

## Citrus White Gold

John Charles Miller

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### EMS shows up (2002)

“Don't move him! Nature Coast EMS is coming from Inverness. They should be here soon. Must've run off the bike trail and crashed down in these woods and hit his head.”

“EMS know where we are? Can they find us?”

“Yes. Told them he was in an old mine pit a mile north of the town of Hernando on the Withlacoochee State Trail, east of Canterbury Estates.”

“That'll do. Who is he?”

“Driver's license says James Harkins, Crystal River.”

“Sure is scratched up. Lucky he was wearing heavy work boots, those old blue jeans and a jacket, and not funny bike pants and shoes.”

*Ohhh, my head! What happened?*

### Comes to in mine pit (1894)

“Looka theah, Joseph, some white boy fell down in de mine. He ain't movin'. We bes' go ova an' see what happen.”

“Slap his face, that'll wake him up.”

“No, get a bucket of water to throw on him. I heard dat be best,” said Ernest.

*Slap me? Bucket of water? Best for what? Where am I?*

### Back to crash site (2002)

“Leave him alone! EMS will be here soon. Here, if you have to do something, use water from my bottle and this tissue to wipe his forehead. Keep the blood out of his eyes.”

“Hear the siren? Should be here soon.”

*Blood? Siren?*

### Joseph, Ernest & Randall (1894)

“Ernest, call de fo'man ova. He mos' likely know what to do.”

“Mr. Randall, Mr. Randall! Ova heah! We's got a hurt man. Need some hep.”

“What happen here?” said Randall, running up.

“We be pushin' dat Georgia buggy on de rails wit' a load of rock down below an see dis man fall down in de mine,” said Joseph.

*Georgia buggy? Mine?*

“Dump that water on him. He don' look bad hurt, jes' a big cut on his head. Must've hit a rock when he fell. So many folks wantin' to see what we're doin',” said Randall.

The water hit with a shock. Spitting and clawing, Jim Harkins opened his eyes to a watery blurred view of two black men and a white man bending over him.

“He's recover'n. Rest him a bit; I'll be back. Have to watch what those fellows near that other slope are doin'. Dig too close and it can slide on top of them. People never seem to understand you don' work close to the mine slope. How many die that way? How many times do ah hafta yell? They only sen' me fools, drunks and men that don' wanna work hard,” said Randall. “I'm gonna see if Mr. Vogt is still here. He'll tell us what to do. Jes' stay with him.”

#### Harkins wonders what is going on

Harkins looked at the two black men, puzzled. Slowly he sat up, blood trickling down his face. One of the men took a dirty rag and pressed it on the cut.

*Who're these guys? All sweaty and covered with white dust. Where am I?*

Behind and below the two men was a deep pit of broken white rock, hundreds of feet across, traversed by a radiating network of small double rails extending up to rocky slopes. Groups of men, mostly blacks a sprinkling of white men, were working with picks and shovels and sledges. They pushed small iron-wheeled carts, some loaded with the white rock, along the rails.

“What is this? Where am I? What are those men doing,” said Harkins.

“Yo be in de Dunnellon Company Mine. Those be miners diggin' of phosphate rock,” said Ernest.

“The Dunnellon Company Mine? Where's that?” asked Harkins.

“It be a mine owned by de Dunnellon Phosphate Company. Dis be de one jes' north of Hernando. But yo know all dat suh, doncha? Yo bes rest a bit mo”

*Of course I know where Hernando is. What are they talking about?*

### Vogt arrives

“Here come Mr. Randall an' dat man wit' de mustaches, dat Mr. Vogt from Dunnellon,” said Joseph. “He sho do dress fancy.”

“Back to work now,” said Randall. “Can't be lookin' about at this and not workin'. I don't pay you a sixty cents a day to be nurses. If you don't hurry, I'll send you back to Georgia. You can't earn a sixty cents a day up there.”

“Son, this is Mr. Albertus Vogt. He's one of the owners of Dunnellon Phosphate Company,” said Randall. “Excuse me, Suh, I have to get back to watchin' the mine.”

Albertus Vogt was tall and slender with a long waxed black handlebar moustache. Dressed in a rumpled checked suit and a white high-collar shirt, the tips folded down above a poorly-tied maroon silk tie, he certainly looked out of place. A large, silk-rimmed floppy dark hat covered his pale balding head. He seemed confident and proud, holding himself with an aristocratic military bearing, almost arrogantly. A man not to be fooled with, thought Harkins.

