Though Betty was a really sweet, biddable little girl, ready to obey anyone who spoke with conviction, including, to her misfortune, her playmate Abigail, she was not carefree. She had been exposed too long to the hell-fire in her father’s composition. And Abigail, exposed too, but somehow responding differently, was not innocent; from the eyes of this child an authentic hellion looked out on a world it would make over if it got a chance.

Poor Betty quailed before such terrible realities as predestination and damnation. Ever since she had had the latter explained to her, she had taken damnation to herself personally. How could a little girl hope to escape it? Why even a sinless newborn infant went straight to hell (albeit to the easiest room in it) if it died unbaptized. What chance was there for a child who, baptized or not, had been sinning for nine years with her hands, her tongue, her teeth, with every part of her? Damnation was under these circumstances as inevitable as death, and the imminence of death was a fact which Betty, in common with most well-brought-up Puritan children, had not been allowed to forget long at a time.

With Abigail, however, it was a different story. She was of a robuster sort, and though as relentlessly catechized as her small cousin, instinctively took damnation, death, and most other unpleasant things as something scheduled to happen to someone else, particularly to people she didn’t like. Abigail had the smugness that had somehow lawlessly infected Puritanism in its later days, an attitude based on the unconscious assumption that the children of the elect would inherit salvation along with the family pewter.

But Abigail’s state of mind would not, if detected, have been classified as innocence by Calvinist standards, nor was it happiness. Placed in a less rigid society she might have been a good little girl, but not here. Too much of her native gusto had been repressed by an environment confining to her spirit.

So Abigail, though narrative, had to date sat as decently in meeting as any. Much of the time she even listened to the sermon on the chance that there would somewhere be lusty talk of the devil, that arch-criminal in the everlasting crime-detection story conducted by the Church. It would be going too far to say that Abigail loved the devil. For all her bold spirit, she sometimes quailed before him and had bad dreams. Nevertheless she took a horrid fascination in hearing about him, and while Betty beside her twitched and swallowed her sobs, Abigail leaned forward to catch every word on this subject.