

are worth winning, and men bar women from competing."

"It is rare to find girls of your age wishing to compete."

"I am twenty-three," I interjected.

"Still, only a girl: and a girl at your age is generally looking for a lover instead of nursing ambitions."

"I have known men of your Excellency's age busy at the same sport," said I. "Besides, I may have been a girl," I added, demurely; taking care to infuse the suggestion with sufficient sentiment.

"And now?" he asked, bluntly.

"I am still a girl, I hope—but with a difference."

"You are not thinking of making a confidant of an old widower like me, are you?"

"No, I am merely laying before you my qualifications."

"You know there is no room for heart in political intrigue? Tell me, then, plainly, what do you wish to do?"

"To lend my woman's wit to your Excellency's Government for a fair recompense."

"What *could* you do?"

There was a return to his former indulgent superiority in the question which nettled me.

"I could use opportunities as your agents cannot."

"How? By other clever guesses?"

"It was no guess. I have seen the jewels in Madame d'Artelle's possession."