

**KINCAID**  
**SHOTGUN**  
**MESSENGER**

**GP HUTCHINSON**

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## **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

Welcome back to the broad, open landscapes of the American frontier, to unruly Western towns, to ranches where cattle barons get richer and small-time operators struggle to make ends meet. Welcome back to the ongoing saga of Emry Kincaid, his adaptation to life in the untamed West, and more importantly, his efforts to shed his status as a wanted man.

Like Kincaid, you'll meet dozens of colorful characters here—some amusing, some as dangerous as a cornered diamondback. Perils wait at every turn, and little can be taken on first appearances.

If you're looking for adventure, drama, and a dash of romance, then swing on up into the saddle and ride along with Emry Kincaid. Be sure you're totin' iron, though. Trouble's sure to be waiting for you . . . and not far down the road.

GP Hutchinson  
March 7, 2022



## CHAPTER 1

**S**hotgun in hand, Kincaid peered vigilantly out the open door of the Wells Fargo & Company railcar. Denver's impressive Union Depot was bustling with activity today. Mostly ordinary folks going about their own business, but life had taught him recently that a man could never be too cautious. While he watched, he hung on every word that passed between his friend Doc Wesley Hastings and Wells Fargo Express Superintendent Reuben Stockton.

Superintendent Stockton—a tall, bearded fella with broad shoulders—paused a second when a blue-capped porter carrying a dusty canvas sack appeared in the doorway. Once the blue-cap had rolled the sack from his shoulder onto the railcar floor and disappeared again, Stockton continued in the same low, even voice.

“You’re sure you’re up to this?” His expression remained sober.

“As up to it as I ever was,” Doc answered.

Doc was dressed a bit different now from when Kincaid had first met him at the sawbones’ home on the western fringe of town. He presently wore a coffee-brown sack coat over his usual shirt, vest, and necktie and a Homburg hat that covered most of his silver-white

hair. More challenging for Kincaid to adjust to was the Remington revolver holstered on the good doctor's hip.

"You're stretching the truth, Wes," the superintendent said. "I know what I feel in *my* joints every morning, and you're older than I am. Shotgun messenger is work for a younger man. Not for old coots like us."

"Don't judge me by my age." The doc waved in protest. "I've still got plenty of spring in my step."

"Not like you had when the two of us used to cover those stagecoach routes out in California. I know that for a fact."

"A railcar's a whole heckuva lot more comfortable than the box of a bouncing, rolling Concord."

Kincaid's gaze swept the interior of the express car, with its built-in desk, cubbyholes for mail, cast-iron stove, wooden chairs, safe, and—of course—stacked and padlocked Wells Fargo strongboxes. Not exactly a luxury Pullman car but more than adequate for what he had in mind.

Stockton shook his head. "If you say so."

"Doctoring's not everything it's cracked up to be, you know," the sawbones said.

"You already told me that. Twice. But I still don't get it." The superintendent gave Kincaid another glance.

"Then I'll spell it out one more time for you and hope it sinks in," Doc said. "You've had troubles aplenty out here lately. I read the papers. And every time I come across another story about another holdup attempt, it boils my blood. So, when I met Kincaid here, I figured it was high time I quit sitting there in my office, stewing over what's been happening, and instead get back on board and do something about it."

Hands on his hips, Stockton paused. At last, he said, “As long as I’m airing out my reservations, I might as well say it right here in front of him so he knows.” He turned to Kincaid. “Young fella, you got this job solely because Wes Hastings vouches for you. I ordinarily don’t hire a man knowing so little about him. But if Wes Hastings speaks for you—well, I’d trust Wes with my life. I can’t say as much about any more than one, maybe two other souls.”

Kincaid nodded. “I understand, sir. You won’t regret the decision.” He held the superintendent’s gaze.

Stockton stuck his hand into his suitcoat pocket, withdrew it, and started forward, holding out a tarnished badge.

Kincaid waited a beat, then accepted it. An eagle, with wings spread, fixed to the top of a shield which read, WELLS FARGO EXPRESS CO. SPECIAL AGENT.

“Maybe you’ll honor that better than the man who wore it before you,” the company boss said.

“What happened to him?” Kincaid asked.

