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Explication of Edward Field's "The Farewell"

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They say the ice will hold
so there I go,
forced to believe them by my act of trusting people,
stepping out on it,

and naturally it gaps open
and I, forced to carry on coolly
by my act of being imperturbable,
slide erectly into the water wearing my captain's helmet,
waving to the shore with a sad smile,
"Goodbye my darlings, goodbye dear one,"
as the ice meets again over my head with a click.

This poem is about someone who ruins himself for the sake of maintaining socially acceptable behavior. We cloak our true feelings in pretenses of trust and goodwill. The Japanese call this *tatamae*: a mechanical, automatic politeness acted out to such an extent, it can replace untoward feeling. The speaker's ability to fake his manner gives him the high rank of "captain" (l. 8) and also kills him. It is not hard to visualize this nutcracker sinking slow-motion, waving good-bye to his wife and children: symbols of domesticity and social order. "[N]aturally" (l. 5) the tone of this poem is cynical love your reading of the poem and your response.; twice being "forced" (l. 3, 6), a sense of helplessness pervades. Special word order and enjambment ("and I" (l. 6)) combine to highlight the direct affront to the speaker's dignity. This poem is a warning: if we go through life putting on appearances and acting only in ways that are concordant with what society expects, we will coldly die.

Biography of Edward Field

<http://andrejkoymasky.com/liv/fam/biof1/fiel1.html>