

Truth

Molly Evangeline

Truth

Makilien Trilogy – Book 1

Copyright © 2011 by Molly Evangeline

Published by Living Sword Publishing

www.makilien.com

www.mollyevangeline.com

Cover Image, Design, and Map

Copyright © Molly Evangeline

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission of the author. The only exception is brief quotations in written reviews.

All Scriptures are taken from the New American Standard Bible, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.
www.Lockman.org

ISBN 13: 978-0983774006

ISBN 10: 0983774005

:Chapter One:
Prisoners

Makilien glared, her intense eyes switching from a half-finished charcoal sketch to the subject of the drawing. The steady, unchanging trickle of the shallow stream should have been a soothing sound, yet it grated on every single one of her nerves. No longer able to bear it, she dropped her piece of charcoal and picked up a stone. With all her might, she flung it into the stream. The splash and ripples it caused only interrupted the natural flow momentarily before it returned to normal.

Scowling, Makilien stuffed her sketchbook and charcoal into the pouch at her side and leaned her head back against the tree. In the silence that followed, she sensed a concerned gaze. Finally, her eyes turned to the dark haired young man, two years her elder, and her closest friend.

“I don’t know how much longer I can take this, Aedan. I have sketched this stream from almost every possible angle over the years. I’m tired of doing it just to pass the time.”

Aedan kicked at the dirt. In his heart, he agreed, but what could he say to give her encouragement or change any of it? They went through this nearly every day, and even that was monotonous, but as far as he knew, change was impossible.

Nothing ever changed in the village of Reylaun. The butcher, the bakery, the inn—everything stayed exactly as it had been for over a century. And the people were just as unchanging. They were born, lived their quiet lives, and eventually died. Every day the same. Day after day. It was just the way life was.

After a long moment of frustrated silence, Makilien stood, mumbling, “I should go home. Mother might have chores for me.”

Aedan rose with her. “Me too.”

Makilien envied him in a way. At least he had some purpose to his life in shouldering the responsibility of caring and providing for his mother and younger sister. They relied on him as the man of the house since his father’s untimely death years ago, the result of a hunting accident, or so they had been told.

The two friends walked a short ways together before they came to a split in the road, one way leading to Makilien’s house, and the other to Aedan’s.

“I’ll see you later, Makilien.”

“Bye, Aedan.”

Going their separate ways, Makilien soon reached the house of her family’s small village farm. Inside the modest dwelling, Makilien found her mother Hanna already at work on supper while little six-year-old Leiya swept the floor. Hanna looked up from her meal preparations when the floorboards creaked at Makilien’s entrance.

“Makilien, the animals’ water trough is low. Will you please take Leiya to the well?” she requested.

“Yes, Mother.”

Makilien held back a sigh, knowing her depressed mood would only make her mother unhappy.

With buckets in tow, Makilien led her younger sister through the dreary, gray village they called home. *Not a single thing ever changes*, she lamented on their way to the well, a task she'd preformed nearly every day for most of her seventeen years.

As they passed by, Makilien glanced at the two guards who stood on either side of the village's one gate. Tall men, dressed entirely in menacing black, they wore large, angular helmets that covered most of their stony faces. Makilien's skin prickled at the sight of them.

No one went in or out of Reylaun without permission. If anyone wanted to visit a nearby village or go out hunting, they had to have an escort. Zirtan, the ruler of the country of Aldûlir declared it to be for the good and safety of everyone—to protect them from the vast evilness of Dolennar outside their borders. Zirtan, a ruler no one had ever seen—a ruler who seemed to have been around for years far past those of an average Human.

Makilien and Leiya soon arrived at the nearest public well. A guard stood there too. Even their water consumption was monitored. The guard watched them with piercing dark eyes as they lowered their buckets into the well.

Living in Reylaun felt like living in a prison, but to speak in such a way would be considered treason. One could be put in the stocks, beaten, or worse for any word or deed that questioned the all-powerful Zirtan. But most people insisted life was good and that Zirtan only did what was best for them. They were content that Reylaun had never been attacked by the evil outside, and everyone could live their lives quietly. *They are fooling themselves*, Makilien thought bitterly. *We are no better than prisoners.*

As she lifted her last bucket, she glanced once more at the guard, glad he could not read her mind else she would have been dragged away to the center of the village and punished for all to see. But this thought did not scare Makilien as much as her parents said it ought to. All the desperate questions and laments in her heart cried to be shared and answered, but she held her tongue, if only for her family's sake.

