



A Royal Patient: Young Doctor Axel Munthe and Crown Princess Victoria of Sweden-Norway

Ingar Palmund

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A story about a young man who goes out into the world, meets trials, and finds a princess — so what's new? The young man in this book is Axel Munthe from Stockholm, Sweden, who learnt to become a doctor in France and became a popular physician in high society in Rome, Italy. Later in life he would write *The Story of San Michele*, an international bestseller.

One day in 1891, Crown Princess Victoria of Sweden-Norway entered his office for a consultation. She was born Victoria of Baden, beloved granddaughter of Kaiser Wilhelm I, and was married to Crown Prince Gustaf of The United Kingdoms of Sweden and Norway.

Their meeting was the beginning of a life-long relationship. The story in this book is about their lives until the very moment their paths crossed for the first time. When they met, they were locked into the roles of a doctor and a patient. But they were also a man and a woman, young, charming when they wanted to, and used to playing power games.

A Royal Patient is a work of fiction, albeit based on extensive biographical research in private and public archives. The tale is told by episodes, alternating between the two protagonists and contrasting their development and experiences. Both were intelligent, colourful personalities. They moved back and forth across Europe. Stockholm, London, Montpellier, Paris, Karlsruhe, Berlin, Cairo, Capri and Rome are settings for scenes in the story.

How did a healthy, active upper-class young woman become a patient in medical treatment? How did a young Swede, son of an apothecary in Stockholm, become a sought-after doctor in Rome? And why? These are key questions in the personal histories of young Axel Munthe striving to become a successful doctor and young Victoria of Baden trying to meet expectations on how to be a perfect Crown Princess. The story is grounded in the late 19th century practice of medicine and the particular context of the cosmopolitan upper classes in Europe, but the two young protagonists' aspirations and dilemmas are timeless as are their struggles over dependency and autonomy. Episodes deal with romance, sex, childbirths, potentially fatal accidents, deaths, and not least with medical ideas about women's bodies and minds.

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