

Booktalk!

Unspeakable Script

For this Book Talk you will need:

- 6 actors (Joseph Hardy, Meg Bates, Jim Farrow, Aunt Geraldine, Wyatt Steele & Ellen Hardy)
- Wyatt Steele: dress pants, shirt, tie, fedora, notepad, pen
- Joseph Hardy: suit, shirt, tie, dress shoes, cap, pocket watch
- Aunt Geraldine Hardy: long skirt, blouse, dress shoes, fancy hat, long gloves, teacup
- Meg Bates: black blouse, long black skirt, long white apron
- Jim Farrow: white men's shirt, brown dress pants, black suspenders, old-fashioned cap
- Ellen Hardy/Ellie Ryan: long skirt, blouse
- Additional props: copy of *Unspeakable*



(All actors except Ellie should stand in a semi-circle facing the audience; as each person speaks, they step forward, then step back when they're finished; they should stand in the order in which they speak)

Wyatt:

(taking a step forward; sounding confident) "The world wants to hear your story," I told her. And, as far as I was concerned, the deceased deserved to have their story told...by someone who was there; by someone who survived. I had so many questions: Did she lose someone close? What brought her to the *Empress* in the first place? What exactly happened that fateful night? *(pausing)* Her story of survival was an incredible one... *(pausing then adding emphatically)* People needed to hear that story. And it was my job as a reporter for the *New York Times* – my duty, in fact – to get that story...no matter what it took. *(taking a step back)*

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Joseph: *(taking a step forward; sounding & looking angry)* She brought shame on our house... Blackened the good Hardy name. *(pausing)* Why it's just as well her mother's dead, otherwise THIS outrage would surely have killed her. *(shaking his head in disgust)* I couldn't even look at her – in fact, I STILL can't – and I want absolutely NOTHING to do with her! *(beginning to take a step back then hesitating & adding)* She's dead to me now...

Aunt Geraldine: *(taking a step forward; sounding stern & looking determined)* "You WILL go on that ship!" I told her, "and you will work hard." They were doing her a favour taking her at all... *(pausing, then continuing)*...not that she saw it that way. I told her she'll learn to be grateful for all she DOES have...and maybe – just maybe – she'll learn to make a life for herself. *(taking a step back)*

Meg: *(taking a step forward; sounding bright & cheerful)* It wasn't just my job to serve Miss Ellen; it was my honour. Bringing her an Earl Grey – milk, two sugars – pressing her clothes; WHATever & WHENever she needed it. But then the two of us set sail on the *Empress* – both hired as stewardesses – and we quickly became equals. The lines between 'the servant' and 'the served' dissolved completely. Miss Ellen – Ellie, as she insisted I call her – told me I was smart... Smart enough to learn to read and write. And, in a short time, not only had I learned to do just that, but we had also become the very best of friends. I had no doubts she would do anything to keep me safe *(pausing)*, just as I knew I would for her... *(taking a step back)*

Jim: *(taking a step forward; sounding & looking sullen)* I saw her. Up close, and not from the shadows along the ship's rail. I don't know why she stood there each night, all alone. I don't know why I could never find the courage to talk to her. All I DO know is that she was even more beautiful than I thought. From the moment I first saw her, I couldn't take my eyes off of her... *(pausing)* But I knew it in my heart: I didn't deserve her. Not after all I'd done... *(taking a step back)*



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Ellen:

(rushing onstage between Meg & Jim and stopping in front of the semi-circle; motioning to the people behind her as she begins speaking to the audience)

Stop! All of you just stop! I'm supposedly one of the lucky ones; one of only a few hundred who survived the sinking of the *Empress of Ireland*. *(laughing ironically)*

Ha! I may have lived to tell the tale, but so much of me died the day that ship sank. The screams. The stench. The frigid water. The

haunting images of all those faces I'll never forget. *(motioning to Wyatt)* Difficult? That doesn't begin to explain it. UNSPEAKABLE – that's more like it. And now, he's making me live it all over again! *(pausing in silence, then holding up a copy of Unspeakable)*. See you at your Scholastic Book Fair.

