

## THE BOMB-SHELL

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had paled with some inward excitement, her eyes gleamed, her ample bosom heaved.

The girl sprang forward.

"Dear mother, you have been vexed or troubled," she said impulsively, for Estelle's heart was really and truly kind.

Mrs. Rodney waved a hand of protest.

"No, no. Only a little upset. Let me sit down for a moment or two and drink a cup of tea."

"I'll bring some fresh," said Estelle quickly. "Everybody has finished."

Mrs. Rodney sank into a chair which had been vacated for her, and the most active and sympathising concern was depicted on every face.

Estelle was only a minute gone, for Julia, acting under severe instruction, had not for a moment permitted the large kettle to go off the boil on the gas-ring.

A cup of tea was quickly poured out, and Estelle made it to her mother's liking and handed it to her. While she was doing so she wished that all these women would have the sense to get up and go away, since the afternoon function was supposed to end with tea, and she was quite sure that her mother had something of importance to communicate.

They did not, however, betray the smallest intention of doing so; but, on the contrary, they waited with varying degrees of interest and ill-disguised curiosity for such enlightenment as Mrs. Rodney might elect to bestow on them.

"Now I feel better," said that lady when she had drunk three parts of her tea and eaten a morsel of rather leathery crumpet. "Ah, tea is a splendid stimulant! If some of our misguided friends would only realise that! But it must be good tea and be freshly made," she added viciously, "if it is to help one. Some of the tea one gets in houses where one might expect better