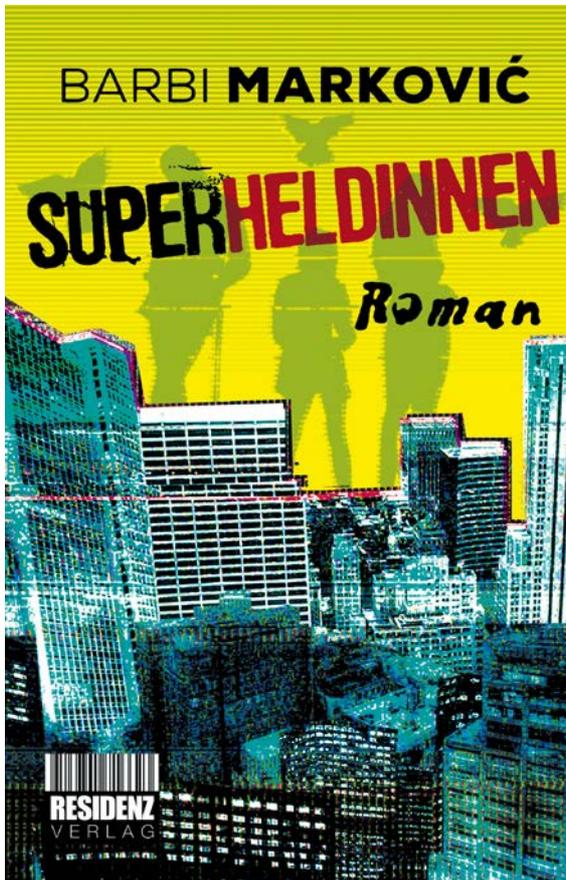


Excerpt from

Barbi Marković, *Superheldinnen*

(Supereroines)

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Mascha was the backbone of the group – always physically and mentally prepared for any type of magical challenge, from obliteration to lightning; she was a crackerjack in all things magic and social. In other words: a goddess to all those dogged by bad luck

Direktorka was the latest addition to the group. She was still testing the waters – in the gang and for herself. Perhaps her inexperience held the potential for something truly great.

I, Marija's granddaughter, was Mascha's first partner. Disappointed by life, with a flexible conscience. Taking stock has always brought me joy.

What do you do when a furious, senile housewife like **Marija** sends you the pigeon curse? All the things she asks of you! Marija didn't gain importance until she moved to that hellhole Belgrade.

Rabija was the halved woman from Mascha's past. A woman on a mission, with telepathic powers that we can only dream of. Maybe she had foreseen what was to come?

The snotty kid was an orphan from the outskirts of Berlin, gifted with extraordinary mental and paranormal skills from birth. Its looks weren't really scary, but it knew how to make all of Berlin tremble with fear.

Part I

Something unexpected happened and our lives were never the same again. The crucial day was a Saturday at the Sette Fontane. Today I know how everything turned out and therefore I can explain a bit about our past and describe what we were like. I will tell you about cities and what went on there that year, when Rabija died, the snotty kid showed up, and I spent the summer in Belgrade taking care of matters of inheritance. I will also tell you how I met up with my girlfriends in Vienna two years later – our city of choice – to perform our well-established Saturday ritual. What I know now, but could not know then, is that all three of us had our own secret motives and that all three of us, each in her own way, had the plan to once and for all end the depressive state we had been stuck in for years. It was a state of mind that made us women of our time, city dwellers with a bad, in parts even allergic, relationship towards nature. We only knew life from an urban perspective and, unfortunately, were not like those people who had collected pig blood in buckets as children. We often compared cities, because choosing where to live meant both ultimate

freedom and dreadful responsibility. Up to the Saturday in question, every one of us had changed country at least once, and we all bore the consequences that came with it. Relative poverty was our minor curse. As is common in the typical allocation of roles in friendship triangles, and the only three options of dealing with problems (dying, changing locations, or changing something), we all longed for our own intervention. That day we were all evasive with our words and it was like playing poker, each against the other one moment, then two against one the next moment, every one of us trying to achieve her goal. The story I tell ends triumphantly with the third friend and savior as the productive principle. The whole thing culminates in a neoliberal robotselffrackerastronauthappyend.

Of course everyone has the right to their own opinion. Everything I describe is normal and logical. People fall apart and do strange things. That's because everyone has some kind of weakness and some kind of idea what could help.

We have had sharpened senses for Viennese dog shit for ages. Teenagers became mothers, internet platforms started asking people to reveal details on their preferences and habits, and the three of us continued to know nobody in town who had died, and we didn't feel constricted, but rather anxious. We were afraid the wind might blow us away.

Part 2

Until the end, nothing pointed to a happy end. Bad omens were all over the place. On the way to Siebenbrunnen square, I came upon a vomit stain, half a meter wide, on some steps, and I thought to myself that the time for change had come. Especially because a pigeon was sitting right in the middle of the sour yellow puddle, eating. It was so liquid that the pigeon threw back its head from time to time to make it all easier to swallow. I read in its face that it was happy, while you could read in my face that I was unhappy. I remembered that cities chew us up and spit us out again and again; we moved tirelessly, broadened our scope. I also remembered that pigeons travelled around the same way, always on the lookout for a dirty terrace with full trashcans, where nobody would chase them away with a broom. They also secretly hoped that some lonely and sick retired person would allow them to build their nest under his bed. People poisoned pigeons, kept them away with sharp spikes, and punished all those who fed them. Somehow there always seemed to be some barely alive pigeon crawling out of a hole right in front of me.

Šimunović. Bird control. Spikes are the most efficient way to prevent pigeons from landing on balconies, benches, casting gutters, facades. Available for the first time in this country. Promo prices! Bird friendly. They are only prevented from landing. Control the problem! Call us at 061 274 942.

Anyways, when I was watching the repulsive scene on the steps, I told myself that it was time for change. And I knew exactly what changes I had in mind.

That Saturday, like every Saturday in the past two years, we had agreed to meet at the Sette Fontane café on Siebenbrunnen square. It was March in Vienna and the lack of sun had left our faces white as the walls. Depression was tearing us to pieces, chewing us up and pinning us to the floor.

We were utterly useless. Even though I believe there was true friendship between us, we didn't start our conversation with reports on our current inner states. Our Saturday dates were not about having coffee, laughing, crying, and exchanging private information. They were serious business meetings following strict rules and set agendas. We began at about ten o'clock in the morning, Direktorka always five, Mascha always ten minutes late. Direktorka's five minute delay was due to a power struggle within the group (a result of her issues), While Mascha's ten minute delay meant nothing other than her sincerely trying to be there on time. After Mascha had hurried through innumerable stations of her fully booked universe, she came rushing in, apologized, and unpacked a huge amount of material that she had been working on in the past week. One glance at her impressive collection of data nipped even the faintest criticism for her tardiness in the bud. We were aware of the responsibility that came with our special powers. That Saturday all of us lay a stack of photos, clippings, and notes on the table. We were ready to get started.