“Well, ah'm not an owner now. Ah sold off my part. But ah like to see what's goin' on in the mines, so ah travel about,” said Vogt, staring unblinking, dark eyebrows raised high above his eyes.

“I've heard of you Mr. Vogt. You're in the Florida history books,” said Harkins.

“History books? That's a good one!” laughed Vogt. “Not yet, but ah've made a bit of a name for myself. Thanks for the compliment!”

“Y'all feelin' better?”

“I must've fallen into the mine. Thanks to those men, I do feel better. But, my head really aches. I don't even know what year it is. Oh, my name is Jim Harkins.”

“Well Mr. Harkins,” shaking hands, “gotcher self purty scratched up. That's gonna be quite a lump. Well, a bit of rest and y'all be jes' fine. And, it's 1894, in case that helps you sort out things.”

*Bizarre! 1894! Strangest dream! Of course the guy isn't in the history books yet!*

“You're not a damn Yankee are you? Don't like northerners, not since the war. Strange accent you have.”

*Oops, almost said Ohio!*

“No sir, from over on the coast, north of Homosassa.”

“So, you were hanging out here watching the miners? You look strong enough; want a job?” said Vogt.

“No, I was just riding through. A job? What would I be doing?”

“As a start, how about diggin’?”

Pausing, “My back isn’t the best, but I can work slowly until it gets stronger.”

“Sounds fine. Ah’ll talk to Mr. Randall. If you do well, he might put you to supervisin’ or something. Most of these men just don’ have much sense, only good fer diggin’.”

“I’ll see if one of the men can find your horse.”

“Horse? I don’t have a horse.”

“You said you were riding through.”

“Yes, but not on a horse.”

“Haw, what was you ridin’ on? A cow? Best you rest a bit.”

### Phosphate Mining history

“Thank you for offering to talk to Mr. Randall, sir. Sorry if I’m a bit confused about this. By the way, how did this phosphate rock get discovered, Mr. Vogt?”

“Ah’ve a property over in Dunnellon, other side of the Withlacoochee River. Was havin’ Renfro Spring cleaned out by my man, Tom Starke, in, let’s

see, April of '89. That was my water supply. Ah was lookin' at the stuff he was throwin' out, teeth, bones and rock. He claimed it was the teeth and bones of the devil himself, and was yelling that the devil is dead!" laughed Vogt.

"Ah'd seen such stuff before in South Carolina. They call'em fossils, from ancient seas so they say. We had the rock analyzed by a chemist in Ocala because it looked like the phosphate rock they found in Dr. Simmons' lime rock quarry up near Hawthorne in Alachua County. That's exactly what it was.

"So, we just went about pokin' holes with a soundin' rod and quietly buyin' up land and began to dig away. The money needed came from arrangements made by John Dunn, the lawyer and banker in Ocala. He and ah, my brother John, the chemist, and those devious Teague brothers started the Dunnellon Phosphate Company."

"You must've made a lot of money selling phosphate."

"Oh, yes, I made a lot from what we in the business call white gold, but mainly from sellin' my part of the minin' company. Folks in town call me the Duke of Dunnellon 'cuz ah spend so much of it. That's jes' fine, call me what they will, ah'm havin' a good time. But ah decided to sell because so many companies were formin' up. Ah was 'fraid the price of phosphate rock would drop," said Vogt. "There were some 215 mining companies in 1892. But the Panic of '93 scared me a lot. That's when the Germans closed the Hamburg Mine south of Inverness. Then they found big phosphate deposits in some place called Algiers. Glad ah got out early and had the money in my pocket.

"Recently they've been findin' bigger deposits of phosphate rock near Floral City. Ah expect that a lot of the money will be a head'n that way. And, shippin' is gettin' to be easier. They're gonna clean out the Withlacoochee River

so phosphate rock can be shipped by barge to a new port on Chambers Island, at Port Inglis.”

“You look to be bright and trustworthy. Let me tell you something, and keep it to yourself. Ah'm plannin' on movin' to Polk County where big deposits of pebble phosphate have been discovered near Bartow. Son, take my advice. You have to keep movin' or the movers will pass you!”

“Yes, sir. How big are the phosphate deposits near here?” asked Harkins.

“Some say it's a long north-south belt, 30 miles long and 10 miles wide, with Dunnellon at the center. Generally the rock is at 2-12 feet depth, and deposits can be 3-150 feet thick. The thickest ones have the slope collapse problems because you have to dig so deep, and the thinnest ones jes' don' pay. That's why Randall uses the soundin' rod so much. You can't get through the entire deposit with it, but he can tell where he shouldn't waste his time.”