With Makilien's two buckets full and one small enough for Leiya to carry, the two of them turned for home. After they had passed the gate, Leiya whispered, "They scare me."

Makilien took a quick glance over her shoulder at the guards. "Don't worry, I wouldn't let them hurt you."

When they reached home, Makilien carried her buckets of water around the house to a small stable. In a paddock stood three sheep, some chickens, and an old milk cow and her calf. Makilien dumped the water into the trough and watched them drink.

"We're not much better off than you," she murmured.

At the deep sound of her father's voice drifting from the house, Makilien turned away from the animals. Inside, the family gathered for their evening meal. As the food was passed, Hanna asked her husband, "Did work go well today, Néthyn?"

"Yes," he answered with only a satisfied nod and no details concerning his labor at the mill.

Quietness settled over the table. Makilien glanced at each of her parents as she poked at her supper with her fork. Neither appeared to have anything more to say. She hated when it was like this, and it seemed to be so more and more lately, at least to her. When she could no longer bear the silence, she asked, "Did anything unusual happen?"

Her father gave her a questioning look. “Unusual?”

“Anything different? Something interesting you could tell us about?”

“No.”

Makilien’s shoulders sagged with a sigh. They never had anything of any interest to discuss at the table because nothing happened in Reylaun unless it was something bad and, right now, even that would have been welcome.

Finally, Makilien pushed her plate toward the center of the table.

“I’m not hungry,” she muttered.

Everyone paused. Néthyn and Hanna looked at each other across the table, sharing a look of discouragement.

“What is wrong this time?” Néthyn asked with a sigh, weary of his daughter’s increasing discontent.

“This, right here, is wrong,” Makilien answered, her voice raising a little. “We don’t have anything to talk about at the table. What are we living for? Just to live? What is the point? Don’t you think there should be a purpose?”

“Makilien, stop,” Néthyn told her firmly.

But Makilien’s frustration had built too far. “Don’t you ever wonder what more there is to Dolennar and why Zirtan is trying to hide it from us?”

Hanna gasped, and Néthyn looked hard at his daughter, caught between anger over her outburst and fear for her.

“Lord Zirtan is protecting us. There is nothing but evil in the world, and you should be grateful we are protected from it.”

“What if the evil is right here, not out there? Don’t you feel the fear and dread creeping into you whenever you are near his guards? What if *they* are the evil ones—”

“Makilien, that is enough,” Néthyn commanded. “Do you want our family to be seen as traitors? Do not speak in such a way again. Outside of our borders *is* evil.”

A tense and uncomfortable silence followed, and the family continued their meal. Knowing she would not be granted permission to leave the table, Makilien crossed her arms and glared at her lap until the meal ended.



After the sun had dropped below the horizon that night, Makilien sat on the steps of the front porch and stared up at the stars. *I wonder if they are the same in faraway places as they are here or if they are different. Will I ever find out? Will I even know what is just beyond the border of our village or will I die here uselessly just as everyone else?*

“Makilien, will you take me to hear Mornash’s stories tonight?”

The sound of Leiya’s sweet voice brought an interruption to Makilien’s depressing thoughts, and she looked up at her sister with a sigh.

“Don’t you get tired of them?”

“No.” Little Leiya crawled into Makilien’s lap, her large brown eyes illuminated by moonlight. “Can you take me, please?”

Makilien still hesitated, but she could not say no to Leiya’s pleading expression. She dearly loved her little sister, and at least it could be one of her life’s goals to make her happy.

“All right, let’s go.”

Leiya clapped excitedly as Makilien set her on the ground and rose to her feet. Makilien had to smile as Leiya took her hand, and the two of them walked toward the village square.

The dancing light of a bright fire lit up the center of town, and they joined the many people already gathered there. Mornash, a short, plump, undesirable man who reminded Makilien of some sort of rodent, stood with the fire behind him as he faced the crowd. He had been the village storyteller for as long as Makilien could remember, and she harbored deep dislike for him, though most people loved to hear his stories.

Makilien took a vacant seat on a bench and set Leiya back on her lap to listen as Mornash told his tales. Most were scary stories—stories about sneaky goblins, giant, fire-breathing dragons, Elves that were evil beings who tricked unsuspecting people into danger, and many other horrible creatures. They were all stories of the evil world told to fascinate adults and both scare and delight the children. But Makilien had never enjoyed the stories, not truly believing them. She believed the evil creatures were real, but she also believed there had to be more than that. More than Mornash never shared with them.

