

TV Review: Looking After Mum/Liberty of London



Andrew Billen

Published 37 minutes ago

The Children in Need Special, *Looking After Mum*, met the child carers who are forced to grow up too fast

Looking After Mum BBC One ****

Liberty of London Channel 4 **

Children in Need will, I am sure, be fun tomorrow night. Fun is not a word we need associate with the children who may benefit from it. The four we met on the documentary *Looking After Mum* certainly weren't much fun — and how could they be? Their childhoods had been stolen by the premature dead-end career of caring for their ill parents. Responsibility had claimed them. I yearned for one of them to do something wholly stupid.

When Kashanna, the 18-year-old in charge of her blind mother, prepared to go out clubbing towards the end of the film, the evening's freedom was meticulously overprepared. On a rare, charity-funded holiday from their mother, who was awaiting a liver transplant, Tom, 10, and his 14-year-old brother Joe were almost too institutionalised by their roles at home to enjoy it. They squabbled over whether Tom was home-sick or mum-sick. The magical power Tom would like, he said, was to make people well.

Yet it was a moment in Antonia-Rae's story that got me. Now 11, she has cared for five years for her single and recently suicidal mother Lesley, who has suffered a paralysing stroke. As Antonia-Rae ironed the sheets, Lesley sat becalmed in an armchair looking on as her daughter explained how her chores were a preparation for adulthood. "Just be careful with the iron," said her mum, being a mum. "I know," said Antonia-Rae, sounding horribly like a mum herself.

This was a technically better-made film than Oritsé Williams' take on Britain's estimated 700,000 child carers for Channel 4 this summer. It even used crane shots. The children's stories had narratives, in the boys' case one with an optimistic ending. The storytelling was achieved, however, at the expense of failing to place their stories in a political or policy context or in some cases a family context (where were the fathers in all this?). The definitive film on this scandal has yet to be made. It may even take a winsome child actor in a schmaltzy feature to get our hearts' attention.

At just 11, Antonia-Rae is a carer for her sick mum Lesley

Post a comment

Print

Share via

Facebook

Twitter

Google+