

# THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Laura Matson Hahn pledged her unconditional loyalty to her intuition in childhood. It's led her astray, but never awry. Now she finds out if she was really alone all the while.

By Scott Edwards

There's a fearlessness to Laura Matson Hahn. And I don't think I realized how rare a quality that is until I saw it and named it in her.

It's a blistering hot Friday afternoon in August and Hahn, a tall, slender figure in a loose, flowing summer dress, is leading me down a set of steps that are dug into a very steep hillside just behind her New Hope home. We're escaping the heat. And skirting death. I'm reaching for anything that remotely resembles a railing, while Hahn is floating down the steps with the carefree trot of a young girl.

We arrive at an intimate patio complete with lounge chairs, a fire pit and, most importantly, shade. Not much, but enough. The faint trickle of the creek that sits just over our shoulders is interrupted only by the New Hope-Ivyland locomotive thundering by 50 feet overhead. Otherwise, we're miraculously far removed from just about everything considering we're still basically sitting square in the middle of a tourist town on a sunny summer afternoon.

This is where Hahn resides: Not far from everyone else, in an impossibly beautiful place of her making. This is what vigilance, some hard labor and a willingness to dream can earn you, I think.

Hahn separated herself from the crowd (read: six sisters and a brother) early in life. She describes the act as tuning into her heart, and she credits her mother with enlightening her, albeit unknowingly. A highly intelligent, well educated woman, Hahn's mother long considered motherhood her lone option, and that contained existence weighed on her over time. Hahn observed and vowed to adjust her life accordingly, which mostly entailed trusting her intuition. "It has taken me on some very circuitous routes," says Hahn, whose enchantingly sultry voice—which she uses to great effect—is spot on for Kathleen Turner. "My husband's amazed that I'm even alive today, some of the things that I've experienced in my life."

It's those experiences, the chances taken, that form the root of her fearlessness. And it's what steered her toward them—listening to her heart—

that serves not only as the common thread through Hahn's wildly diverse existence but as the impetus for her first novel.

During a sleepless night in a French castle—yes, I know how that sounds, but it's no less true—Hahn, a corporate writer for much of her career and a journalist most recently, began to write these letters on behalf of a character who had taken up residence in her head, a well-traveled woman. Over the ensuing days, she created a family tree right down to a point of origin: Bohemia, home of an artistic, independent clan, not unlike herself.

And then the story's thesis emerged: How exactly does one listen to his heart? an issue Hahn has grappled with since she was a girl. She allowed the book to grow organically from there, right on through her promotion of it. Patti, one of the six sisters, asked if her Northern Jersey book club could read the manuscript as Hahn was completing it, two years ago. Hahn has shared copies with a handful of clubs since, including two, most recently, in New Hope. "I absolutely respect all of their opinions and their input, but most I adore how this book makes people want to converse about something I think is essential, and elemental and beautiful about your heart speaking to you," Hahn says.

That, however, is not actually the most significant reaction. That would be from those who are determined to see the book published and who possess the connections to help. Over a brief span early in the summer, manuscripts were passed on to *O* and *Good Housekeeping* magazines and publishing giants Random House and Algonquin, all of which could amount to nothing, Hahn understands. "But it was a really good week. It's good energy around the book," Hahn says with a subdued confidence.

**Editor's Note:** We are presenting the first chapter of Hahn's novel, *Bohemian Hearts, The Heart Code*, in its entirety over the following pages. The remaining chapters will be posted on our Web site, [www.BucksLifeMag.com](http://www.BucksLifeMag.com), one by one, on a weekly basis beginning October 15.

## Bohemian Hearts, The Heart Code

### Chapter One

## Birch Bark Hat

Gladdenbury, CT  
May 27, 1920

*"What's a Bohemian?" Celeste asked.*

*Finally, the question Gamma had been hoping to hear and waiting to answer.*

Squatting on the crescent-shaped rock jutting out from the creek's edge, six-year-old Celeste released her bundle of forest treasure and stared into the soft flowing gray-green water. Sniffing deeply, her nose filled with the scent of mud and new green as she wiggled her toes inside her shoes and looked up at grandmother with hopeful eyes. "May I today, Gamma?" she asked.

Glancing at the houses on the hillcrest overlooking the creek, Gamma winced. News traveled fast in small towns. No doubt those glassy eyes would report them on the grassy slope, shoeless, sockless, skirts pulled up to their knees, splashing their feet; and prompt another lecture from Myrtle on the dangers to her daughter's health. But none of that had ever stopped her before so Gamma wrinkled her nose like a rabbit and nodded. Celeste's

laugh gurgled in harmony with the stream as she unlaced her ankle boots, pulled off her socks, rolled her canvas skirt above her knees and tiptoed into the creek, sucking small breaths at every step.

"Too cold?" Gamma asked, tucking her hem into her waistband. "Oh, nooooo," Celeste said, biting her lower lip as Gamma stepped in.

"Ouff, you make a joke of me — is freezing!" Squealing, Celeste clutched her sides and teetered in the water. "What a pixie! Quick now, hand me the bark so soon I get out."

Still giggling, Celeste passed her a long strip of birch bark they'd found on their walk and watched Gamma submerge it into the water, gently working the edges with her fingers, pulling and bending the bark to soften it. Lulled by the babbling water tum-