**Self-Portrait as Waiting**

The ICU nurses on the podcast

insisted they were fine until

they weren’t. One said he was sure

he’d develop PTSD eventually, an inverted

version of the illness he tried

to help his patients survive

but mostly couldn’t. *I’m smiling at you,*

he’d tell them when he came in,

suited up in PPE.

\*

The image of a flower

bulb occurs, the extra

outer layers light as wind. Those little nubs

look mostly all alike, so catalogs

depict the later flowering.

\*

And then I think of my father,

skin yellow and waxen

the last days I saw him, greasy

with the oil his aides rubbed on.

I felt the waiting

was worst, and kept asking

when he’d die. When the call came, two weeks

after I’d gone home, I was asleep.

My husband didn’t want to wake me,

and why should he have?

\*

Edvard Munch painted six versions

of his dying sister over forty years, compelled

to repeat the scene of waiting for

what was in the past. In all of them,

her mother holds her hand, head

deeply bowed while her daughter

looks sharply past, impervious

and patient, toward a sideways

light that makes her slightly glow.