

Baby Doe Tabor: Colorado's Legend

“When Baby Doe first saw the mountains, she had an inexplicable feeling that her destiny was bound up in those distant granite fortresses.”¹ Baby Doe Tabor is a timeless figure in Colorado history. Her story has been committed to film, opera, and literature time and again. Although there are many parts that are the same in the various renditions of her story. There are three critical parts that are all perceived differently across time; her life in Central City prior to meeting Horace Tabor, her relationship and life with Horace, and her long and lonely vigil at the Matchless Mine in Leadville, Colorado after Horace's death. These three are perceived differently largely based upon the fact that the authors craft their language so as to present the reader with different perspectives on the event.

¹ Gordon Langley Hall, The Two Lives of Baby Doe (Philadelphia: Macrae Smith Co., 1962), 69.

Because of continual retelling Baby Doe's story remains an integral part of Colorado's history. What is it about her that makes her such an important and timeless figure? Why are authors and historians so fascinated with her? Her story begins simply enough. Elizabeth Bonduel Nellis McCourt was born in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Her official birth date has never been agreed upon, as the official records were destroyed in a fire when she was a teenager. She was christened on October 7, 1854 when she was estimated to be about 12 days old.² She first arrived in Colorado in 1877 on the arm of her new husband Harvey Doe; they settled themselves in Central City to work some mining claims belonging to Harvey Doe Senior. Harvey Jr. was by all accounts a lazy and procrastinating man who was used to having things done for him. When their claims proved to be worthless, he deserted Baby for a time, during which she delivered a stillborn baby. The baby's paternity was in question, for Baby's close relationship with storekeeper Jake Sands had raised concern. Despite attempts at reconciliation, Baby sued for divorce on the claim of desertion and non-support and quickly received it in 1879. Following this she moved to the roaring boomtown of Leadville, where she took up residence above the Sand's store and continued her relationship with Jake. In early 1880 Baby caught the eye of millionaire Horace Tabor at the Saddle Rock Café in Leadville. He became infatuated and took her as his mistress, ferrying her back and forth from Denver to Leadville so they could be together. In late 1882 he began divorce proceedings against

² Caroline Bancroft, Silver Queen: The Fabulous Story of Baby Doe Tabor (Boulder: Johnson Publishing Co., 1950), 8.

his faithful first wife Augusta, sparking the beginning of the great scandals that would follow the Tabor's throughout their lives.

Horace and Baby were married in Washington DC in March of 1883 while he was filling out a 30 day term as Senator. They raised two daughters Lily and Silver Dollar.³ They lived extravagantly until the depression of 1893 took away the last of their crumbling fortune. Horace worked as a miner hauling slag in Leadville until hired, by his affluent acquaintances as the Postmaster of Denver. He died penniless, from appendicitis, in 1899. Baby Doe removed herself to Leadville and spent the remainder of her life guarding the Matchless Mine. Her daughters both left her during this time; Lily went to Chicago and married, denying that she was of any relation to the infamous Baby Doe Tabor. Silver Dollar spent most of her life attempting to regain the glory formerly held by the Tabor name. She was scalded to death under mysterious circumstances in a boardinghouse in Chicago in 1925. Baby Doe was last seen alive February 20, 1935, and was found dead in early March of that same year. Her body was removed to Denver to be buried alongside Horace.

Elizabeth McCourt Doe, or Baby Doe as she would become known, created scandal wherever she was. Her early days in Colorado were spent mostly in Central City working seemingly worthless mining claims with her then husband, Harvey Doe. Most of

³ Their two daughters given names were; Lily Bonduel Tabor and Rosemary Echo Silver Dollar Tabor. "Silver Dollar" as she was called throughout her life resembled her mother in looks and character alike. While Lily held great disdain for her mother and her actions.

the writings about her agree on the fact that, “From early childhood on, the girl born and christened as Elizabeth Bonduel McCourt promised to be a disturbing element in whatever bit of the world she chose to inhabit.”⁴ Overall, authors of works on Baby Doe look down upon her actions while in residence in Central City. Gordon Langley Hall, John Vernon, and John Burke are the three authors that will be primarily discussed when looking at this period of time in Baby Doe’s life.

⁴ John Burke, The Legend of Baby Doe: The Life and Times of the Silver Queen of the West (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974), 7.

