

## THE BOMB-SHELL

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In ordinary circumstances her mother would have expected her to change her school garb for something more befitting the occasion. There was not time, however, to do that at present. So, with her gloves still in her hand, Estelle opened the drawing-room door.

It was a long narrow room with a French window looking out to the garden, and it was furnished in a very nondescript fashion with odd bits of furniture picked up at sales. In the City Road house there had been no drawing-room, but at Denmark Hill the daughters of the family had declared a drawing-room to be a necessity. It was by no means pretty, but it had a homely, attractive look, and the huge bunches of pink roses on the Early Victorian carpet had improved and mellowed with age and much usage.

Estelle beheld about twelve ladies of varying ages all busily engaged in consuming and, incidentally, praising the good things provided by their hostess for their enjoyment. Mrs. Rodney was an excellent household manager, and she particularly prided herself on her baking prowess. One entire morning once a fortnight was given up to it in preparation for the meeting of the working-party; and appreciation of her efforts was always ready and warm. Recipes were often asked for on these occasions.

"There isn't much use of passing on 'receipts'—so she called them—Mrs. Rodney would rather proudly remark to her family afterwards. "It's the touch that does it, and it isn't every woman that's got the light hand!"

Mrs. Rodney sat behind her well-spread table, dressed in a gown of stiff black satin with a lace collar fastened by a cameo brooch. She was a large, ample, comely woman with a high colour, bright and rather restless black eyes, and quantities of very dark hair, which had once been curly, but which she now kept