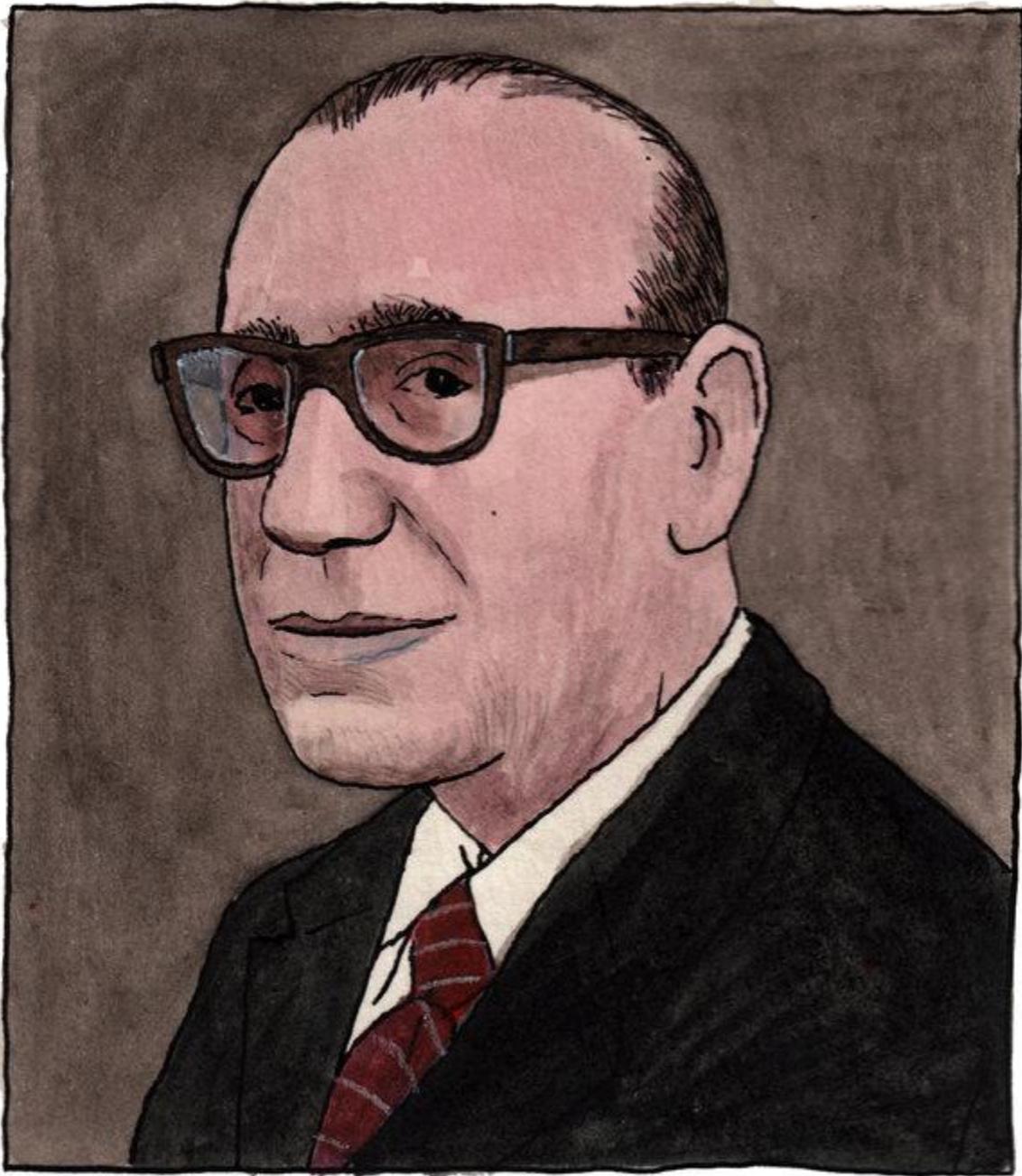


The Hôtel Meina

By ANDREA VENTURA and MIMMO FRANZINELLI

For International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the story of Lotte and Mario, and what happened to the guests of an Italian hotel when the Nazis came to stay.