Most of the positive interpretations come from writer John Burke, whose book The Legend of Baby Doe is probably the most historically accurate text about Baby Doe Tabor. Burke uses powerful language to show his high opinion of her as well as her actions during her time spent in Central City. For example, “Elizabeth, with her Celtic beauty, might have stepped out of the illuminated pages of the Book of Kells. The stuff of warrior-queens, Druid priestesses, ladies of the Fianna Fail.”⁵ ⁶ The comparison to Elizabeth, as he was fond of calling her, to warrior-queens, priestesses and ladies clearly demonstrates Burke’s high opinion of her. Burke however is greatly aware of the public persona of Baby Doe, he acknowledges her flaws, and then immediately praises her strength. He is telling the reader that even though everyone saw her as being a snobby beauty queen, she still remained an impeccably strong woman:

Elizabeth may have been something of a spoiled darling, a little too conscious of her beauty and overly expectant of its rewards, but there was a bedrock durability of character beneath the frivolity of a young bride.⁷

Following their seeming failure at the 4th of July mine in Central City, Harvey worried and began to give up hope. Elizabeth was the one who pulled him up with positive thoughts, as well as aiding his fledgling mining efforts; “She began to assume an executive function, in fact, before the marriage was two months old.”⁸ Elizabeth was the one who filed papers on the mining claims, hired miners to work the claim, and oversaw their efforts.

⁵ Fianna Fail refers to one of the political parties in Ireland.

⁶ John Burke, et al. 12.

⁷ John Burke, et al. 20.

⁸ John Burke, et all. 24.

She is credited with the little success the Doe's achieved, she was not afraid to go out and work with Harvey in the mine. She donned dirty old mining clothes and climbed down the shaft with him everyday. This fact caused great scandal in Central City, and helped bring about the criticism of her morals. This is where the books begin to dredge up shameful facts and put them on display for all readers to judge.

“Once more the Belle of Oshkosh was emerging as something of a local femme fatale.”⁹ Baby's outgoing personality that did not care much for what others thought was the cause of great shock to the conservatives in Central City. Most shocking of all was the very idea that a woman would don miner's clothes and climb down into the ground to muck like a common laborer,

Not only were the respectable wives, mothers and spinsters of Central City shocked beyond words but so were many of the town's painted ladies. More than one of the latter told her evening partner that ‘hussies like that Mrs. Doe should know their proper place.’ A respectable wife saw fit to write a long letter to Mama Doe, telling of the carryings-on of her daughter-in-law who dressed like a man all week and a princess on Sundays.¹⁰

Seemingly their anger was directed equally at the facts that she worked in the mine and dressed like a man. Either was inappropriate and together they were seemingly unbearable.

⁹ Gordon Langley Hall, The Two Lives of Baby Doe (Philadelphia- Macrae Smith Co., 1962), 84.

¹⁰ Gordon Langley Hall, et all. 76.

Gordon Langley Hall, the author of The Two Lives of Baby Doe, shows that this seemingly innocent attempt at aiding her husband in the quest for financial stability caused a great deal of controversy among the citizens of Central City. Her actions were so shocking that she appalled even the towns “painted ladies”. This fact seems ridiculous when one considers what these “painted ladies” were doing at the time. Hall is quick to point out that the “respectable” wives were shocked too. What then is Baby Doe? Her actions seem to have condemned her to being termed an inappropriate wife, not only in the eyes of members of the community, but Hall himself is condemning her as being unacceptable. “His (Harvey’s) distress was increased by the way Elizabeth was scandalizing the community, dressing like a man, strutting around, joining the singsongs of their Cornishmen, and acting like she didn’t know a woman’s place.”¹¹ Hall implies to his reader that by the standards of the time, especially the expectations placed on women to act womanly, her actions were definitely inappropriate. As a result, Baby’s actions are cast in a disapproving light, a trend that continues throughout her life.

Another author who supports the belief presented by Hall is Duane A. Smith, author of Horace Tabor: His Life and Legend.

Her pictures show the petite Baby Doe to have been slightly plump, as was stylish, with ringlets of blond hair framing an attractive face. This charmer had come west from Oshkosh, Wisconsin, trailing a hometown reputation of showing both a taste for masculine flattery and a trace of exhibitionism in flaunting her beauty and figure. Women did not like ‘Lizzie’, even before the Tabor scandal.¹²

¹¹ John Burke, The Legend of Baby Doe: The Life and Times of the Silver Queen of the West (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974), 27.

¹² Duane A. Smith Horace Tabor: His Life and Legend (Boulder- Colorado Assoc. University Press, 1973),

Smith states the belief that Baby had “a taste for masculine flattery,” as well as “exhibitionism,” two traits that would scorn any woman of the time. Smith’s choice of words demonstrates a belief that a woman’s desire for either of these things is unacceptable, and that Baby Doe was scorned because of her desire for attention, and her inability to understand a proper woman’s place. These too were criticisms that followed her throughout her life.

