A Requiem
Sam Hickford

For my sister, Amber.

"What can I say? Some people have princesses and fairies. Others have the Amber Room." - Professor Eichwede

Mosaics of lizard-claw, or wilted tree
fall, or have fallen, & sailors puzzle over
the mosaics they’re aflame with: eternities
in relics, whole memories of supernovas

or fragments that the forest meant to leave
behind - as small, faint prints to mark itself -
before it sank into the Baltic Sea
with only brittle stories left to tell.

One architect had longed for cities, built
from every imprint that the waves consumed
of amber-work. These dreams subsided, then distilled
into the private, contemplative room

of Catherine, whose meditations filled
every inch of fragile panel, fears
departing, leaping out against the stilled
breath-shadow, or crystallised as regal tears

haunting the final tsar when he was quelled
& lineages bled into the lines
of primal sense. Thus, later, when the Nazis shelled
Leningrad in murderous rampage, they were kind

to the ghost-room, which they carefully compelled
into the particles which made it up
and took it to Königsberg. & when the Russians
swept into that ambered town, they took

no such care, burning every shard of sculpted dream
in auto-vengeance; burning the German castle down
which cradled those mosaics, burning every gleam
of Russian treasure, kept within the proud

fortress of a false and bourgeois queen.
I am trying to find one hint of you
here, but it was torched to smitherens
and nothing remains - not ash or any residue -

though when I search enough, a tactile sound
swirls, & strokes the gutter; although no trace
of the room that you dismantled can be
found, something survives of the embrace.

and so I mark a new room every day
and dwell within that anechoic chamber
for a moment; watching you quickly fade
hearing your silent voice becoming fainter:

a room made out of whatever, at all, became
‘treasure’; broken plastics; bits of twine,
wattled in some image of your name,
destroyed, before I ever stay inside.