Carlotta Fröhlich was born in Germany in 1904 to a Jewish mother and a Christian father. In the 1930s Lotte moved to Milan, where she met and married Mario Mazzucchelli, a lawyer and a writer of historical novels. The Mazzucchellis led a very private life. Among their few friends were the Behars, a Jewish family who owned an antique store in Milan as well as a hotel on the Lago Maggiore in Meina, north of the city, where Lotte and Mario often spent their vacations.

On Monday, Sept. 13, 1943 — five days after the armistice between Italy and the Allies, and after a summer of heavy bombings and the overthrow of Mussolini — the Mazzucchellis left the city and went to Meina for a week.



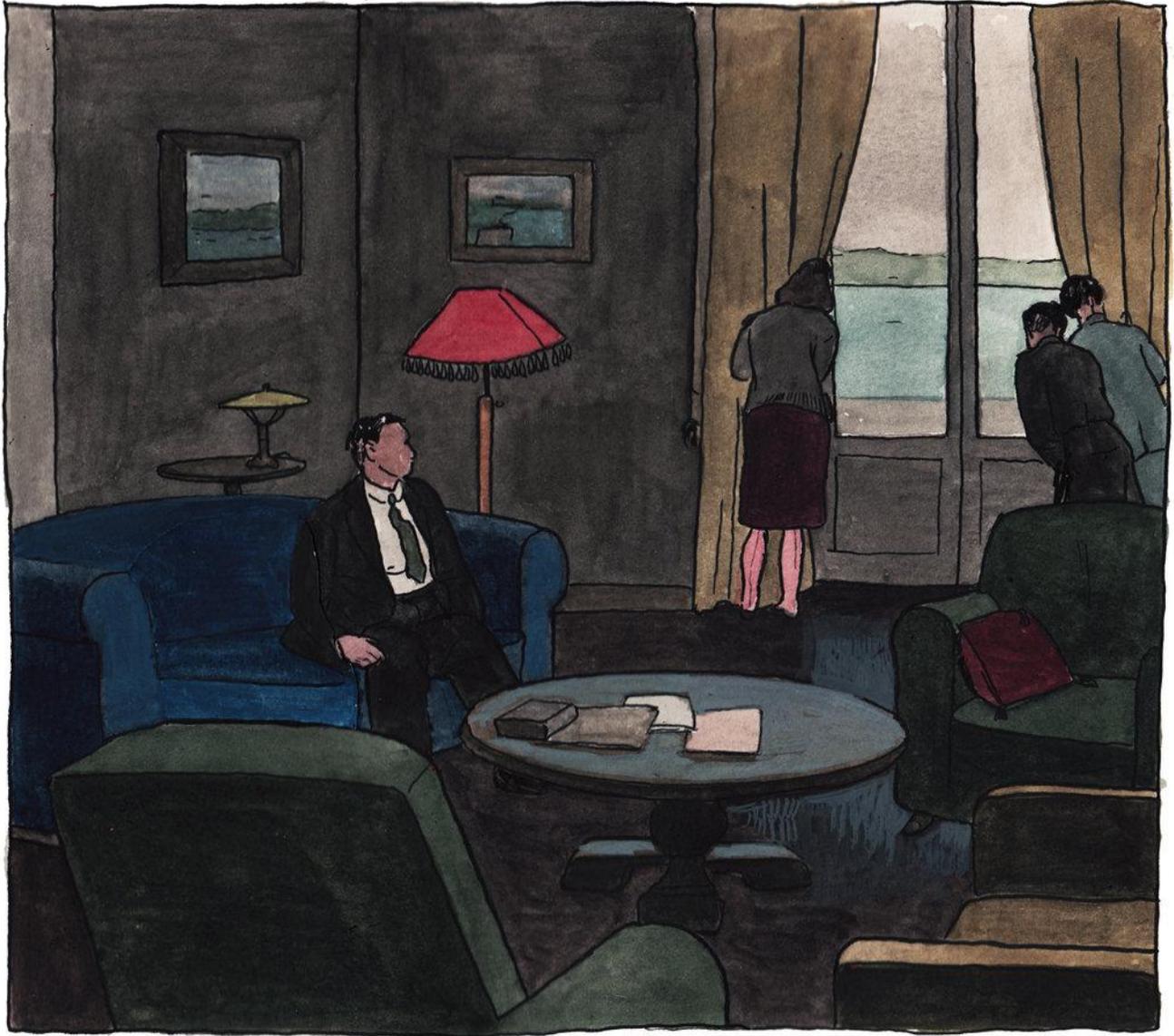
The hotel had about 30 guest rooms, as well as a billiard room, a reading room and a room for playing cards. The garden faced the lake. At that time, it housed a number of Jewish guests, mostly from Greece, who had escaped the Nazi occupation there.



