

Cezara Dalca, 1754 (the year Crème de la Crème finishes)

Author Notes:

- F/M/M, very explicit, major spoilers for the game
- This is not the only possible canon by the end of Crème de la Crème, but is something that could happen after some paths through the game

They've essentially been living together for most of the last year, in that little teachers' house on the Gallatin grounds, but waiting for them in her flat leaves Cezara uncharacteristically anxious. She's tidied the place three times this morning.

Raphael arrives first, his hand cold when he shakes her hand despite the late-summer heat, unbuttons his pale grey peacoat, and then hovers uncertainly, not knowing where to hang it. Cezara takes it from him firmly, letting her fingers brush his hand, but he does not really react—instead, he heads into the parlour and exclaims over the view of the river and city beneath, before settling on the blue-and-gold brocade couch that is Cezara's pride and joy.

She'd been banking on Sinclair arriving first, so that they could welcome Raphael together, so this isn't entirely ideal. She brushes down her wide-legged, sand-coloured linen trousers, tucks a curl of her hair behind her ear, hangs up the coat, and heads in.

"How have you been?" she says brightly, and could kick herself when Raphael clasps his hands in front of him and smiles politely at the floor. Obviously, things will not be normal. Obviously, there is little chance of casual conversation after the frankly fucking horrible business happened at Gallatin. Maybe she shouldn't have invited them.

But when Raphael looks up, his bright brown eyes are warm. "Better, really," he says. "But I'd been at my parents' house for a bit, and they fuss, you know—so it's good to be here."

Cezara holds his gaze. She restrains herself from looking him up and down: it might be rude, certainly it would intimidate him. Whatever else she's learned about Raphael Blanchard since working with him, since the night they slept together, since everything, it's that he is easily intimidated. Besides, after being thrown underground for months, no one wants to be assessed and surveyed. She wouldn't care for it, anyway.

Still: there are greyish smudges beneath his eyes, and the way he clasps and unclasps his hands is new.

"I'm glad you're here," she says, and Raphael smiles properly now, his lovely eyes crinkling and making butterflies flutter in her stomach. *Alvir's blessing*, she thinks, *you're so beautiful*, and she could absolutely lean down to pet his curly hair, and she thinks about how it felt running her fingers through it that one time; she shifts her weight forward a little, almost reaching out, and then there's a knock at the door.

Sinclair.

"You stay there," Cezara orders Raphael, as though there were anywhere else for him to run off to—he wouldn't be so impolite as to barge into the bedroom and hide in the wardrobe—and she hurries to let Sinclair in.

As usual he is his wonderful wry-looking self, stooping down to kiss her cheek and to give her a hug that smells faintly of lavender. His dark hair is neatly parted. The warm weather and informal occasion has led him to wear no tie and only a light, powder-blue jacket with beige trousers. He could be an elegant Westerlind tourist summering on the Jezhani riviera, the kind Cezara and her family used to make fun of at a distance when they were on summer holidays there too. (Her grandparents said Cezara and her family weren't *really* tourists because Jezhan welcomes those of its blood no matter how far they go, which Cezara appreciated when her Jezhani accent got too Westerlind.)

"He's through here," Cezara says, and she marches Sinclair through to the parlour.

"It's so lovely to see you," Raphael says, standing to shake Sinclair's hand. He's shorter and a little broader than Sinclair, younger by a few years - younger than Cezara by a year or two - but his handshake is firm; he does look genuinely happy to see the newcomer.

Then there is a brief kerfuffle during which Raphael tries to be tremendously polite and offers to sit somewhere else so Cezara and Sinclair can sit next to each other, and Sinclair is too polite to sit on the couch while Cezara is elsewhere. In the end Cezara drags over a ridiculous mustard-coloured padded footstool that her aunt bought her "for special occasions" and forces Sinclair to sit on it while she goes and gathers tea and cake, then settles beside Raphael.

"I don't have the spare cash for servants," Cezara says, pouring the tea, "so you'll excuse me doing it myself. Probably less well than the Gallatin cooks."

She's well aware that Sinclair's, and probably Raphael's, families have domestic staff. On a Gallatin salary she could afford it, technically, but she'd rather save her money for

emergencies and live in this snug space and make her own tea. Sinclair gives her the affronted look she's immensely fond of that he does whenever she talks bluntly about money. Raphael murmurs apologetically and says it's absolutely lovely, and there's no need to worry whatsoever.

