Kaddish

by Philip F. Clark

"He was something else," they said. That black he always wore -- the motorcycle jacket and chaps -- worn well and long; the boots that walked over or past us and we gladly met step for step; the slow way he had of unbuckling the night on us. That laugh of his, his eyes a welcome or warning, "No, not you," "Not yet." He smoked. He drank. He regaled us with stories, gossip; and like a coven we listened, rapt, intent, in thrall. We never knew his next move but watched and hoped for it. Bars would fill, waiting for that laugh. Summer nights or frozen winter, the crackles of his black. Gone long these years, there is not a room that doesn't hold his polish and his sweat. We gather here, but have few words. A Kaddish for the man we met.