But after the armistice, the area around Lago Maggiore was occupied by the Germans — the SS-Panzer Grenadier-Division Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler. There had been no massacres of Jews on Italian soil until then, but soon, the SS started to hunt them down. Captain Hans Krüger directed the operations in Meina and the surrounding villages.



That Wednesday morning, Sept. 15, the hotel was surrounded by the SS, probably after having been denounced. Twenty Jews were identified, including: Alberto and Eugenia Behar, the owners of the hotel, with their children; the Fernandez Diaz family; the Mosseris; Raoul Torres and his wife, Valerie Nahoum; Daniele Modiano; Vittorio Haim Pompas; Vitale Cori, the hotel's bartender; and Lotte.



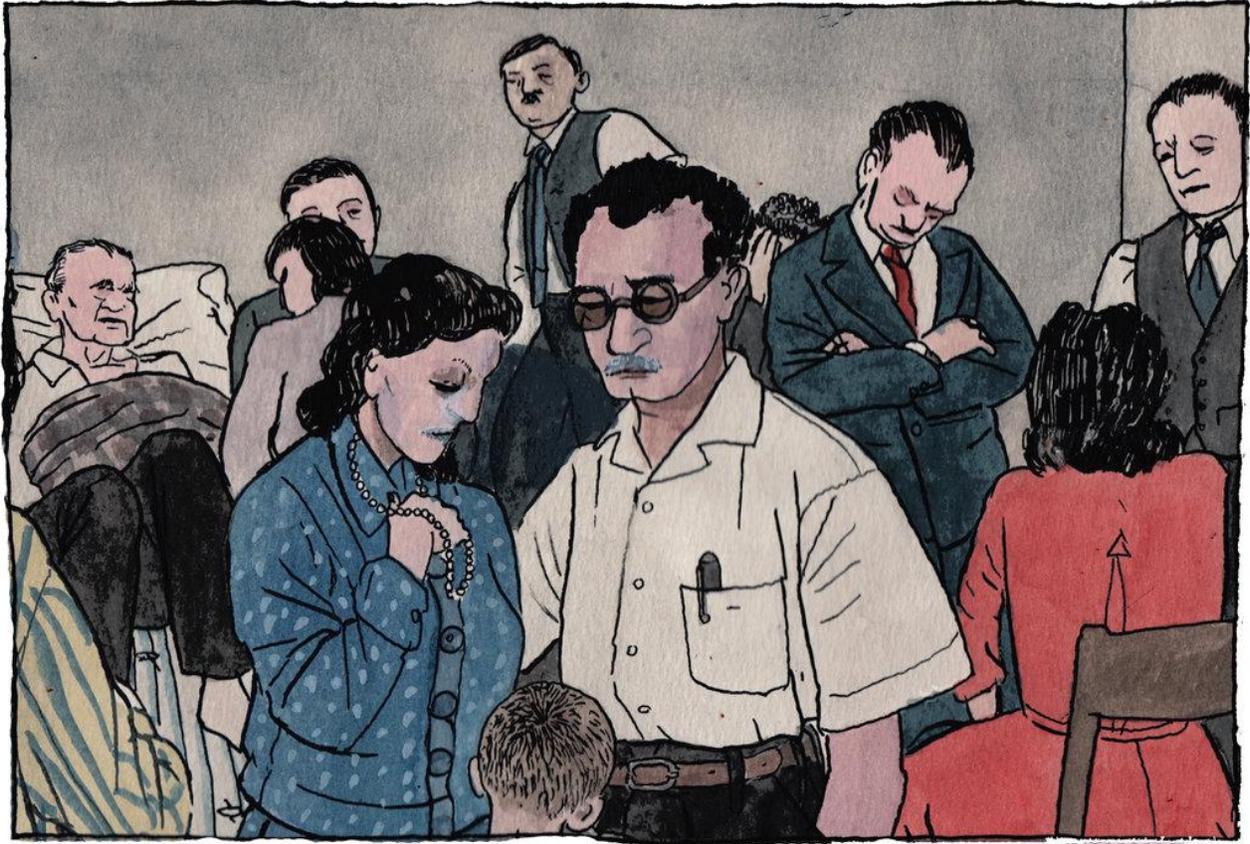
When the SS arrived, Lotte was in the reading room. She saw the soldiers through the glass door and, frightened, went with Mario to their room upstairs. Around 11:30 a.m., an SS officer entered and arrested her, leaving Mario behind because he was considered Aryan. The Jews were locked up in a big room on the fourth floor.