She nudges Raphael's leg with her shiny green shoe. "You're too kind," she says, and he smiles at her over his tea cup. Emboldened, she lays a hand on his arm; he does not pull away. She only moves away to eat a mouthful of rhubarb cake. It's delicious, the best you can get in the borough at this time of year—savouring the crunchy crust of sugar on top.

They talk gently about the summer and what everyone's been doing. Cezara tells them this is the year she finally rereads Weber's folios after ten years away. The windows are open a crack to let in a faint breeze, but the flat in the afternoon is warm and sun-drenched. Cezara has worn a loose, dark blue shirt, unbuttoned at the top, partly thanks to the heat and partly because she likes how the neckline shows off her figure. She leans forward when she pours more of Sinclair's tea to give him a better view, and he catches her gaze with his cool grey eyes, knowing exactly what she's doing.

They have had conversations about their situation. It's been a mess. She always swore she'd be sensible and straightforward about these things. It was neither of those things to sleep with Raphael in the first place, but he worshipped her, that was clear, and she's human enough not to be immune to that, and she got carried away in the moment. Then she got carried away again, with Sinclair, because she could not resist the length of his legs and the timbre of his driest tone of voice and the way she could push him to lose all his composure.

They all had the most awkward discussion, before everything happened, where they sort-of agreed, at least she thinks they did, that they all liked each other, and would be hypothetically interested in perhaps having something between all of them. And then: everything happened, and she was sick with worry, and she and Sinclair were so busy, and when Raphael and the students emerged from that awful place, that was hardly the time to discuss relationships.

Sensible and straightforward.

She says, "Raphael, I'd really like to kiss you right now."

It cannot be a surprise—in her letter she made it plain that she wanted to talk about where things were between the three of them—but Raphael's eyes widen anyway, and

he puts down his teacup with a clink. Sinclair is watching from his vantage point on the footstool, legs folded absurdly, silent. Raphael nods, quickly; when she leans in she runs her fingers up the nape of his neck and pets that curly hair, and his eyes close, and she kisses him softly, coaxing his lips apart with her tongue. The noise he makes—eager and ready, but also relieved, as though he's been hoping for this, was desperate for it since the moment he arrived— sends heat all through her. She groans against his mouth and realises this is going to be more than kisses and tea and sending them on their way.

She wants to avoid being too rough with him—she wants to show that he deserves something nice, just something *good* after all this awfulness, but he tugs back a little to tighten her grip on his hair and his breath thickens as she kisses him again, and she sets that aside to be aware of, that perhaps for him something nice may include a little roughness, and they can figure all that out later.

She gives Sinclair a sidelong glance. His expression has the same tight blankness that it had when she felt him up under the table at one of those banquets. A faint flush has spread across his cheekbones.

“What if you touched him,” he says.

“What if I did,” Cezara echoes, pressing her palm against Raphael's chest. Beneath his shirt, his skin is warm. He looked so grey and dry-lipped and hopeless when he came out of nowhere on graduation day. Now his skin looks healthier, but there's still that exhaustion around his eyes.

Raphael presses back, chest comfortably against her hand. She can feel his quick heartbeat. “Have you ever done this before?” he says, voice soft. “With more than one person.”

A little self-conscious, Cezara tosses back her hair haughtily. “I'm sure it's practically the same,” she says.

“That's no,” points out Sinclair, the traitor. She tries to kick him, but cannot reach. He's sitting on the other side of Raphael, his shoulder almost touching the arm of the couch.

“Have *you*?” she says.

They both speak at once. “No,” Sinclair says, and “Not exactly,” Raphael says.

Cezara is intensely curious about what *not exactly* means but instead of allowing herself to get distracted, she slides her hand down Raphael's chest to rest at his belt. Slow, deliberate. Then she stands and tugs him up by his shirt. She doesn't have to pull much: he's scrambling to his feet already. "I want to get in the bedroom," she says. "It's too hot in here, and I'm not getting my couch messy."

The bedroom is indeed cooler: the windows and curtains are closed to keep it so. Cezara guides Raphael in and steers him so he's sitting on the edge of the bed. She nudges his legs open with her knee.

"This will be easy," she says, as much to herself as to either of them. "I've done this with both of you. And you've thought about it—Sinclair, don't pretend you haven't—so we'll just use our imagination."

