

NATALIE SUMNER LINCOLN'S "THE
LOST DESPATCH"*

The first chapter of *The Lost Despatch* covers only seven pages, but it wears seven league boots and enough is set forth to make you turn to page eight. Time: the Civil War period of 1864; Place, Maryland, en route to Washington; Personæ, Secret Service men, spies (off stage) and a United States trooper; Object, The Papers; Action, halting of trooper by Secret Service Agents Lloyd and Symonds, and immediately ensuing head-smashing of their heads by trooper who rides madly away, has his broad cavalry hat jerked from his head by a low-hanging branch, and—Denouement: "My God! It's a woman!" gasped Symonds.

There is more to know, beginning with page eight. The erstwhile trooper's name is Nancy Newton, and she owns a dog Misery, whose name affords opportunity for the personal exploitation of private wit from time to time. Misery wears a collar with a secret drawer so to speak, and here various "papers" are hidden. Nancy also owns red-gold hair, some strands of which of course adhered to that ill-fated cavalry hat, and young Lloyd, talented, of fine social position, but who nevertheless declares bitterly that he has "no desire to associate with society people," is the Secret Service man who picked up that hat and laid those red-gold strands carefully away in his pocket.

Of course Lloyd and Nancy meet, and the latter is instantly recognised by the keen-eyed Secret Service agent who bears her a grudge for the smashing blow upon the temple she dealt him with her brave revolver butt. He knows but cannot prove she is in communication with the Southrons. Stanton's secret code has been stolen; Nancy knows telegraphy and takes the most poignantly important message of the Civil War off the dancing keys by ear. This message

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and the code in Nancy's handwriting are found upon the dead body of her Southern cousin, and Lloyd, at the top of his voice, in his boarding-house, where also lodges Nancy's lover, a Union officer blinded by a recent bad fortune of war, orders Nancy's arrest and then flings himself upon his bed to take well-earned repose. A few hours later Nancy is seized and thrown into prison to await trial for conspiracy—and murder!

For Lloyd is dead before the girl's arrest! And the blind officer was found lying in Lloyd's undisturbed room with a battered head. And how or why Lloyd died when he did is not told the reader until the end. Lincoln circulates through the pages, getting arrested by that blunderer Lloyd, telling stories to his friends, feeling Tad's pulse, and pardoning the deserving.