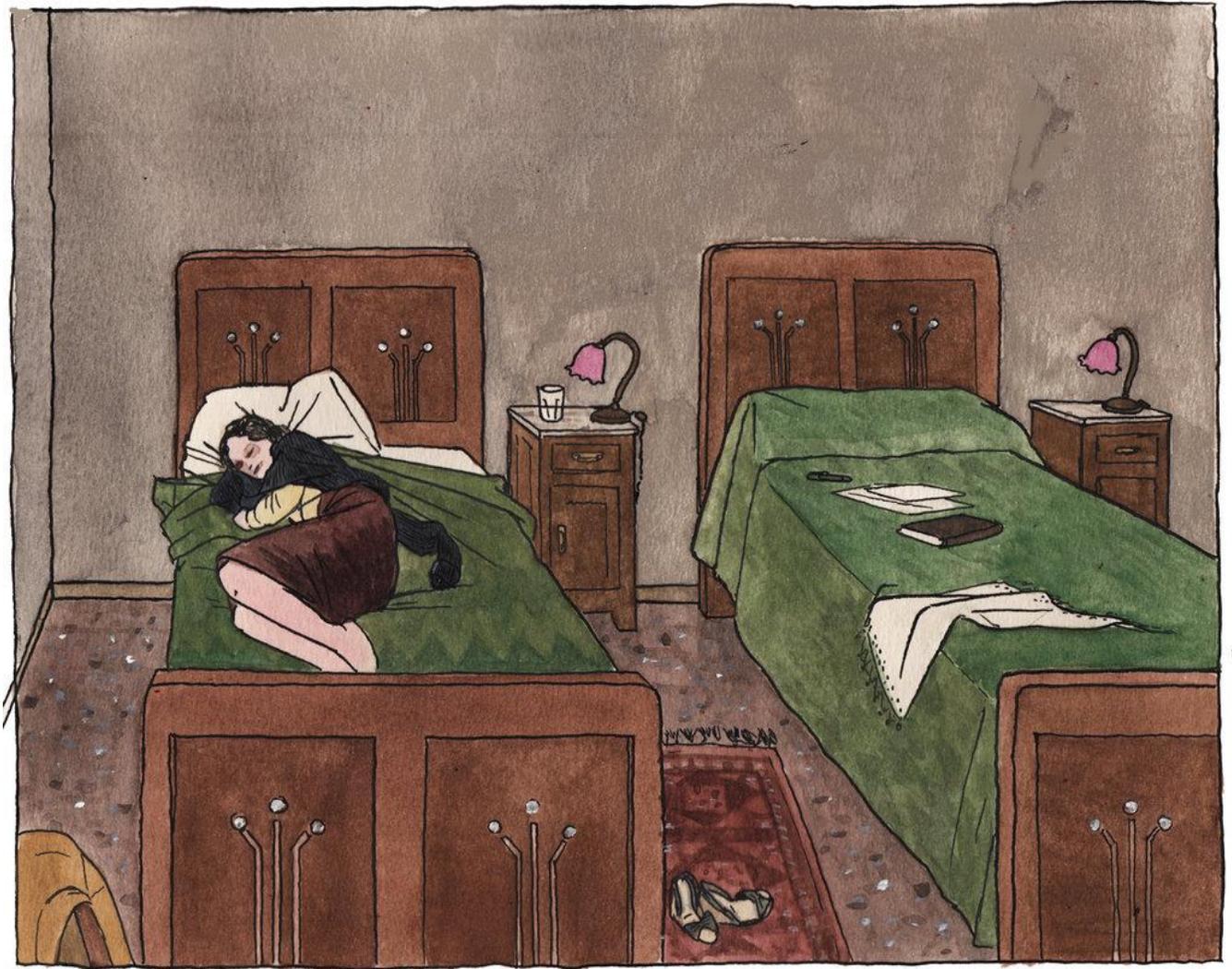
The next day, the Jewish prisoners were allowed to have their meals with the other guests in the main dining hall.