The storytelling lasted for over an hour, but then the people began to disperse to get their children to bed. Amidst the sound of children begging for one more story, Makilien left Leiya for a moment and found the courage to walk over to Mornash. She'd never talked to him personally before because of her dislike for him, but tonight she was just worked up enough to ask him a few questions.

“Mornash, how do you know about all those creatures if we are never allowed to leave the village?”

Mornash blinked his beady eyes in surprise and then answered smoothly, "I am a loyal servant of Lord Zirtan and go wherever I am requested. I am not so fortunate as you to have been sheltered in this village all my life."

"What is out there?" Makilien asked, her heart pounding with a desperate hope that she just might learn something from this man, undesirable or not.

"Have you not listened to my stories?" Mornash questioned, placing his hands on his hips with impatience.

"Yes, but there must be more." Makilien's desperation leaked out in her tone. "If there are so many evil creatures, how have we stayed safe?"

Mornash tensed and narrowed his eyes. "Lord Zirtan is a powerful ruler, quite capable of protecting his people from evil. You should not be speaking as you do about things you do not understand. Be thankful for Lord Zirtan's protection."

Makilien wasn't satisfied, but she now realized Mornash wasn't the one to talk to. He surely wouldn't hesitate to get her in trouble if she kept after him. Disappointed, she turned away, but before she returned to her sister she ran into Aedan.

"I thought you hated Mornash's stories," Aedan said with a smile.

"I do," Makilien muttered, "but Leiya doesn't."

"Yeah, Rommia still likes to listen to them too," Aedan said, looking over his shoulder to locate his own sister. Turning back to Makilien, he asked, "What were you talking to Mornash about?"

Makilien's face soured. "I wanted him to tell me what more there is in Dolennar, outside of our village."

"I'd like to know that too, but I don't think I'd go to him for answers." He was surprised Makilien had tried it.

“I know, but he’s the only one who knows besides the guards, and I’d sooner ask him than one of them.”

“Be careful. You don’t want to get into trouble.”

“It might be worth it to know,” Makilien murmured.

Aedan nodded slowly, but said nothing. Too many people still lingered around them. They would have to wait to speak freely another time.

:Chapter Two:

The Stranger

With each unchanging day that passed, Makilien grew more and more despondent. Her family and friends all sensed it, but no one, not even Aedan or Leiya, could do anything to lighten her mood.

Several days later, Makilien reluctantly agreed to a walk around the outskirts of the village with Derrin, a young man about Aedan's age. It was well known throughout the community that Derrin had been taken with Makilien for years. She, however, had no interest despite everyone's attempts to see them together.

"What's wrong, Makilien?" Derrin asked after failing miserably in an attempt to have a conversation with her. "You're so quiet."

"I'm always quiet," Makilien muttered.

"Not this quiet."

Makilien crossed her arms and kicked at a pebble. "You know how I hate life here. I want it to have some sort of purpose, but it doesn't."

"Perhaps it could," Derrin said, his words tentative. "Maybe . . . if you had your own family . . ."

“Stop, Derrin,” Makilien snapped, a little more harshly than she meant to. “I know you have your heart set on marrying me, but I’m not interested. Neither do I have any interest in raising a family who will just exist as we are.”

With their walk over as far as she was concerned, Makilien strode away leaving the young man to follow behind in disappointment. By now they had nearly reached the gate. When it came within her view, a most unusual halted Makilien. A stranger stood at the gate, speaking to the guards. Standing behind him was a proud dapple gray horse, quite a rarity since the only horses she had ever seen were the pure black ones belonging to the guards.

Makilien inched her way closer, straining to hear the men’s words.

“. . . you are not to speak with the villagers,” one of the guards instructed, his voice sharp with warning.

The man merely gave a casual shrug.

“You will get your supplies and leave in the morning, understand?”

“That’s all I asked.”

“Remember, keep away from the villagers,” the guard reminded him threateningly.

“Yes, sir,” the stranger replied with a hint of sarcasm.

The two guards stepped out of his way, and he turned to his horse. After mounting, he rode slowly into the village. Makilien was riveted. It was rare for a stranger to come in who was not a servant or subject of Zirtan, and clearly he was not.

The stranger rode right past Makilien who could only stare. He turned his head to look at her as he passed and nodded courteously. His short, dark hair and beard were flecked with gray, showing his years, but his eyes made him seem even

older. They were the eyes of someone who had seen many things—things Makilien longed to see. An incredible urge to follow him gnawed at her, but the guards were watching closely. Resisting, she turned for home.

