

## FIONA MACPHERSON

### Editor of *Harpers & Queen*.

(*Harpers & Queen*, 2000)

There are some who believe it impossible to edit a magazine without possessing a small degree of insanity. No one disproved this theory more completely than Fiona Macpherson: in a world of fads and egos, she was the voice of good sense, guiding her readers through the maelstrom of hip and hype to things of enduring quality and importance.

Sophisticated, elegant and intelligent, Fiona embodied the spirit and tradition of this magazine. She loved to tell of her days as a young sub-editor on Jocelyn Stevens's *Queen*, when telephones were routinely ripped from the wall and members of staff sacked over the Tannoy. She went on to edit the arts pages, and in 1970 became deputy editor of the newly created *Harpers & Queen*. After five years she left to raise her family (she had married *Queen*'s cookery editor, Adrian Bailey), freelancing wherever she could.

When she returned to *H&Q* as editor in 1994, its circulation was tumbling. Fiona reversed the decline, and made the magazine more profitable than it had ever been. 'Exclusive but not excluding' was her motto, and she insisted that *Harpers* was the property of its readers, however socially or geographically far-flung: if a recipe contained ingredients unavailable in a small town in East Lothian, it would be replaced with the ultimate neap and mutton broth.

When she was diagnosed with cancer, she told no one on her staff. If we failed to guess, it was because she was so open about everything else in her life; but to Fiona it was anathema to let a personal problem – even a fatal one – interfere with the running of the magazine. She would also have hated the inevitable publicity: she never willingly gave interviews,

and said that she would have done her job anonymously if she had been allowed to.

By the standards of the world she inhabited, her lack of ego was extraordinary. It was irrelevant to her whether she was seated in the front row of a fashion show or the fifth, and she once scandalised an American colleague by taking the underground to Heathrow in preference to a chauffeur-driven car. People who gave themselves airs left her unimpressed: the qualities she valued were ability, integrity and a readiness for hard work, and she had more time for an enterprising taxi-driver than a *prima donna* photographer.

Fiona's supremely civilised manner set the tone for the office. She never raised her voice, tolerated bitchiness, or stooped to flattery: we knew that when she gave praise, it came from the bottom of her heart.

Last September, Fiona was promoted to editor-in-chief. It was just recognition for six years in which she had given her all for the magazine, both in the office and at the endless fashion shows and advertisers' parties which – although she found them increasingly exhausting – she forced herself to attend. Her work ethic, rooted in the Scots ancestry which meant so much to her, was formidable – but so was her sense of humour: when a rival editor lost her job, Fiona complained that she felt like Sherlock Holmes without a Moriarty. It is hard to think of her now without hearing her sudden, delighted laugh and seeing the amusement in her eyes.

It would not be possible for an editor to be more deeply missed than Fiona. We loved her because she was straight and sensible and good and kind, and she made us proud to work for her. One page of her cherished magazine is not enough to do her justice – but we know that, in her infinite modesty, she would have scolded us for giving her even this.