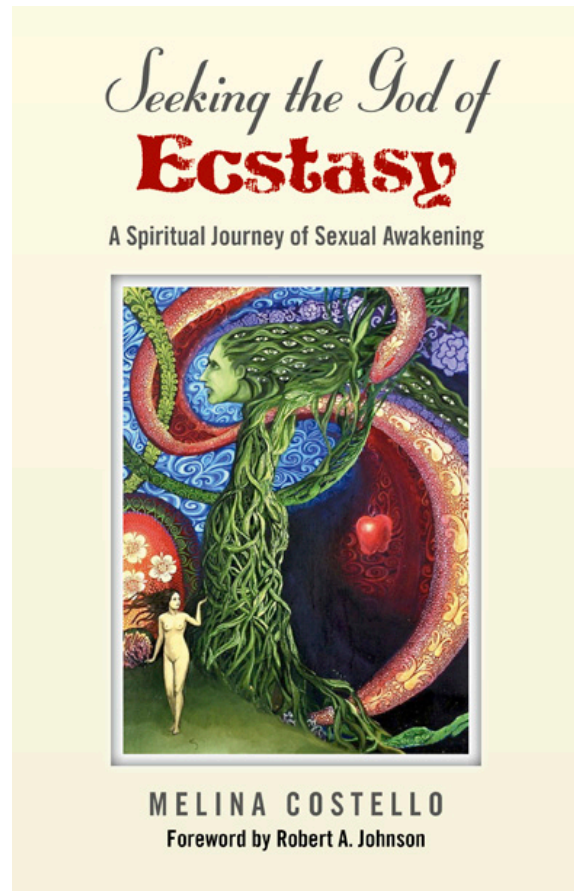


Excerpt from *Seeking the God of Ecstasy: A Spiritual Journey of Sexual Awakening*

by Melina Costello



*Melina Costello has entered the winepress and produced from her own alchemy of soul a rare wine to savor. Through bridging the sacred and commonplace, she candidly and intimately fleshes out her dramatic initiation into the paradoxical realm of 'ek-stasis'—the fall into the breathable dance of opposites that is the fragmenting fate of soul—which merges us with the divine madness that is Dionysus.*

*The archetypes, as Melina makes clear, are the openers of mysterious doors, leading to terror, wonder, wisdom and transformation. Creative dialogue with them requires a shamanic kind of inner strength, shrewdness, imaginal power and moral courage. When approached with the author's brand of creative fire, reverence and vulnerability, this can be a perilous yet exuberant dance at the rim of the Abyss: too much or too little control and we risk being overwhelmed. Melina discerningly avoids either extreme. She both gives herself fully to a raw merging with the rending joy of Dionysus and at the same time wisely distances herself in order to reflect. This is a god we cannot, dare not face till we have ourselves become many faces, many*

*masks, all of them forged through successive deaths and rebirths that render us as fluid as nature's elements and changing forms. Melina makes all this viscerally real and alive in this uniquely exuberant, timely and deeply personal work.*

—Maureen B. Roberts, Ph.D, Soul-centered Psychiatric and Shamanic Therapist

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## Chapter 1: Awakening Instinct (pages 19-25)

I close my eyes and see that I'm seated upon a hardback chair in a dimly lit room. Dionysus is sitting to my left. His hands are folded relaxedly on his lap and his head is bowed, almost as if in readiness to hear me. He looks mature here, not youth-like.

"Why didn't you warn me that all of this could become an obsession?" I ask.

"Another's words are lost on you. Your own experience is not."

"But don't you think it's a bit dangerous letting me plunge headlong into experience that's potentially hazardous?"

"You have enough common sense to sidestep the pitfalls, even when you are right on top of them. An impulsive nature such as yours craves the danger as well as freedom from the craving. This is a terrestrial dilemma."

He pauses and studies me to see how I've taken what he's said. He looks genuinely concerned.

"Let me add that your impulsiveness suits your path and your nature," he continues, "yet it is often reckless and impatient, naive and demanding."

"Is there anything good about it?" I ask, exasperated.

"It has brought you here."

"So now what?"

"You have heard of the senex."

I mentally trip over the word "senex" and wonder if I heard him correctly. Vaguely recognizing it as a psychological term for the archetype of age or "oldness," I nod, even though I really don't know what he's talking about.

"Do you mean that babbling old lady?" I ask, feeling my dislike for the old woman.

"Talk to the senex," he advises firmly. "She can help you. Without her you will perish here."

Growing uncomfortable with the somber mood of our discourse, I start to fidget.

