It is typical Aarons, with a formal elegance and sense of graceful surroundings that perfectly capture the high life. —RUSSELL HART