

PAPERBACKS

William Leith

POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE

by Carrie Fisher

(Scribner, £8.99)

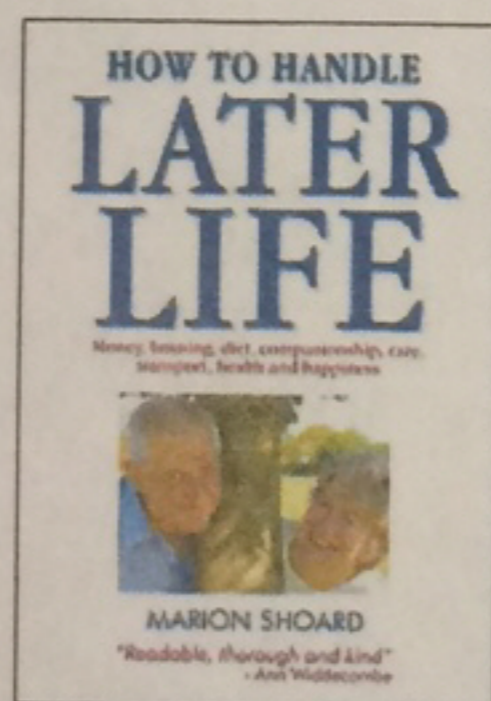
A NOVEL about an actress whose life falls apart, by an actress whose life fell apart, reissued following her recent death. I'd forgotten how good it is. Carrie Fisher's narrator Suzanne Vale tells this story, of a privileged woman gone awry, with sharpness and wit. After a while you realise this serves a purpose: it is armour. At the start, she says: "Maybe I shouldn't have given the guy who pumped my stomach my phone number, but who cares?" Read that again – it's a beautifully compressed line. She is great at describing the loss of control. "I'm not suicidal," she says. "My behavior might be, but I'm not."

**HOW TO HANDLE LATER LIFE**

by Marion Shoard

(Amaranth, £22.99)

"GROWING old today," says Marion Shoard, "is far more congenial than it was even a few years ago." But it's still getting old. One day it is



likely to happen to you – it will almost certainly happen to someone you know. Also, you might spend a long time as an old person. You will probably face many unwelcome changes, one by one. Imagine finding yourself in a new and increasingly unfamiliar place. You'd want a guide book. This is that book. It's clear and well-organised. It covers everything, from new relationships to the checklist you might consult on your deathbed. Unique, essential and considerate.

FIRST LOVE

by Gwendoline Riley

(Granta, £8.99)

I WAS hooked by this gritty little book. It's a novel about a woman who has relationships with the most dire people you can imagine. Her mother, her father, her lovers. Perhaps they are dreadful. Or perhaps the narrator, Neve, is just supremely talented at seeing the dreadfulness in others. Even so, they are a class apart: "Walking ahead, he'd lift his leg to fart and then turn to look at us with dog-like surprise." That's her father. But then there's her mother, who is in a very bad way, and her husband, Edwyn. What people, you will keep thinking. This is brilliant.

