

Before we begin, I'd like to give you some background on myself—a primer to the exploits of an international rogue, hip-hop sleuth, purveyor of mail-order brides and other monikers of distinction yet to be revealed. My name is Todd Barrel and I am heir to the Cracker Barrel fortune. You heard it correctly—heir to the family dining empire that spans seven countries, five cruise ships and the cafeteria at a certain Russian space station. My grandfather started the enterprise with a Sterno can and a dream. Cheese grit by cheese grit, he built it into a behemoth restaurant chain that he would one day hand over to an heir. When that day came, he held a potato sack race, pitting his two sons against each other—winner take all. Well, sort of. My father won control of all Cracker Barrel assets by two furlongs, and beat his twin brother, Jack Barrel. Uncle Jack was devastated and so my grandfather presented him with a consolation prize—a little known subsidiary at the time called Crate & Barrel. Uncle Jack's done well for himself, amassing a sizable fortune of his own, but there still remains a Falcon Crestish rift between the two sides of the family. The Barrels are a shifty lot; sometimes Lady Luck smiles upon us and other times she delivers a stiff reality check to the groin.

When I was fourteen I was kidnapped by a rogue Special Forces Unit of the French Army and held for ransom. The family accountants calculated that I was not worth the twelve-million-dollars requested and ended the negotiations by sending along a fruit basket and a spare change of clothes. The mercenaries took kindly to me and I to them. So began my three years in the arid Moroccan desert, being trained in the dark arts of guerilla warfare, espionage, weaponry, tax evasion, racketeering, horse doping and carnal pleasure.

A price was put on my head by a local warlord after I sold him a trunk-load of contaminated camel semen, so I returned home and was promptly sent off to boarding school in England. There I met other children of the insanely wealthy who gave me entrée into a world of privilege and absolute power, introducing me to global leaders, corrupt businessmen and high-priced call girls with a penchant for Cartier jewelry and South American nose candy. Those contacts would serve me well in my future quest for cash.

Though heir to the Cracker Barrel fortune, I remain penniless due to my father's lack of trust in my fiscal abilities—cut-off from the Cracker Barrel teat! What can I say? The man is entirely justified in his convictions. I would probably squander the fortune in a blaze-out of epic debauchery. My appetites for booze, women, gambling and penthouse suites make it necessary for me to involve myself in clandestine deals that take me to the edges of the earth. And these deals always begin with a simple phone call...