It truly was her intention to head straight for her house, but the urge to see the stranger became overpowering, and she changed course once the gate was well out of sight. Instead, she headed for the livery stable where he would have to bed down his horse. Avoiding everyone along the way, Makilien finally made it to the stable and took a cautious step inside. The stranger stood in a stall brushing and talking to his horse. Silently, Makilien approached him.

“Just what could a young woman like you be thinking by sneaking alone into a stable with a complete stranger who could kill her for all she knows?”

Makilien froze. The man’s back was to her, and she didn’t know how he could have possibly heard her coming. With a wry expression, he turned around.

“How did you know I was here?” Makilien came to only one conclusion. “Magic?”

The man scoffed. “Hardly. There is no such thing. I heard you coming.”

Makilien frowned deeply.

“To a trained ear, you are not nearly as silent as you think you are,” the stranger said with a flicker of amusement in his eyes.

Makilien’s cheeks flamed with embarrassment, but she asked, “Who are you?”

“My name is Torick, but I suggest you leave here before someone sees you. Apparently, I am not permitted to speak with the villagers here and that means you.”

“I’m sure I would not be permitted to speak to you either, but I’m not afraid to do it anyway.”

Torick smirked. “You’re quite a spirited one, aren’t you?”

“I just want to know the truth.”

“Truth?” The man’s eyes narrowed keenly.

“Yes. The truth about what is out there, beyond this village, and whether or not there is any purpose to life.”

Torick paused and contemplated her words. “Were you born here?”

“Yes, and so were my parents, my grandparents, my great-grandparents, and probably my whole family since the beginning of time when Dolennar began,” Makilien answered in a dark and miserable tone.

“Well, I’m sure that’s not quite true.” Torick turned back to his horse.

“Please, tell me what is out there.” Fearless, Makilien walked into the stall with him, determined not to leave without answers. “Is it all evil like I’ve been told?”

Torick looked at her again, finding himself intrigued by this young woman with rich brown hair and striking green eyes that hungered for knowledge. Something about her piqued his interest, something he just could not ignore.

“What is your name?”

“Makilien.”

“No, Makilien, it is not all evil.”

Then it is a lie! Makilien’s heart jumped at the knowledge.

“What else is there?” she asked eagerly, wanting to know everything all at once.

“It is true that evil can be found everywhere, but there is much good also. There are good beings fighting the evil.”

Makilien knew how dangerous her next question would be, but she had to know. “Is Zirtan evil?”

Torick’s eyes were hard with seriousness. “These questions and the answers could lead to very serious consequences.” *For both of them.*

“I *need* to know,” Makilien replied, holding his gaze steadily.

“Yes, Zirtan is evil . . . he is the root of all evil . . . evil itself. He is the deceiver of all Doleennar.”

Makilien hardly dared to breathe. “Is he Human?”

“No.”

“What is he?”

“I told you, evil.”

Makilien wasn’t sure she understood this, but one thing she did understand well. “We are his prisoners.”

“Yes, you are,” Torick confirmed gravely. “He does not want you to know the truth and will keep you from learning and accepting it no matter what it takes. He uses his lies to convince people that he is doing what is best for them, but unfortunately, at the end of life, these people will realize they never believed the truth and will be separated from it forever.”

A dreadful chill raced through Makilien’s body. “What can I do? I want to know the truth.”

“The truth is available to anyone who will believe it.”

“Tell me more,” Makilien requested. Gaining answers to the questions she’d struggled with for years only made her want to know more.

Torick glanced uneasily over his shoulder. “Now is not a safe time or place.”

“I need to know more,” Makilien pleaded with him.

Torick sighed. "Tell you what, you meet me here at dawn tomorrow. By that time I will have found a place for us to talk."

Makilien grinned. "I'll be here."

She left Torick and snuck away from the stable with more to think about and consider than she ever had in her life. Makilien wished desperately to share the information, but she kept it to herself for the time being. She would tell her parents after she learned more from Torick. The more information she had, the easier it would be to convince her family it was true.

Word of Torick's arrival spread through every corner of the village in no time at all. Néthyn had heard all about him by the time he arrived home from work, and the family finally had something to discuss over supper.

"Everyone hopes he leaves quietly in the morning like he is supposed to," Néthyn said, passing a bowl to his wife.

"So do I," Hanna replied. "The last thing we need is trouble."

"Why do you think the stranger would cause trouble?" Makilien asked, trying to keep an innocent demeanor.

"Strangers almost always mean trouble," Néthyn told her.

Speaking cautiously as she spooned peas onto her plate, Makilien suggested, "Maybe he can tell us things about other lands."