“Well, mus' be on my way. Good fortune to you son; come to Dunnellon to see me sometime; I'll show you where I first found that old white gold.”

### Working in Mine with Joseph & Ernest

The next few weeks Harkins worked digging phosphate rock, breaking bigger boulders with sledges and filling and pushing the little Georgia buggies up the slopes. Mules hauled the rock on wagons to crusher/washer mills near the Plant System railroad tracks where it was loaded and hauled by rail to Yankeetown, on the Gulf of Mexico.

Harkins thought, *Plant System Railroad? This is the old Seaboard Coast Line Railroad. There shouldn't be tracks here; this is the Withlacoochee Trail! It's a 41-mile bike path running from Citrus Springs in Citrus County to Trilby in Pasco County. When will this dream stop? Why do I know all this?*

Harkins worked side-by-side with Ernest and Joseph. While they mined they talked. Joseph explained he and many other black men came to mine because they could earn much more than in Georgia. It was hard work, but worth the effort to have money for their families. They talked about staying, maybe going over to Floral City.

Harkins didn't say anything about what Randall was paying him. It seemed unfair that he was getting \$1.10 per 10-hour day shift, almost twice as much as the black men.

### Randall moves him to sampling

The fourth week Randall approached him. "You seem to've learned a bit how the phosphate rock goes. You've got a new job if'n you want it, trackin' the phosphate and tellin' the diggers where to go. I'd like to get ever' bit of this rock out without a lot of dirt in it. Takes too long and costs too much to get it out. Oh, pay'll be a dollah and a half a day."

"Thank you, Sir. How do I track it?"

"Here, take this 20-foot steel soundin' rod. See the slot on the pointy bottom? When you push it into the ground it'll hit rock if'n it's close to the surface. Push real hard; hit the end good with a hammer. Then pull it up to see what's in the slot. If'n it looks like phosphate rock, don' be fooled. Use this acid to see if'n it's limerock. Compass-and-chain your holes from the mine pit edge so that you have sort of a map. That way we'll know where the phosphate goes. I'll get a man t' help you. Understan'?" asked Randall.

"And, learn fast, 'cuz we'll be bringing in a cable-tool drill rig soon, to go deeper. If you do good, you might run that. Mr. Vogt also said that the new owners might buy a steam shovel, but there will still be plenty work."

“Yes, what you say seems easy enough,” said Harkins. As with Vogt, he didn’t want to let on he was an amateur geologist and collector of fossils. He’d heard there had been phosphate mining in the area from Dunnellon down to Floral City from 1889 to the 1930s. Quite a few deep pits were left over from the mining, most of which ended with the onset of World War I, Germans being the primary buyers of phosphate rock.

### Vogt returns and invites Harkins to visit

Later in the week, Mr. Vogt came by to see how the mining was going. He took the opportunity to talk to Harkins.

“Y’all don’t act concussed anymore and seem to be workin’ out jes’ fine accordin’ to Randall. Come on over to Dunnellon someday and we’ll see if you can’t do somethin’ else in my businesses.”

“I might do that Mr. Vogt. Sir, can I ask you a question?”

“Certainly, Son.”

“How many folks live around here now? Seems like the mining brought in a lot of new people.”

“The county census says more than 5,000. But with transient miners, Floral City has close to 10,000; most of them black folks and lots of Italians. And, the town of Hernando is right big.

*Yes, bigger than Miami was at that time.*

### Harkins hears a siren

Eleven o'clock the following Monday morning Harkins was mapping phosphate rock in the pit. He'd taken a break and was comparing some samples with phosphate rocks in his hand. Randall was telling stories to Ernest and Joseph. Suddenly Harkins turned to them and said, "Where's that siren coming from?"

The others looked, puzzled. "What's a siren?" said Randall.

"You don't hear anything?" said Harkins.

"No, you be feelin' de headaches again," said Joseph. "Set yo sef down here an rest. We havta get back to work." Harkins lay down on his back.

### EMS again 2002

Looking up at their concerned faces, they slowly began to fade as they walked away.

The siren grew louder. New faces, people he had never seen before, looked down at him. A voice said, "He seems to be coming around. Keep him calm until the EMS crew gets him into the ambulance. And, take that rock out of his hand."

*No, I have to keep these samples for Mr. Randall!*

"I can't get his hand open. He's squeezing too hard."

"Ok, forget it. Here comes the EMS vehicle down the bike trail."

*Bike trail? What bike trail?*