

SÜSKIND

based on true events.

Summer 1942. Walter Süskind is fired from his job at Unilever as ordered by the occupiers, but manages to secure a position of responsibility at the Jewish Council. More important than the income it provides is the fact that the job offers him and his family protection against deportation to Germany.

One evening Walter witnesses a Jewish working-class family being torn apart during a check. While the parents are roused into a truck, their eight year old daughter manages to escape with her younger brother. Together, Roosje and Simon have to cope with surviving in the jungle that is the occupied city.

Their parents are delivered to the Hollandsche Schouwburg where all the unfortunate ones are herded together who were picked up during a raid or who have answered a summons. The man appointed by the Jewish Council as manager of the Schouwburg is Walter Süskind. He has to arrange for the detainees to be transported to Germany to work– at least, that is what he has been told.

But when Walter discovers what is really awaiting his Jewish fellow citizens, he decides to play double. He befriends a high ranking SS officer, Aus Der Fünter, and at the same time cooperates with the underground movement. Using his position at the Schouwburg to his advantage, he gathers a group of co-conspirators around him. Together, they devise cunning ways to help save a large number of children from a certain death.

Among those children are Simon and Roosje, the duo that wandered around the city without their parents for days and was ultimately picked up. They end up in the crèche of the Schouwburg, where they begin to understand what is at stake. There is very little time left for them to be children. Simon and Roosje, too, have to show courage when Walter attempts to keep them from their gruesome fate. After having been smuggled out of the crèche they end up at a rather sinister hiding address. Their attempt to escape, carefully orchestrated by Süskind, threatens to fall through.

But it is not only the children who are in danger, the lives of Walter and his family are also at stake when Aus der Fünten begins to suspect that Walter is not the reliable manager he pretends to be. The SS man warns him but does not take any action. Aus der Fünten has become attached to his friendship with Walter and prefers to believe Walter really cares for him.

Then Aus der Fünten is convinced by his superiors that Süskind himself is the brain behind a series of illegal activities. The SS man blows his top. Deeply hurt and feeling utterly betrayed, he takes revenge on the only person in Amsterdam he feels close to. Süskind's family is rousted from their home.

The resistance movement provides Walter with an opportunity to save himself and avoid deportation, but he chooses to join his wife and daughter on the train taking them east. Taunted by his companions in misfortune who consider him an opportunistic Nazi friend, he rides towards his destruction together with his family.

But Roosje and Simon who survived thanks to him, will never forget his name: Walter Süskind, the man who managed to save some thousand children.

Rudolf van den Berg

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