"Yeah, he can tell us stories like Mornash," Leiya piped up.

"No." Their father gave them each a stern look. "No one is to talk to him. Anyone who does will be punished."

The thought of punishment made Leiya's young face become sober and fearful.

"What could be so terrible about talking to him?"

Everyone's eyes settled on Makilien, and she shifted in her seat.

"Strangers like him tell lies," Néthyn spoke with surety.

"How could you know they were lies if you've never left the village to see for yourself?" Makilien found herself asking.

Néthyn's stern look returned to her. "Makilien, I have already said we will not discuss such things. There will be no more talk of the stranger."

"Yes, Father," Makilien murmured, wondering how she would ever be able to convince her parents of what she believed to be true.



Tossing and turning, Makilien could hardly find sleep for fear of not waking at dawn. All through the night her mind raced with the questions she wanted to ask Torick and the answers she'd already gained. For a long time she dwelled on what he'd said about believing the truth. The thought of being separated from it forever scared her. She had to find out what it was.

At last, the barest hint of light peeked through the windows, and Makilien threw back her covers. She dressed quickly and snuck out of the house, careful not to wake anyone.

No one was around this time of the morning, yet Makilien used all caution on her way to the stable. She was willing to risk punishment to see Torick, but she certainly wanted to avoid it.

Creeping into the stable, Makilien looked around. Torick's horse stood where he had left him, but she could find no sign of Torick.

She whispered his name.

Only the soft snort from his horse came as an answer. *Maybe he's on his way*, she thought, realizing in her eagerness she had arrived a little early.

Makilien walked over to the horse who watched her curiously, but with calm eyes. Gently, she ran her hand down his smooth face. She had only seen a couple of horses in her lifetime. No one in Reylaun had any use for them. All they had were ponies and donkeys for pulling carts. Makilien longed to ride a horse and dreamed about what it would be like to ride Torick's magnificent, gray stallion.

A long while passed, marked only by the steady breathing of the horse and straw rustling in the corner from mice, but Torick did not appear. Makilien frowned and looked out the window as the sun climbed up over the trees. *Where is he? Maybe he didn't actually think I'd come*, she grumbled. *Or he never intended to come in the first place.*

The stable door creaked open, and a shaft of pale sunlight poured in. Makilien's heart jumped, and she ducked down out of instinct. A stableman walked in to feed and care for the stabled ponies. Makilien grimaced. Staying low, she crept out of the stall and to the back door. Holding her breath, she slipped out and pressed herself up against the building. After a moment, she blew out a sigh when no one came after her.

Looking both ways, she dashed away from the stable. Once the building was out of sight, she relaxed and slowed. The villagers were used to seeing her walk in the early morning and would not suspect her. In the middle of the main street, she paused, wondering why Torick had not come to see her. *Well, if he won't come to see me, I'll find him.*

Makilien hurried to the inn, which was really just a gathering place for the townspeople since it was so rare to have visitors. Inside the large, gloomy building, Makilien spotted Keni, the innkeeper at work. She searched the room and when she saw no one else around, she walked up to the bar.

“Hello, Keni,” she said cheerfully.

“Hello, Makilien, what’re you doin’ in here?” the bald and somewhat short and rounded man asked.

Makilien shrugged. “I was just taking a walk.” She purposely let a moment of silence pass. “Hey, Keni, did the stranger leave yet like he said he was going to?”

Keni sent her a serious look. “You ought not to be askin’ questions ‘bout him.”

Makilien shook her head as if it was of no importance. “I was just curious if he was gone since everyone was hoping he would leave without trouble.”

“Oh, he’s gone all right,” Keni answered with a quick nod.

Makilien frowned. “But I thought I saw his horse still at the stable.”

Keni leaned closer to the bar and spoke in a low voice. “Late last night, guards came in and took him away.”

Makilien’s stomach twisted. “Why?”

Keni shook his head. “Guess they thought he was stirrin’ up trouble.”

“What did they do with him?” Makilien asked breathlessly.

“Who knows? Maybe they took him to Lord Zirtan.”

Remembering what Torick had said about Zirtan made Makilien shudder. If Zirtan was nothing but evil, what chance did Torick have of surviving?

“Somethin’ wrong, Makilien?” Keni asked when he noticed her look of distress.

“No,” Makilien lied, quickly hiding her emotions. “I’m fine. I think I should be getting home for breakfast.”

She turned and left the inn with an awful feeling of hopelessness. Now that Torick had been taken away, how would she ever learn the truth?

