Betty and Abigail had by 1692 lived in Salem Village for well over two years, assuming that they had come when Betty's father did, in November 1689. They already knew in the way that children do know these things that the community was not perfect in godliness, that it was inhabited by crabbed characters, many of whom failed to appreciate the quality of the Reverend Samuel Parris. Salem Village was by reputation one of the most contentious little communities in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Although bickering was hardly uncommon in any Puritan community (living up to so severe a creed put a strain on anyone's good temper), here some quarrels had lasted so long as to amount to something like a state of bloodless feuds.

There were in the Parris household two slaves, relics of his Barbados venture, kidnapping John Indian and his consort, the ageless Tituba, said to be half Carib and half negro. The possession of these slaves lent prestige to the parsonage, for although there were other negro slaves in the community, there were not many. Thanks to the labours of this pair, Mrs Parris, a shadowy, self-effacing woman of whom history says little and tradition only that she was a truly good woman, was able to find time for numerous errands of mercy, and the children to live like little princesses, not to be sure in the sense of enjoying any pampered idleness, but in the sense that their chores consisted of those lighter household tasks that even a princess may learn.

All the heavier household work fell to the slaves. John Indian attended to the livestock, and woodlot, worked in the field, and even on occasion was hired out to give a hand in Deacon Ingersoll's ordinary, coter-cornered across the road from the parsonage. Tituba did the heavier, coarser household chores, boiled and pounded the linen when seasonal wash-days came, fetched water from the well, emptied the slops, scrubbed and sanded the floors.

All these things Tituba did, but not one gathers, with energy. Her breeding had been in a softer, more languid clime; her life at hard labour in frosty New England was none of her choosing. She found subtle ways of easing her lot, and one of these was idling with the little girls.

The minister spent much of his time afield inspecting the parish, and even at home usually sat safely out of range in his study. Mrs Parris was in the kitchen more often, but even she had frequent charitable errands abroad. Left alone with the children, Tituba had long ago learned to amuse herself in ways that would have got her a thrashing from Parris had he got wind of them in time.