

DALE RITTERBUSCH

Soul-Stinger

Never think the word *soul*; certainly never say it in anger or disgust unless to conjure from some wild bestiary a soul-stinger, something scorpion-like—stinger long as a braided whip—that injects a just venom into a malignant soul and thus removes it from the pantheon of lost and tortuous miscreants, a merciful end even for the unjust. Not long ago a court determined that sexual harassment in the military was just part of the job, to be expected in that culture. I want that soul-stinger to do its job. I imagine the thick, oily stab, the barbed removal, the fiery love I have for such a venomous creature.

After Shakespeare's *When Icicles Hang by the Wall*

There are certainly icicles hanging by the wall, down the clapboards, dripping from the eaves, downspouts, gutters and a last course of curling shingles. Thirty days. A month—but who's counting—of days below the freeze mark; it never stops. As for *a merry note*, whacking stalactites with a shovel does nothing but break the peace: those sharp, cutting shards explode upon the walk though better there than on the heads of those braving it out to pick up the morning paper, ice sheets on the steps, swords of ice overhead—a dangerous place despite the serenity of winter. Almost nothing moves in this frigid pallor of air. Even hatred freezes: would it were so in the headlines— another air strike, more collateral damaged. I swing hard at a thick, glacial flow of ice twisting the gutter overhead. It shatters, and the headlines break: just another day of cold and damming ice. And fire, always fire, somewhere, on the other side of this world.



A frequent contributor to WLA, **DALE RITTERBUSCH** is the author of two collections of poetry, *Lessons Learned* and *Far From the Temple of Heaven*.