:Chapter Three:

Escape

The news of Torick's capture pulsed at the very center of Makilien's mind; however, her family had no reason to believe her sullen mood to be anything more than what she'd been going through for days. But to Makilien, it was worse than ever. Now that she knew about Zirtan and the true state of those in the village, she wanted desperately to do something, but what could she do? If only she had been able to speak more with Torick!

Later on that day, Makilien followed her mother and sister to the town square to do their market day shopping. It was one of the only days that offered any change or a chance for entertainment, but this day Makilien's mind was not on their task. Hanna continually had to reclaim her attention, and even then Makilien was preoccupied.

Only a short time after their arrival in the bustling center of town, a sudden commotion startled everyone. Makilien looked up. Several guards stormed into the square. Between them, they dragged a young man. Makilien gasped and horror gripped her.

Hanna and Leiya turned at the sound.

"Aedan!" Leiya cried with the same distress that ran like ice through Makilien's body.

Everyone who had gathered in the market grew still. Gasps and murmurs punctuated the stillness before everything became deathly quiet. The guards dragged Aedan into the center of the square and halted.

Sweeping his cruel eyes over the crowd, one of the guards declared, "This man was seen speaking with the stranger, an enemy of His Majesty, Lord Zirtan, after warnings were issued not to do so. He will therefore face the consequences."

With a rough shove, Aedan stumbled toward a tall post, and Makilien knew what was coming even before she spotted the whip in another guard's hand. Her throat and chest tightened. Could she just stand there and watch her best friend be punished for something she too had done? Without knowing what she could possibly do, Makilien rushed toward Aedan.

"Stop! Please don't!"

The iron grip of one of the guards clamped down on her arm and jerked her back.

"Stay back, girl!" he growled.

Makilien struggled against him. "No! Please!"

Her eyes caught Aedan's. He shook his head with grave urgency.

"Makilien, don't."

But Makilien had to do something. She had to. She pulled hard against the guard, but she was no match for his strength. Before things could escalate to the point she might share Aedan's fate, someone took her by the shoulders.

"Makilien, come with me," Néthyn said firmly.

The guard released Makilien to her father, but her eyes stayed fused with Aedan's as Néthyn half-dragged her back to where her mother and sister waited. But she could not bear to

stay, and the moment he released her, she ran for home, tears blurring her vision. When at last she reached the confines of her bedroom, the tears spilled over, pouring down her face. Overcome with frustration and pain, she beat her fists against the wall until finally she slid down against it, spent. Burying her face in her arms, she wept bitterly.

“This isn’t right!” she choked out, hardly able to bear the despair that crushed her heart. “It shouldn’t be this way!”

She cried in agony for a long time and barely noticed when her family returned home. Quietly, her parents stepped into her bedroom, and her mother knelt beside her.

“Makilien,” she coaxed, laying a hand on her shoulder. “Will you come downstairs and have lunch with us?”

Makilien gave no response.

Hanna glanced uncertainly at her husband, and Néthyn said, “Makilien, you must understand. Aedan chose to ignore the warnings we are all given for our own good and had to face the consequences.”

“No, the warnings weren’t for our own good!” Makilien burst out. She rose, eyes flashing. “We are prisoners, and Zirtan is just trying to hide the truth from us.”

“Makilien, what has gotten into you?” Hanna asked, shocked and frightened at what her daughter’s behavior could bring upon her in light of what she had just witnessed in the square. “How can you dare to say that?”

“Because, it’s true! I talked to the stranger too,” Makilien declared, and her mother paled. “He told me Zirtan is evil and we are his prisoners. He’s deceiving us into thinking he’s doing what is best for us, but he is just hiding the truth. It isn’t just evil outside our borders. There is good out there fighting the evil.”

“The stranger told you lies,” Néthyn tried to make her understand. “That is why we were warned not to speak with him.”

“No,” Makilien insisted stubbornly. “That is exactly what Zirtan wants us to believe. Torick was telling the truth.”

Néthyn just shook his head, frustrated at his inability to make her understand and as fearful as his wife of the consequences. “Makilien, unless you stop this right now, you will not leave your room until you do.”

But Makilien would not be swayed. “I won’t stop searching for the truth.”

“You are going to get yourself punished just like Aedan or worse,” Néthyn warned her. The last thing he wanted was for that to happen to his daughter.

“If I find a purpose to my life it will be worth it.”

Néthyn didn’t know what else he could say. Hoping time would bring Makilien around, he and Hanna gave up and left the room, closing the door behind them.

