Lady of the House

Slick white spines
lined the west wall
of my grandmother’s apartment
like sharks teeth, smooth
as pearls preserved
in glass tubes.

She used to shine
a pink light bulb
in each corner,
flooding
onto Technicolor faces
and long black letters.

We weren’t allowed
to touch them—
our sticky fingers
would rip the priceless pages.

One summer I wandered
alone, after dinner
into the pink room
and let my hand graze
the spotless covers.

I closed the door
and turned the pages
like ancient velum
with the tips of my fingers.

A woman looked straight ahead
at something I couldn’t see,
holding her hands
against her chest,
her long pink dress
bleeding into the floor.

“Eugenia Niarchos,
in Dior,
in the yellow gallery
of her family home
in Paris”

I sounded out the letters
silently,
silver behind my teeth
swallowed like a spider
in my sleep.
When I pulled
    at the edges
    it made no sound.