

CutBank

Volume 1
Issue 3 *CutBank* 3

Article 4

Spring 1974

Ermine

David Steingass

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Steingass, David (1974) "Ermine," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 3 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss3/4>

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in CutBank by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

ERMINE

He rose off winter.
A dance of flame, a
Dream of quick cold shape.
White cobra in snow,
Eyes furious blood
Drops. Fur icicle,
Barb-clawed snow-silver.
Parsnip with frost-black
Tip. My steel trap held
His wire arc of flesh
In bare formal fear.
The silver dollar
Of pan was bigger
Than his head. He'd worked
To spring it. He held
The trap like a gift
I was refusing.
I saw his outrage:
His heart leaped in his
Tail-tip. I felt his
Insanity grow
At having to chew
The shattered foreleg
Away from his paw
To escape. He stopped
Only to spit me
Blood-flakes of right leg.
I found a blackjack
Of club his head fell
Under like a rag-
Wrapped egg.
I loved his
Body so, I slid
It up my coat sleeve.
I held the bloody
Head in my hand like
The two-headed pink mouse

I'd found dead under
A hen once. My hand
Was ermine-red. My
Arm was soft and warm
With animal life.
It was the hand that
Dropped the blow that peeled
The skin from its flesh
Neat as candy wraps:
Melting snow revealed
A patch of pink buds.
The muscles stood taut
As textbook drawings
On his body. I saw
Fat like two or three
Pats of hoarded butter.
The organs hinted
Like blue mysteries.
I wondered how they
Could all crouch so close.
The skin, dry and clean
As sausage casing,
Had an acrid scent
I loved. I never
Tanned it. Reversed,
The fur slept for years
On my bookcase. Each
Time I considered
The brown weasel turned
White ermine, I thought
Of a velvet-coated
Grapevine between shirt
And skin, whorled and
Sexual muscle
Of wood, draped in snow.
I cried for its life,
The animal's sacred
Breath. I felt my own
Dead within it, and
I knew, I knew me.