THE LOST DESPATCH

By James Leach

Based on the 1913 novel by Natalie Sumner Lincoln

Genre: Historical Thriller / Espionage / Civil War

Logline: In the final days of the Civil War, a Confederate spy accused of murdering the Federal agent determined to expose her must prove her innocence while confronting the secret that could still send her to the gallows.

Synopsis

In 1861 Virginia, **Nancy Newton** watches her father, Confederate **Colonel John Newton**, die from wounds suffered at Bull Run. With his final breath, he asks her to continue resisting the Union. Nancy promises and spends the next several years secretly serving the Confederacy from inside Washington.

By 1864, Nancy has become an accomplished spy, moving through Union society while passing intelligence through a clandestine network. Federal Secret Service **Captain George Lloyd** is closing in. After Nancy escapes him disguised as a Union courier, Lloyd becomes determined to prove she is the elusive female operative he has been hunting.

Complicating Nancy's double life is **Major Robert Goddard**, a Union officer and Lloyd's longtime friend. Goddard falls in love with Nancy, unaware that the woman he wants to protect is the spy Lloyd seeks. Nancy returns his affection, but years of deception have left her questioning whether loyalty to her father's cause justifies betraying those she has come to care about.

On a final mission near Winchester, Nancy secretly delivers coded intelligence to her Confederate cousin, Major George Pegram. A violent nighttime encounter leaves Goddard badly injured and blind. Lloyd later tracks down Pegram and recovers the despatch that finally proves Nancy is a Confederate spy.

Then Lloyd suddenly dies—and the evidence disappears.

Nancy is arrested and brought before a military commission for espionage and Lloyd's murder. Circumstantial evidence mounts against her until a hidden syringe reveals Lloyd was poisoned with Curari. The trail leads to Washington socialite Mrs. Bennett and a secret from Lloyd's past: his real name was George Lloyd Irving, and Bennett was the wife who abandoned him years earlier after leaving their infant child to die.

Fearing Lloyd would expose her identity, Bennett murdered him and stole his papers. Her confession clears Nancy of murder.

But Nancy's victory is short-lived.

Her dog, **Misery**, digs up a buried tin box containing Nancy's official appointment as a Special Agent of the Confederate States Government. The murder accusation is gone, but her espionage is now undeniable.

With Lee surrendered and the Confederacy defeated, Nancy admits what she has done. She refuses to apologize for loving her people but accepts that the cause for which she fought is over. Imprisoned and facing execution, she confronts the consequences of the promise she made to her dying father.

Two days later, the blinded Goddard visits Nancy and offers his own life for hers. Then President Abraham Lincoln arrives. With the war ending and the country exhausted by bloodshed, Lincoln asks whether Nancy can accept the reunited nation and pledge allegiance to the flag she once opposed.

Nancy agrees.

Lincoln grants her a full presidential pardon and leaves the prison for an evening at Ford's Theatre.

Five hours later, the President is assassinated.

His mercy toward a former enemy becomes one of his final acts of reconciliation in a nation emerging from civil war.