Tears still falling, Makilien sat by her window and stared out at the forest, past the palisade. For hours she did not move. Evening crept into the village as the sunlight faded. At suppertime, Makilien’s door opened again, and she glanced back. Her mother stepped into the room with a tray of food.

“I’m not hungry,” Makilien murmured almost inaudibly.

“Makilien, you haven’t eaten since breakfast. You must eat.” Hanna set the tray of food down on Makilien’s bed and looked pleadingly at her daughter. “Please eat it.”

Makilien didn’t reply and turned her face back toward the window. With a sad sigh, Hanna turned and left the room again. Still, Makilien did not move. From her chair, she watched

the stars appear and the moon rise above the trees, but her mind was far from idle.

At last, Makilien stood and opened her window wider. She crawled through it and climbed down the tree growing next to the house, something she'd done frequently over the years. With all caution, she crept through the village, careful to stay well away from the patrolling guards. Shortly, she came to the small cottage where Aedan, Rommia, and their mother lived. Makilien snuck around the back of the house to Aedan's bedroom window. The curtains were closed but light peeked through.

She stepped up to the window and whispered, "Aedan."

When no answer came, she tried again a little louder. Finally, the fall of footsteps approached. The curtains parted, and Aedan looked out. He wore no shirt, but most of his torso and shoulders were wrapped with bandages. Makilien's stomach churned.

"Makilien, what are you doing?" Aedan asked, frowning down at her.

Makilien shrugged a little. "I wanted to see if you were all right."

Thinking she was acting very strange, Aedan looked at her oddly. "I'll be fine. You could have used the front door. Mother would have let you in."

"I know, but . . ." Makilien hesitated and looked to be certain no one was around. "Aedan, when did you speak to Torick?"

At once, Aedan turned very serious. "How do you know his name?"

"I spoke with him too," Makilien murmured.

Concern clouded her friend's eyes as he too scanned the area. He motioned for her to come in and helped her climb in through the window. Quietly, he shut it behind her and drew the curtains.

"When did you speak to him?" Aedan asked in a low voice.

"Yesterday in the stable, just after he got here."

"Are you sure no one saw you?"

"I don't think so. I'm sure they would have come after me by now."

"What did Torick tell you?" Aedan wanted to know.

"That Zirtan is evil and we are prisoners."

"He told me that too."

"What else did he tell you?" Makilien desperately hoped Aedan had learned more information than what she had been able to obtain.

"He said there are people and creatures fighting to end Zirtan's rule."

"Did he give you any details?"

"Not much, but he did say Zirtan is preparing to attack them. The army going against him is not as strong as Zirtan's, but they are trying to rally more help."

A sudden tingle of excitement raced through Makilien's body as she thought of being part of the fight. "Is that all he told you?"

Aedan nodded. "We were going to speak again, but then . . ."

Makilien sighed. "I was supposed to meet him at the stable this morning and talk more too. Where did you talk to him?"

"At the inn. I didn't think anyone else was around, but I guess I was wrong. Someone must have seen us talking, but I don't think it was Keni."

“No, he wouldn’t tell on you.” Makilien took a deep breath. “What do you think, Aedan? Do you believe what Torick said?”

“Yes, I do believe him,” Aedan answered with certainty.

“What are we going to do?”

“What can we do?”

“We can leave,” Makilien murmured.

The thought had for years floated around in her mind, but never this seriously.

Exhaling, Aedan shook his head in regret. “I can’t just leave, Makilien. I’m all Mother and Rommia have. I can’t walk out on them.”

Makilien understood his position, but that didn’t change the decision she’d already made. “I am going, Aedan . . . tonight.”

The young man’s eyes widened. “Tonight?”

“Yes. You know how I feel, and it’s worse now than it has ever been. I *must* find the truth. I can’t stay here and just accept I am a prisoner. I have to try to do something about it.”

“Do your parents know?”

“No . . . and I don’t think I can tell them. I know they would stop me from going. I told them what Torick said, but they won’t believe it.”

“Where will you go?” Aedan asked, wondering if she had any plans beyond her escape.

“I’m not really sure. I figure my best chance is to head south since Aldûlir is called the North. That’s all I know,” Makilien answered. How could she know any more than that?

“I wish you luck, Makilien, and you know how much I wish I could go with you.”

Makilien smiled. "I know. Thank you, Aedan." She turned back to the window. "I'd better get back home and get ready. I want to get as far as I can before morning."

But Aedan stopped her. "Wait. Before you go, I have something I want you to take."

