

*Fa'apoto Island, March 21, 1899*

## THE SPRING

Rediscovery of the spring erased constraints, including the island taboos and new impositions from the colonials. Identities washed away. Bodies were reduced to nude and meaningless display. They lost the ability to be naked. Food was consumed without preference or joy. Relatives died and were walked over. No one had cloth. No one cared about colors. Perfume was wasted on the air. Houses had shapes but did not cluster. Roads went somewhere but no one could say for sure which direction, and no one cared. Children and adults used the weapons of hand and mind with impunity. The culture of fear was erased. So was the culture of grouping. Signs of belonging vanished in the white blood of the spring, diluted to neutral in the place of all crossings and no crossings, the juncture of the invisible, where all significance is lost to discerning eyes and the senses. It was the well of true beginning: before knowledge, before meaning. It created change even as it cured it. Island culture could only resurrect itself with a mixture of that water, ancient beliefs, and old rules for social behavior, with that water and beliefs about the invalidity of beliefs and rules for breaking rules — with criticism and constraint. Only then could the water of true nothingness be reconverted to the original colors, a heartfelt handshake and embrace, a birthing celebration, a dying regret, a social fabric that raveled to all without breaking and made them complete in their parts, separate but joined. So they drank from the spring and spoke sparingly of the original ways. Some spoke more than others, some not at all. When the steam and the murmuring cleared, some of the people were whole again, some were not. The children put down their arms. The groups marked themselves with red dye and blue flowers and made their villages round. Some sailed north to fish. Some stayed home to dance and tell stories of the longest times. They renewed their centers, the spring receded shortly thereafter, and a centrifugal feeling swept the intruders out to sea.