Barriers

separate the self
from the messy business of blood and vomit.

Curtail contamination …
provide impunity …
confer safety …
or so we pray.

Closely mimic the cocoon
we learned to spin in medical school
to keep emotions at bay
patient after dying patient.

But
Mongols breached the Great Wall
Ebola penetrated the epidermis
and
the rogue teardrop blindsides
even the flintiest of docs.

— MARILYN ASCHOFF MELLOR, MD

Marilyn Aschoff Mellor is a retired pediatric emergency medicine physician who blogs at marilynmellorintothefray.blogspot.com.

ABOUT THIS PIECE
Mellor gives two sources of inspiration for this poem: “The barriers we all erect for self-preservation. And a gruff trauma surgeon.”