

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *ASHES TO ASHES* BY THOMAS MALTMAN | SOHO PRESS

- 1) Discuss the theme of history—both personal and communal—in the novel. How do the discoveries of the remains and the Book of Hours affect the characters' sense of place and identity?
- 2) Morgan's desire to restore the legend of the Viking woman is deeply tied to her mother's memory. What does this suggest about how people construct meaning from the past? How does it relate to Lukas's and Basil's relationships with their own families and histories?
- 3) The novel is set during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. How does this backdrop influence the characters' actions and anxieties? Does it heighten the novel's atmosphere of uncertainty and revelation?
- 4) The author uses an omniscient narrator with access to the interior lives of many characters—including, at one point, a herd of dairy cows, who are given their own short, lyrical chapter. Why do you think the author chose this expansive approach rather than limiting the perspective to one or two point-of-view characters?
- 5) What do the unremovable ashes symbolize for different characters, and how do their interpretations reflect inner struggles or beliefs? What does the title *Ashes to Ashes* evoke for you by the end of the novel? How has its meaning shifted from the beginning of the story?