"Lighten up, Dionysus."

Dionysus leans forward in his seat and gazes at me thoughtfully, then undergoes a sudden transformation. His hair begins to move and gather into thick locks. Horns erupt from either side of his head. His chin and cheekbones narrow and become bearded, while his eyes appear smaller, wilder. This all happens so fast I can do nothing but watch. He stands up with a jolt and I see that he has a tail and the legs of a goat. From his pelvis to his cloven feet, he is covered with coarse hair. He prances in a strange manner away from me, then turns about swiftly, cocking his head at me in the queerest way. He holds up some sort of flute and waves it back and forth in the air. I'm breathless, but not shocked.

“All right, so you’re Pan,” I remark dryly. “I don’t get it.”

He continues to caper about in a weird, crazy way. As I watch him, deep green images loom in my peripheral vision, crystallizing into the familiar wooded setting in my previous journeys. He skips away from me to a stream just ahead of us. I do not follow. He stands at the water’s edge with his back to me and sways in a provocative manner, his arms wrapped about himself. He keeps peeking over his shoulder to see if I’m watching him. Of course, I am. I start to feel strangely unsettled. I walk to a nearby tree and place my back against it for support. I’m not sure why I’m doing this, why I don’t flee. He watches me lean against the tree and smiles, seemingly quite pleased. He then advances toward me, swaying and leaping and cocking his head from side to side. At once, on closer inspection, I realize he is hideous, yet it is not a hideousness that’s easy to define. I feel simultaneously repulsed and riveted. He is not devilish to me, not malignant or foul. I don’t feel he can harm me or has any intention of doing so; yet I do feel he is mischievous and somewhat mad, possessed by something magical I can’t understand.

“Do you want to know me?” he asks, slowly swaying from side to side.

He throws his voice like a ventriloquist. High and whiny, it seems to come at me from everywhere. He’s stooping awkwardly now, looking up at me from one extreme angle then another, grimacing and smiling. I notice his teeth are very straight and white. Amazed, I don’t know what to say. I’m thinking this is some kind of proposition and that he would like to rape me, but I sense he will not do this without my consent. Nonetheless, I’m beginning to think it would be “rape” even with my consent. I’m starting to feel flustered.

He giggles and leaps up, then trots off to the stream, yelling and whooping and flinging his arms toward the sky. It’s obvious to me as I watch him that he’s experiencing a delicious pleasure I know nothing about. I’m envious of his abandon and the way he grabs the air, delighting in whatever it is only he can see. I want to join in, but I don’t know how. He then turns swiftly around and runs toward me, leaping and gesturing with his arms as he approaches. His theatrical overtures look so comical that I burst out laughing. He peers at me quizzically, then breaks into laughter as he spins and pirouettes and skips. He works this into running in a large circle while blowing his flute. He is so crazy-looking that by now I’m really laughing hard, enjoying everything about him. Suddenly he breaks from the circle and runs toward me, placing his face very close to mine. He is breathing hard. He holds the tree behind me with both his hands so that his arms surround me but do not touch me. He then sways back and forth in front of me, watching me intensely with a wild grin.

I immediately close my eyes and hold my breath. I don’t want his scent to pervade me, which seems to be precisely his intention. I can’t keep my eyes closed. I notice his torso and arms are damp with perspiration. Catching my breath, I smell his body musk. It is strong but not unpleasant. I can feel something happening in my brain as I inhale his scent. It is scrambling my thoughts, replacing them with an awareness of my own body. My skin tingles as though electrified. My nipples harden and I become aware of the weight of my own breasts, how they rise and fall as I breathe. My legs feel suddenly heavy as though they’re filled with warm fluid. The sensation of something sinking in my brain brings my body to a wild alertness. My respiration quickens.

“You do want to know me, don’t you?”

He says this in an almost hiss and I'm reminded of the forbidden fruit, that this, he, is the forbidden fruit. I'm ashamed of my need to want to know him, to touch the forbidden in myself. I feel I'm betraying some sacred code, that I'm weakening, falling prey to an abyss in myself. I think of a way to justify what I'm doing but I can't. He takes both my arms, lifts them above my head and holds them against the tree behind me. Some part of me is glad he is doing this, that he is taking control where I dare not. Suddenly I feel cool tendrils encircling my wrists and arms. I look up and see that vines of lush green ivy are moving and curling around the tree, securing my arms to it above my elbows. A heavy, coarsely-textured garb hugs my body. I look down at myself and see that I'm wearing an animal skin garment. The sight of it sends blood rushing to my head with such force that I can hardly breathe. Gasping, I look into Pan's face and see nothing less than the personification of raw desire staring back at me. Both fear and excitement strike hard in my stomach as he tugs the garment from my body. My sudden nakedness engulfs me like cool rippling water. Some part of me thrills to be naked, stripped free at last, exposed. I yield to this feeling and discover that I really do want this experience more than I realized.