Raphael lets out a breathless laugh. "You have it all figured out."

"I have," Cezara says, and puts her hands on his shoulders.

He rests his hands on the curve of her hips. Sinclair moves so he's behind her, a delicious tall, solid presence stabilising her; he puts his hands on her too, brushing fingers with Raphael, lightly pushing beneath her waistband. She arches, inviting Sinclair to move lower; Raphael looks up at her, and when his gaze shifts past her face to Sinclair, his fingers tighten just a little. Her skin feels alight, tingling down her hipbones and sparking heat between her legs.

"Fuck, I just want you. I want everything," Cezara says wildly. She fumbles with Raphael's belt, has a dreadful time trying to unfasten it in reverse, and they end up on the bed properly, laughing, with her naked and Raphael kneeling astride her in his shirt and underwear. She reaches forward to rub the fabric of his shorts, coaxing him harder, and he runs his hands reverently down the curve of her belly, gasping and pushing against her hand as he discovers how wet she is, how wet she's been since she kissed him.

Sinclair comes to sit beside her and runs his fingertips down her soft breast, lingering at her nipple. He's still wearing his summer-tourist trousers but his shirt-sleeves are rolled up; there's something delightful about being so exposed when he looks as though he could be out for a stroll. She twitches hard beneath his touch, squeezing her thighs urgently around Raphael's hips. When he starts licking and scraping his teeth against her other nipple, she can barely stand it any longer but she refuses to beg.

"I want you now," she says to Raphael, who's still touching her but whose eyes are glazed in some sort of trance as he watches Sinclair's tongue on her nipple.

He's out of his underwear in a moment, putting on the rubber, and she takes a second to admire him in the golden afternoon light—they were in the dark when they did this before, and everything was fast, and she didn't manage to get much of a look at him—before urging him to slide into her. She arches to meet him and they move together in a quick, heady rhythm. Sinclair moves one hand down to rub her clit in a fast, delicate motion while Raphael fucks her and—oh, Cezara's done something like this plenty of times but there's just no way of getting as *much* as this with only two sets of hands, and when she comes she can't help but grip Sinclair's hand so hard that he grunts in pain.

"I'm so close," Raphael whispers, voice ragged, "you feel so good—"

"Please," Cezara says, pushing back so he's deeper inside her, rocking her hips. Sinclair slides his fingers into Raphael's mouth so he can taste her; Raphael comes with a shuddering groan, withdraws, and kisses Sinclair with passionate urgency before flopping down beside Cezara and kissing her too.

Sinclair gently runs his fingertips down her, slipping inside for a moment. She's soaked and sensitive; she murmurs and bucks lightly against his hand.

"What do you want?" she says. She runs her foot up the back of his thigh.

"You look so extraordinary like that," he says, irrelevantly.

"Always so serious," she says. She puts an arm around Raphael's shoulders. He nuzzles at her neck.

"I want you to come again," Sinclair says.

He bends to lick her, sucking at her clit and making her legs tremble. She pushes hard against him, desperate, and he slides two fingers into her again, then another, until his whole hand is inside her, filling her and stretching, and she can't speak anymore.

At some point Raphael extracts himself and finds a bottle of lube from somewhere - bless your resourcefulness, Cezara thinks. She feels the moment when Raphael slides his fingers into Sinclair, feels Sinclair moan against her and how the stroke of his tongue and the tight movement of his hand shift from deliberate to sloppy, and she's lost track

of everything now except demanding more. When Sinclair comes it's with a sharp groan, and the sound of him sends hot tension coursing all through her. She grabs at the pillow beside her as she shudders, the aftershocks forcing her hips to twitch more beneath Sinclair's tongue.

They clean up—Cezara congratulates herself on the decision to move from the couch—and pile into the bed. She wants to do nothing but luxuriate in the feel of them, their smell, the look of them when she and Sinclair wrap their arms around Raphael, holding him close. She kisses Raphael's forehead, then his face, then his mouth. On his other side, Sinclair inhales the scent of his hair.

"Why on earth didn't we do this earlier?" Cezara murmurs.

"Because we had a modicum of professionalism," Sinclair says tartly.

"Say modicum again," Cezara tells him.

"A modicum of professionalism."

Raphael gives a quiet laugh, eyes closed. "Barely."

"Excuse me," Sinclair says, threatening to rear up, and Cezara drags him back down.

"Hush," she says. "Just enjoy it."