

CHAPTER XXIV

AT FIVE MINUTES OF TWELVE

TWENTY minutes later, well along the East River front, in an unsavoury and deserted neighbourhood, Jimmie Dale was crouched before the door of a small building that seemed built half on the shore edge, and half on an old and run-down pier that extended out into the water. The building itself was little more than a storage shed, and originally had probably laid claims to nothing more pretentious—to-day it served as warehouse and office for Hunchback Joe's "business," and, above, for Hunchback Joe's living quarters. Jimmie Dale glanced around him sharply—not for the first time. There were no other buildings in his immediate vicinity, and such as could be seen loomed up only as black, shadowy, distant shapes—warehouses and small factories, for the most part, and empty and deserted now at night. It was intensely black—only a twinkling light here and there from a passing craft on the river, and the glow from thousands of street lamps that, like some strange aerial illumination, hovered over the opposite shore. The shed itself, windowless at least in front, was as silent, as deserted, and as black as all around it.

Jimmie Dale's hand stole into his pocket, produced a black silk mask, adjusted the mask over his face—and then the deft, slim fingers were at work with a little steel instrument on the door lock. A moment more, and the door swung silently inward, slowly, inch by inch. He listened intently. There was no sound. He stepped in—