In the afternoon, they were allowed to go in groups of two for short walks in the garden. If they did not return, they were warned, the other prisoners would be shot.



Mario Mazzucchelli went to Milan to ask the authorities to have his wife freed as an Italian citizen, but in vain. Monday he returned to the hotel. He found Lotte quiet and absent, as if in shock. When he left, he promised to find help.



Wednesday evening, two SS officers went up to the fourth floor for three people: Marco and Ester Mosseri, and Lotte Fröhlich. In the hallway, they picked up Vitale Cori. The prisoners were driven a few miles away, then shot in the back of the head and thrown into the lake with stones tied to their necks.

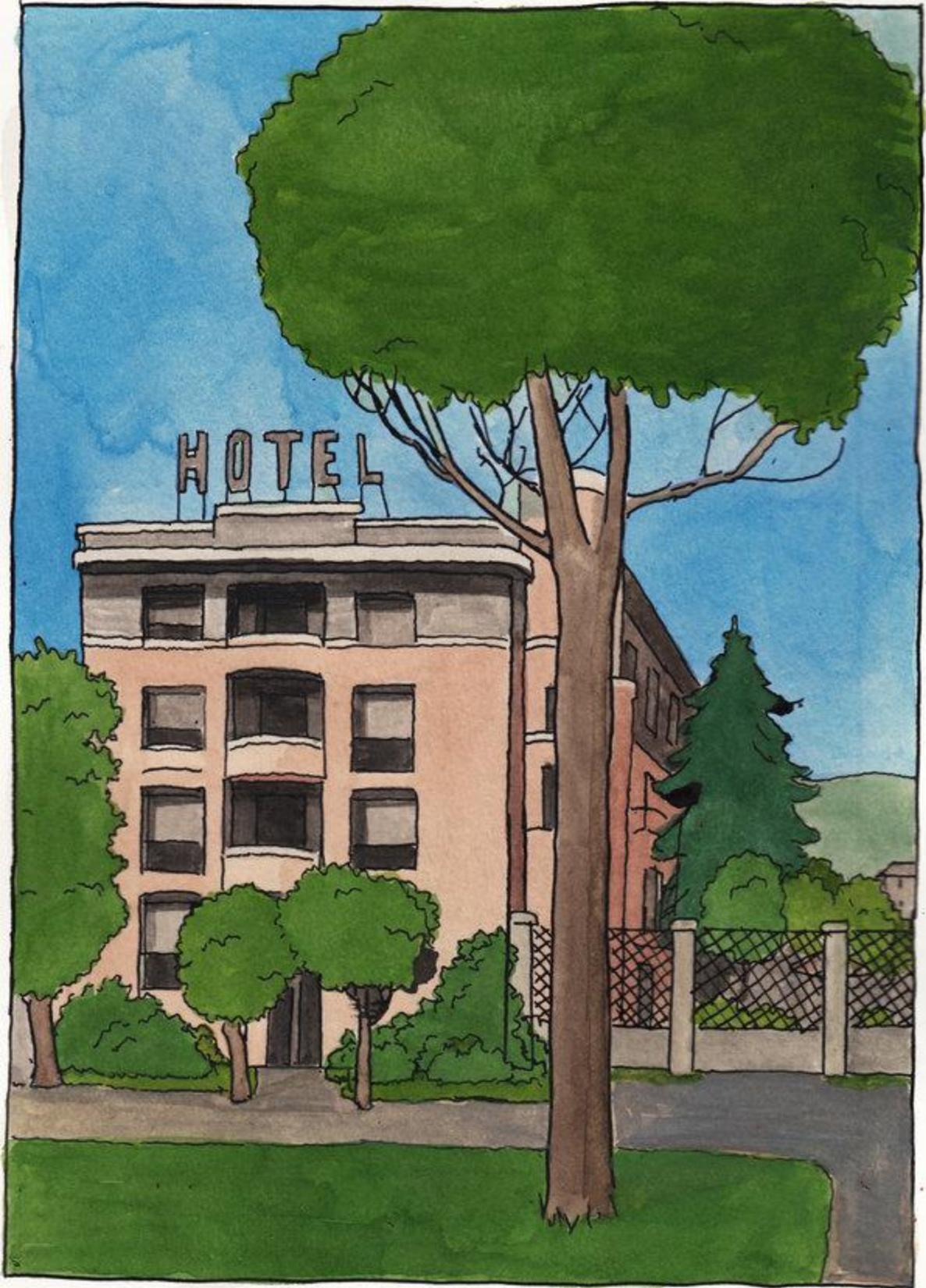
That night, the soldiers made two more trips between the hotel and the lake. All the Jews on the fourth floor were killed except for Dino Fernandez Diaz and his three grandchildren, who had barricaded themselves inside. They were forced out the following night. The grandfather begged for their lives, but they too were executed and thrown in the lake. Over the next few days, bodies floated to the surface. The SS recovered the corpses and burned them.





The hotel was eventually abandoned. In the '50s, it was torn down, and a new hotel, Hotel Victoria, was built in its place. It, too, was abandoned and demolished. Today, it is an apartment complex.

The fate of Lotte and the other Jews was forgotten. Those responsible for the Meina massacre were tried in Germany in 1968, and Mario Mazzucchelli testified as a witness. Three officers were sentenced to life in prison, though in 1970, the Supreme Court declared the statute of limitations had expired and released them.



An Italian police report on the Meina massacre was lost, only to reappear in 1994, when the so-called “cabinet of shame” was discovered in a storage room in Rome, shelving hundreds of files of war crimes committed on Italian soil after the armistice.

Mario Mazzucchelli had a commemorative stone placed in his hometown cemetery, where in 1982 he would be buried. It reads: “To the sweet and tender memory of Lotte Mazzucchelli Fröhlich, atrociously sacrificed to an unspeakable myth.”



Produced by KARI HASKELL and JON HUANG

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