

THE LANTERN OF LUCK

them together there was no such awkwardness or constraint as might have been expected. He had come in the nick of time to contradict conclusively that untoward telegram from Lisbon, and — there was so much more he might be able to tell them. Fate had so shuffled the cards that they could not but be grateful for his company.

And he seemed to harbor no *arrière pensée* as to the part they had played in any event of the past. He did not scruple to answer, frankly enough and as fast as he could, the urgent questions they had to ask: for had not they also taken the law into their own hands, despoiled him as unconcernedly as ever he had despoiled anyone? It did not occur to him that they had merely recovered what was their own — and a margin to meet expenses. But, in any case, he bore them no grudge. What he could not keep for himself he would yield gracefully. Lose or win, he would face the outcome unmoved, imperturbable. And — he had lost very little in comparison with his winnings.

Eileen was in close confabulation with the Doña Carmen and Ulick Scarlett. The others were listening intently to every word Casado let fall, but, of tacit understanding, they kept their own counsel concerning the real object of their indirect inquiries.

He could tell them nothing, however, as to the whereabouts of the *Olive Branch*: except that she