Gypsum mines in Nova Scotia.
Layers of anhydrite crumpled by the water that altered it to massive beds of selenite, the glassy crystals thick as my thighs. Mr. Reed janitored at the Springfield Museum but assembled the largest collection of fresh-water mollusks in the world. Mineral collecting was a hobby, but mollusks were serious: no children allowed, not even Norman, his son. We drove, then ferried to Yarmouth. The great quarries, called “mines” for courtesy, gaped like football stadiums, the gypsum too white in the sun.

We couldn’t enter the mines but the foreman granted access to huge talus heaps. We sorted a hundred perfect specimens, needle-crystals, giant blocks, fibers of satin spar. Also
polyhydrate and possibly epsomite. We bagged our take and lounged for a day on the beach, chatting about our future careers in mineralogy. Then in Mr. Reed’s shaky old Ford we drove to the ferry and home to the USA, our bags of gypsum groaning in the trunk and our lives already metamorphosing into specimens no simple field test could identify.