Here I pause. I'm seeking counsel and find myself seated with Dionysus as before. I'm glad for the respite. I look into his face and detect a trace of annoyance, although his manner is calm.

"I'm having problems with this," I confide nervously.

"With what?"

"This Pan thing, this scenario I'm in."

"What troubles you?"

Embarrassed, I stare into my lap as I struggle to articulate my feelings.

"I'm starting to get off on all this. It worries me."

I wait for a response but Dionysus says nothing. Assuming he didn't understand what I just said, I take a deep breath and force myself to look into his eyes.

"I'm becoming aroused."

Dionysus looks at me blandly.

"That is the whole point, Melina."

"To get off?"

"To open to the life of your body and the power of your instincts. It has been a hidden world for you."

I gaze down at my hands. I realize this is true, but I don't trust the manner in which it is playing out with Pan. The whole thing feels uninhibitedly wicked, even depraved.

"I notice I'm experiencing this detail for detail," I remark. "Is that really necessary?"

"Necessary for what? What is 'necessary,' Melina?"

Dionysus studies me as I grope for an answer. Disappointed in myself, I shrug.

"I don't know," I admit weakly.

"This is an area you least trust about yourself."

"I know. I guess I just needed to check this out with you."

"Do not seek my permission. Seek it from yourself or not at all."

I'm becoming aware of a part of myself that dislikes the body, physical functions, appetites, sex. This awareness is annoying and increases my feelings of discomfort.

"Why is all this taking place within a sexual construct?" I ask pointedly.

“I cannot answer that right now.”

I find his evasion frustrating. I bite my lip, trying to control my rising tension.

“Look, it seems that I’m being deliberately set up by this experience and I don’t like it. I don’t like the fantasy-seduction theme thrown in with the lure of spiritual union and ecstasy. The mixed metaphors are confusing and they’re throwing me off balance. Let’s be clear about this from the start: I didn’t come here to be seduced by some animal for enlightenment’s sake, at least, not in the way... I mean... oh! You know what I’m trying to say. This entire experience is making me mad.”

Dionysus gazes at me quietly. His face is utterly expressionless.

“You are wasting your energy here. Either rest or re-engage with Pan.”

“Just like that?” I explode. “What do you think I am, a robot?”

“You can shift, Melina. All you have to do is desire it. It is really that simple.”

I leave, grumbling to myself. Navigating my way back to Pan, I find myself walking through a tunnel of semi-darkness that echoes whenever I make a sound. Trudging along slowly, I wonder if I’m just inventing this anger as a cover to disguise my own horniness, my darker sexual nature. Disgusted with this thought, I throw it out, feeling it is much too transparent. I dig deeper. I wonder if I’ve stumbled upon stored unconscious anger somehow related to the sexual experience. I soon realize that isn’t it either. This is all a smoke screen for something else; what, I have yet to find out.

The tunnel is thinning out and I can now see that I’m approaching the woods. I slacken my pace, then remember something Dionysus said to me that I forgot to write down: if I wish to touch knowledge in his world, I’m going to have to part with my judgments and embrace nature instead. I think about this as I peer through the trees to the spot where Pan still stands. I see myself, arms strapped by ivy to a tree, gazing at Pan. He is fondling my breasts vigorously, pulling at my nipples. I look at my face and see quite plainly that I’m excited by what he’s doing and breathing heavily. I suddenly enter into myself. I’m moving my backside in a rhythmic motion against the tree. I sense Pan wants me to do this as a signal for him to enter me. My body responds immediately to this awareness and I’m swept completely into my cells, my own heat, the wide circling rhythms of my pelvis rocking back and forth as I anticipate his entry.

At this point I break from the experience, realizing it’s late and that what I need is contact with a real flesh and blood human being. I also feel this scenario has gotten just about as intense as I can stand. I shower, slip into bed with Ted and make love for what seems like hours. I’m more receptive than usual to my body’s rhythms and needs, as well as his. The experience is very deep and gratifying for both of us. I tell him afterward that I need to lose more control during our lovemaking. I ask him if he’ll help me. Ted seems to understand completely and consents. We fall asleep in each other’s arms.

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