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TOO STRANGE NOT TO BE TRUE.

BY LADY FULLERTON.

CHAPTER VII.—Continued.

OF one thing he felt certain. If Madame de Moldau was the Princess Charlotte, it was impossible to conceive a more extraordinary or more interesting position than hers, or one more fitted to command a disinterested allegiance and unselfish devotion from the man she had honored with her friendship. If something so incredible could be true, every mystery would be explained—every doubt would be solved. The blood rushed to his face as he thought of the proposal of marriage he had made to one of so exalted a rank, and of the feelings which it must have awakened in her breast. "Perhaps," he thought to himself, "though too generous to resent it, she may have found in those words spoken in ignorance one of the bitterest and most humiliating evidences of her fallen position;" but then he remembered the tacit avowal Madame de Moldau had made of feelings which did not imply that she was indifferent to his attachment. "Ah!" he again thought, "she may wish to withdraw not only from the man she may not wed, but from him whose presumptuous attachment was an unconscious insult! But I am mad, quite mad," he would exclaim, "to be reasoning on so absurd an hypothesis, to be building a whole tissue of conjectures on an utter impossibility; but then M. de Chamblle's dying words recurred to him—

those strange incoherent expressions about a *mesalliance* and a palace, and their relations together, so unlike those of a father and a child, and yet so full of devotion on his side and of gratitude on hers.

One by one he went over all the circumstances Simonette had related. The reports at New Orleans, the sale of the jewels, the Czar's picture in her possession, the stranger's visit, her agitation when the casket was mentioned—everything tallied with his wide guess. It would have been evident had it not been incredible. As it was, he felt utterly bewildered.

As soon as light dawned he rode to the village. There he heard that Hans had gone away in the night with a party of *coureurs des bois*. He breakfasted with Father Maret, and all the time was wondering if, supposing Madame de Moldau was the princess, he was aware of it. She said she had told him everything about herself, so he supposed he did. This thought inspired him with a sort of embarrassment, and, though longing to speak of what his mind was full of, he did not mention her name. As soon as the meal was over he returned to St. Agathe, where he had business to transact with Madame de Moldau. He found her sitting at a table in the verandah looking over the map of the concession. She raised her eyes, so full in their blue depths of a soft and dreamy beauty, to greet him as he