

## Little Dorrit: Merdle's Bank

In *Little Dorrit*, there is a rich banker called Mr Merdle. Some of the main characters have invested all their savings in his bank. One evening, there is a glittering party, where the rumour is that Mr Merdle will be made a Lord. Later that night, Mr Merdle kills himself in public baths. News of his suicide spreads very quickly. At first, people thought it was because of pressure of work, but later the same day...

1 ...appalling whispers [began] to circulate, east, west, north, and south. At first they were  
 2 faint, and went no further than a doubt whether Mr Merdle's wealth would be found to be as  
 3 vast as had been supposed; whether there might not be a temporary difficulty in 'realising' it;  
 4 whether there may not even be a temporary suspension (say a month or so), on the part of  
 5 the wonderful Bank. As the whispers became louder, which they did from that time every  
 6 minute, they became more threatening. He had sprung from nothing, by no natural growth  
 7 or process that any one could account for; he had been, after all, a low, ignorant fellow; he  
 8 had been a down-looking man, and no one had ever been able to catch his eye; he had  
 9 been taken up by all sorts of people in quite an unaccountable manner; he had never had  
 10 any money of his own, his ventures had been utterly reckless, and his expenditure had been  
 11 most enormous. In steady progression, as the day declined, the talk rose in sound and  
 12 purpose. He had left a letter at the Baths addressed to his physician, and his physician had  
 13 got the letter, and the letter would be produced at the Inquest on the morrow, and it would  
 14 fall like a thunderbolt upon the multitude he had deluded. Numbers of men in every  
 15 profession and trade would be blighted by his insolvency; old people who had been in easy  
 16 circumstances all their lives would have no place of repentance for their trust in him but the  
 17 workhouse; legions of women and children would have their whole future desolated by the  
 18 hand of this mighty scoundrel. Every partaker of his magnificent feasts would be seen to  
 19 have been a sharer in the plunder of innumerable homes; every servile worshipper of riches  
 20 who had helped to set him on his pedestal, would have done better to worship the Devil  
 21 point-blank. So, the talk, lashed louder and higher by confirmation on confirmation, and by  
 22 edition after edition of the evening papers, swelled into such a roar when night came [\*].

23 For by that time it was known that the late Mr Merdle's complaint had been simply Forgery  
 24 and Robbery. He, the uncouth object of such wide-spread adulation, the sitter at great  
 25 men's feasts, the roc's egg<sup>i</sup> of great ladies' assemblies, the subduer of exclusiveness, the  
 26 leveller of pride, the patron of patrons, the bargain-driver with a Minister for Lordships of the  
 27 Circumlocution Office<sup>ii</sup>, the recipient of more acknowledgement within some ten or fifteen  
 28 years, at most, than had been bestowed in England upon all peaceful public benefactors,  
 29 and upon all the leaders of all the Arts and Sciences, with all their works to testify for them,  
 30 during two centuries at least [\*] was simply the greatest Forger and the greatest Thief that  
 31 ever cheated the gallows.

[\*] shows some words have been cut from the passage.

---

<sup>i</sup> A roc is a legendary bird, so a roc's egg is something rare and valuable

<sup>ii</sup> A government department