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# Character Biography

## Vána

By Dawn Felagund

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Like many of Tolkien's female characters, and especially the female Valar, Vána barely earns a mention in the published text, appearing on a bare four pages. From the published text, we learn that she is called the Ever-young, she is married to Oromë, and Yavanna is her sister. In learning of her role upon Arda, Tolkien tells us only that, "All flowers spring as she passes and open if she glances upon them; and all birds sing at her coming" (1).

Typical as well for the women of Arda, Vána's primary claim to fame comes from her associates rather than her own deeds. Aside from her illustrious sister and husband, two women who play defining roles in the mythology are named as her servants. Melian, the mother of Lúthien, is named as Vána's servant, as well as a servant of Estë, another female Vala who doesn't get much time in the published book (2). Likewise, Arien--who would pull the sun across the sky after the death of the Two Trees--is said to have tended the flowers in Vána's garden, watering them with the golden dew she collected from Laurelin in the eras before she was trusted to illuminate all of Arda (3). Indeed, the number of luminary characters associated with Vána belies the lack of importance suggested by her absence in the text and hints at a deeper, more profound history.

### A Bright Beginning

*The Book of Lost Tales* represents Tolkien's oldest published works relating to the history and mythology of Arda. Begun in the 1910s while Tolkien was serving in World War I, this collection of stories, full of lavish mythological detail, forms the recognizable foundation of what would become *The Silmarillion*.

At this early juncture, Vána warranted quite a bit more attention than could be given on a mere four pages. In fact, perusing the index of *The Book of Lost Tales 1* reveals page after page of entries concerning her. In this earliest version of the story, Vána played a formative role in the growth of Laurelin:

Then was the pit covered with rich earths that Palúrien [Yavanna] devised, and Vána came who loveth life and sunlight and at whose song the flowers arise and open, and the murmur of her maidens round her was like to the merry noise of the folk that stir abroad for the first time on a bright morning. There sang she the song of spring upon the mound, and danced about it, and watered it with great streams of that golden light that Ulmo had brought from the spilled lakes--yet was Kulullin almost o'erflowing at the end. (4)

Then Yavanna--called Palúrien in the early versions of the legends--performs enchantments that give rise to Laurelin, and "[t]hen did the Gods praise Vána and Palúrien and rejoice in the light" (5).

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There are obvious parallels between the earliest myth and the version that would be published around 60 years later. Also similar between the two versions, in *The Book of Lost Tales*, one of Vána's maidens--called Urwen in the early version and Arien in the published book--is charged with tending Laurelin and, later, braves the heat of the Sun to draw the new lamp across the sky (6, 7). The chief change between the earliest and published versions: Vána's primary role in the generation of Laurelin is eliminated. Indeed, in the published version, it is Nienna who takes her place, watering the mound from which the tree would emerge with tears, replacing levity and sprightliness with sorrow (8).

In the early version, as well, Vána presents herself as a compelling and assertive woman. She is among the Valar who speak most vocally, first against Melkor, then in favor of bringing the Elves to Valinor, and finally in support of hiding Valinor after the Darkening. At the loss of the Two Trees, she at first falls into inconsolable grief, then attempts to gather what she can of the spilled light to rekindle the dead tree, along with Lórien. While Yavanna understands her failure to do so as an indication that the Valar should turn their attentions elsewhere--namely to reclaiming the world from Melkor--Vána can think only of her lost tree, an early example of the theme threaded throughout Tolkien's works of a creator's obsession with the work of her own hands blinding her to all else.

And like the later creators, Vána's flaw also leads to an unlooked-for blessing. As she clings to the dead trunk of Laurelin after all ministrations have failed to rekindle the tree, her tears coax forth a new golden shoot that bears the fruit from which the Valar construct the Sun that her maiden, Urwen (Arien), will lead across the sky. Vána, in repentance of her earlier doubts, cuts short her golden hair to weave the sails of the Sun-ship (9).

### **Dimming Prospects**

In the next version of the story, *The Quenta*, published in *The Shaping of Middle-earth*, Vána begins to fade into the background of the story. As Tolkien pares down the legend of the Sun and Moon, Vána's pivotal role in the forging of the Sun disappears. She becomes the younger sister of Yavanna (and Varda as well, a detail that was not retained in the published version) and earns the title "Queen of Flowers," taking on her later role as a symbol of flowering and spring without the former command and power that she held in *The Book of Lost Tales*. (10)

What happened? Vána would never regain her primary role in the story; she would remain defined primarily by her associations: Yavanna, Oromë, Melian, and Arien. While Christopher Tolkien comments on the changing of roles between Vána and Nienna in germinating Laurelin, he gives no reason or even speculation about why his father chose to so suddenly and drastically reduce the role of a primary and intriguing character in the original legend (11).

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## Works Cited

1. *The Silmarillion, Valaquenta.*
2. Ibid.
3. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Sun and Moon."
4. *The Book of Lost Tales 1, Of the Coming of the Valar and the Building of Valinor.*
5. Ibid.
6. *The Book of Lost Tales 1, The Tale of the Sun and Moon.*
7. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Sun and Moon."
8. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Beginning of Days."
9. *The Book of Lost Tales 1, The Tale of the Sun and Moon.*
10. *The Shaping of Middle-earth, The Quenta.*
11. Ibid.

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## About the Author

Dawn Felagund is the founder and owner of the Silmarillion Writers' Guild and has authored more than thirty stories based on J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*, some of which have been translated and published in fan magazines around the world. These days, she directs her fannish energies towards research projects and developing the SWG into a fun and valuable group for *Silmarillion* fans. Dawn can be emailed at [DawnFelagund@gmail.com](mailto:DawnFelagund@gmail.com).