

THERE had been a time when cleaning up after formal occasions had been the duty of the lesser servants. But, Tromell supposed, it was long enough since Lord Jyscal's day for everyone to have forgotten the usual order of business. Lord Seymour had not yet been back long, and had refused most company so far, although he had been most eager to invite Lady Yuna into his home.

There wasn't much to take care of, anyway; most of Seymour's guests had refused food, apart from the young girl who, although nobody had mentioned it, was clearly an Al Bhed. Just a few plates and glasses to clear, and then Tromell would be able to return to more important matters. Stacking the dishes carefully, he took them out through the servants' door at the back of the mansion, and carried them down to the spring that flowed behind the building; it was easier to wash large quantities there than try to manoeuvre them around the small sink in the kitchen. There were machina that cleaned dishes with minimal manual involvement, Tromell had heard, but those were certainly banned in Guadosalam.

He had scrubbed the first two or so plates and carefully stacked them to a side, when he heard a voice above him ask, "Can I help you?"

"Who's there?" he said, looking up at the bank that ran past the mansion's boundary.

There was no reply for a while, and Tromell was beginning to think his mysterious interlocutor had taken their leave, but

then a young girl appeared at his side; she was slightly flushed after, he realised, hurrying down the bank to get there.

“My name is Shelinda,” she said. “You were entertaining Lady Yuna and her guardians, weren’t you? I saw them heading into the town.”

“Lord Seymour requested Lady Yuna’s presence,” Tromell confirmed, not without a little suspicion.

“How wonderful,” said Shelinda. “What a privilege for Lady Yuna. She really is a most fortunate summoner – I wonder if she might really bring the Calm.”

“We should all like to see that,” said Tromell, resisting the urge to add, *especially Lord Seymour*.

“And she has such a lot of guardians,” Shelinda went on. “I suppose they were eating from these plates.” Before Tromell could correct her, she added, “I would be most honoured to help you clean them.”

“Is that so?” he said, baffled.

“Why, of course,” said Shelinda. “I wish I could assist Lady Yuna and her guardians more directly, but I’m just a mere acolyte. But if Yevon has ordained that this is the small part I must play in their pilgrimage, then I shall do so gladly.”

“There isn’t very much left,” Tromell pointed out.

“Then it will be still easier to serve,” said Shelinda.

Tromell let her get on with it; he had never been much of a Yevonite, having witnessed firsthand the Guado’s conversion to the faith some twelve years ago and failed to share Lord

Jyscal's enthusiasm. But if it made her feel as if she was doing right by her beliefs, he could hardly stop her – especially when it meant less work for him.