He walked over to a chest on the floor and dug through its contents. Makilien was shocked when he pulled a dagger out of the chest and placed it in her hands. Weapons were forbidden in Reylaun. To know someone who possessed one was rare.

Makilien gazed in awe as she wrapped her fingers around the polished, deep red mahogany handle. Pulling it out of the sheath, her eyes took in the shining, razor sharp blade, slightly curved and about as long as her forearm. It had a snake-like design etched along the top edge.

"It was my father's," Aedan explained, "but I want you to take it."

"Oh, Aedan, I couldn't if it was your father's."

Makilien tried to hand it back to him, but he refused it.

"You need to have some protection, Makilien. You're going to need it much more than I am."

Aedan walked over to the window and opened it again. He peered out carefully before helping Makilien climb out.

"Be careful," Aedan whispered, almost afraid to speak out loud. "Torick said there was good, but there is also evil. You don't know what is out there."

"I know," Makilien murmured. After a pause, she told him, "Aedan, I am going to come back, and I'm going to come back with the truth."

Her friend nodded gratefully at her promise.

"Goodbye, Aedan."

“Goodbye, Makilien,” he said, his eyes expressing the deep longing to join her.

Wishing she could have him at her side as she began this dangerous and uncertain adventure, but knowing she could not, Makilien turned and ran home. She climbed back up the tree and through her bedroom window. Listening, she heard nothing and suspected her family had gone to bed.

Careful not to make any noise that would wake them, Makilien pulled a pack from under her bed and packed clothes and a few of her belongings into it, including her sketching supplies. She reached for her belt and buckled the dagger Aedan had given her around her waist along with a small pouch of coins she’d been saving.

With most of her preparations done, Makilien sat down at a small table in the corner of her room and wrote a note to her family, explaining her reasons for leaving and promising she’d be back for them. She placed it on her bed with her uneaten supper and snuck downstairs into the darkened kitchen. She’d left just enough room in her pack for enough food to last a couple days, hoping she’d be able to find more by the time it ran out.

Once Makilien had filled a waterskin and packed a couple useful items, it came time to leave. Taking one last look around the house, Makilien quietly walked to the back door. Just as she reached it, a voice broke the silence.

“Makilien?”

She spun around. Leiya stood in the kitchen doorway.

“Leiya, what are you doing up?” Makilien whispered.

“I’m thirsty,” Leiya told her innocently.

Makilien filled a cup with water and handed it to her. After Leiya had taken a long drink, she looked at her sister curiously.

“What are you doing?”

Makilien sighed and explained, “I’m going on a journey.”

“A journey?” Leiya perked up. “Like in stories?”

Makilien nodded.

“Do Mama and Papa know?”

“No, they don’t,” Makilien answered hesitantly.

“Won’t they be mad?”

Makilien grimaced. “I hope not. Now, Leiya, you have to go back to bed quietly, okay?”

“Makilien, will your journey be dangerous?”

“It might be.”

Deep concern clouded Leiya’s face. “Will you come back?”

“Yes, I’m going to come back,” Makilien assured her.

“When?”

“I don’t know.”

Leiya’s face drooped sadly. “I’m going to miss you.”

Her expression melted Makilien’s heart. She got down on her knees and hugged Leiya. “I’m going to miss you too.” When she let go, she said, “All right now, go on back to bed.”

Leiya turned and went quietly to her bedroom. Having seen her little sister made it difficult for Makilien to leave. But finally, she let herself out the back door and hurried past the paddock and through the side streets until she reached the palisade. She would never be able to leave by the gate, which was closed at night, but she knew one of the stakes that made up the wall was loose. When she was much younger, she and her friends used to dare each other to sneak outside the village and then, of course, come right back in. She hoped she could still squeeze through the gap.

Scanning the entire area for guards before she moved, Makilien dashed from the shadows of the buildings to the

palisade. Kneeling down, she put her fingers around one of the wooden stakes and pulled hard. Finally, the stake moved a little. Eyeing the gap, she shrugged off her pack and pushed it through first.

Makilien glanced over her shoulder once and squirmed through the gap. On the other side, she pulled the stake back into place, grabbed her pack, and stood. If she took just one more step, it would be the first time she had ever truly left Reylaun in her entire life.

Taking that one step, relief and a sense of freedom swept through her. She wasn't a prisoner any longer and was determined never to be one again. That thought sent her hastily into the woods for cover, and she began her journey south.

To read on and follow Makilien through the rest of her journey, *Truth* can be purchased in paperback and eBook from a variety of online retailers. For purchase links visit:

www.makilien.com

or

www.mollyevangeline.com