**Self-Portrait on a Birthday**

In the night, I heard coyotes:

a low, near call and then

a higher echo. Then the lower one

repeated, then the other,

on and on . . .

The night my mother-in-law died

I woke and heard them, shrill

and wild, a kind of keening.

There must have been a den

of newborns up the hill.

My cousin has gone home,

*low on energy and high*

*on joy!* she wrote, blood

scrubbed clean to stop the cancer

chemo couldn’t. Once she’s stronger,

she’ll have to repeat

her childhood vaccinations.

She didn’t mention the infection

she got, *C. diff*.*,* now treatable,

my uncle wrote, which almost killed

my mother two years before she died.

Today’s her eighty-eighth birthday,

or would have been. It’s impossible

to imagine her still here, though I try

to see her face, first

as it was, then as it might have been.