“The express box entrusted to him? He handed it over to a lone pistoleer. No protest, no fight. He just handed it over. The next day he showed up in my office, tossed the badge on my desk, and walked out. Haven’t seen him since.”

“You’ll get better than that from Kincaid,” Doc piped in.

“I could get better than that from my sister’s granddaughter.”

Kincaid stole a glance at the strongboxes on the railcar floor near the built-in desk and wondered whether he’d bleed to protect them. He hadn’t signed on with the company out of any particular passion to protect other people’s money, noble as the notion might be.

“If you still have doubts about me, in spite of Doc’s

recommendation,” he told the superintendent, “then let your mind rest on this—I haven’t known Doc Hastings as long as you have, but I owe him quite a lot. I’m not gonna let *him* down. So, if this business is important to him, it’s equally important to me.”

A silent moment, then Stockton extended his hand. “I’ll take you at your word.”

Kincaid shook with him.

The superintendent gave Doc a parting glance, then turned for the railcar door. After climbing down to the platform, he took out his pocket watch and checked it. “Two minutes,” he said, peering up at Kincaid. “Best of luck to you.”



With its wide sliding door secured from inside, the Wells Fargo Express railcar rumbled along, the second car from the tail end of five, southbound on the steel tracks of the Denver & Rio Grande. Kincaid occupied the chair nearer the railcar’s built-in desk, while Doc Hastings sat with his arms crossed and legs stretched out before him in the chair nearer the cast-iron stove.

Kincaid asked, “Mr. Stockton’s really your closest friend?”

“Closer than a brother.”

“How much did you tell him about me?”

“Not much.”

“You gave him my real name, though.”

“I did.”



“He won’t connect it to the stories about a Kincaid fella from Texas murdering two federal judges?”

The doc shifted. “The instant your name left my lips, he made the connection.”

Kincaid’s chest tightened. He shoved himself to his feet. “Why’d you do it, then? Why didn’t you give him a made-up name?”

Without the faintest hint of a balk, Doc peered up and said, “Stockton’s that good a friend. He and I don’t lie to one another.”

“And what if he’d said he had to go to the law with what you told him?”

“He didn’t.”

“That’s beside the point.”

“No, that’s precisely the point. He trusts me, and I trust him.”

Taking off his hat and running his fingers through his hair, Kincaid began to pace. Was the two men’s trust of one another enough? He reflected on the confidence he himself had placed in Doc Hastings . . . mainly out of desperation. So far, it seemed to have been well-founded. Having failed on more than one occasion to escape Colorado on his own, he was, after all, on his way back to Texas now.

He stopped pacing and peered again at the doc. “Mr. Stockton hired me *knowing* what folks have accused me of.”

“He let me explain it all to him.”

“But all you could tell him is what I told you.”

“That’s right.”

“So . . .”

“So, it ought to be evident—I’ve taken everything you’ve told me at face value.”

The doc indeed had, although Kincaid wasn’t entirely sure why. He’d hid nothing from the man. Nonetheless, the charges against him were as serious as could be.

“Before you know it,” the sawbones said, “you’ll be standing on the front porch of some ranch somewhere south of here, with your arms around Charlotte and her arms around you, and all the troubles you went through up in Colorado will amount to little more than fading memories.”

Kincaid wished he could be so confident. Since arriving in Texas a couple months prior, he’d faced one unexpected challenge after another, one trial slamming him up against the next. Helping out a threatened lady saloon owner down in Sweetwater had landed him in the arms of a girl up to her neck in trouble with a corrupt and powerful outlaw. Freeing the girl from the incriminating evidence the outlaw held over her was what brought him to Colorado to begin with. Little could he have imagined the corruption he’d find himself up against here in the Lead State. Even less the blood he’d have to spill simply to remain alive.

He turned again to his new pardner, drew a deep breath, and let it go. “I’ve tried twice to make my own way out of Colorado, and—”

“And the third time’s a charm”

Kincaid didn’t put much stock in charms and old wives’ tales and such. But Doc had proven himself to be a man of action, somebody who made things happen and who’d already gone out of his way to help, even when he was little more than a stranger to him.

“Let’s hope so, Doc,” he said. “Let’s hope so.”