Another part of Baby’s life that put her on the outs of society was the speculation of an affair between herself and Central City shopkeeper, Jake Sands. Historically speaking, this affair most likely did occur. There is substantial evidence that the two did engage in some sort of relationship, beyond that of a friendship. Jake fed Baby and paid her expenses during the period in which Harvey had abandoned her. It is believed by many researchers that the stillborn son born to Baby Doe in 1879 was Jake’s child. Baby never left any evidence naming who the father was. However, there was definite cause for speculation, especially in a town so eager to condemn her. Again, writer Gordon Langley Hall speaks on the topic,

While Harvey conveniently worked nights, Jake and Baby Doe became lovers. They had clandestine meetings near the railroad trestle that precariously spanned Packard Gulch at Mountain City. Baby indiscreetly pasted a picture of the trestle in her scrapbook, writing underneath, ‘ Meet me, my darling, at ten.’¹³

There are reports of inappropriate behavior between the two in public as well. They frequented the many dance halls in Central City together and were seen by many to be more than friends. Hall suggests that Baby took advantage of her nights spent alone to establish relations with Jake, implying that she was a sneaky woman; A woman who did not seem to be concerned with her own infidelity, and definitely not a discreet woman. Hall condemns her actions and labels her an adulteress.

The author to take greatest liberties with Baby Doe’s sexual escapades was John Vernon, author of All for Love: Baby Doe and Silver Dollar. Vernon is a writer of historical fiction, who takes great liberties in attempting to present his subject’s lives. Baby Doe in his book is a loose woman to put it kindly; his portrayal is by far the most negative of all that this writer found. Throughout his book, he speculates that Baby had affairs with at least 6 men during her time in Colorado. There is no historical evidence anywhere that states this to be factual. The most blatantly described ones were that with Bill Bush, an associate of Tabor and of Jake Sands.

¹³ Gordon Langley Hall, The Two Lives of Baby Doe (Philadelphia-Macrae Smith Co., 1962), 86.

She'd flirted with Jake right in front of her husband- sat on his lap and nuzzled his beard- Harvey never made a peep. Jake fucked like Harvey slept, long, hard, and deep. Harvey's little mosquito pecker.... She wouldn't put it past him to sneak in at night and rip all her dresses right up in the middle, after first sniffing them.¹⁴

Obviously, when researching the topic upon which Vernon intended to write he viewed Baby Doe's actions as scandalous, a belief that he blatantly expresses in the above quote. He discusses sexual problems between husband and wife and Harvey's desire to "sniff" Baby out.

Throughout his entire novel, Baby Doe is portrayed as being a desperately unfaithful woman whose sexual urges could not be quenched. In doing so, he has given immortality to an unrealistic portrayal. As the novel goes on, he is more and more critical of her sexual escapades in Central City, and begins to cast an even more unflattering light upon his perception of her character.

Running back to bed, she couldn't help herself, she spread her arms and legs making a bare X. She pinched her own nipples then playfully licked one with her tongue. Back under the covers, Billy seized her shoulders and swung her on top. That was the only way they did it, because of his length. She fit them together and slid down his sickle-shaped ding dong, Whee!!!¹⁵

Vernon has turned the life of Baby Doe into a pornographic novel, and takes severe liberties with history. He makes up dialogue, thought, and motivation as well as over-dramatizes her sexual behavior. Vernon's unflattering portrayal is by far the worst, and

¹⁴ John Vernon, All for Love: Baby Doe and Silver Dollar (New York- Simon and Schuster, 1995), 47.

¹⁵ John Vernon, et al. 53.

unfortunately one of the most recent items written about Baby Doe. His attempt to make her story fit to today's reading standards has made it a shell of the truth. The names are the same, as are the places. Beyond that, egregious liberties are taken. In the author's note, Vernon addresses the liberties he has taken, but never does he acknowledge the historical inaccuracies presented, inaccuracies that have no factual basis anywhere in the history gathered of Baby Doe.

“So this was Baby Doe, the mysterious siren of the eighties, who had intrigued the rest of a nation little more than a month ago by marrying, in Washington, Colorado's 30 day Senator, Horace A.W. Tabor, Midas of the Silver Mines.”¹⁶ This is the period of Baby's life that is defined as being the most scandalous. It is the period in which she met, fell in love with, and married Horace A.W. Tabor. Horace Tabor had become a millionaire almost overnight due to his silver mines in Leadville. Tabor had more money than he knew what to do with, and his first wife Augusta (who has been labeled as the shrew), did not revel in his newfound wealth. Horace took the company of many women, but after he met the beautiful Baby Doe, he no longer had eyes for anyone else. However, the critics of this relationship were a dime a dozen. A symbolic annihilation of both the relationship and Baby Doe occurred in the media and in everyday conversation. Almost all writers on the subject slander the behavior exhibited by Baby as well as by Horace. The only positive records, aside from a few newspaper articles, are those committed to

paper by Baby and Horace themselves. In this section we will examine a multitude of sources, many negative, a few positive, and all intriguing. The *Colorado Prospector* is a newspaper that reproduces newspaper articles from the past on certain subjects, and the issue focusing on the scandalous marriage of Horace and Baby Doe is full of negative commentaries. From these reproduced primary sources we can get the full picture of what the public thought:

¹⁶ Edgar C. McMechen The Tabor Story (Denver-State Historical Society, 1951), 5.

When a man of Senator Tabor's wealth, influence, and position, boldly defiles society by marrying a woman whose history is as well known as Mrs. Doe, it is high time he was lashed by the scorpion tongues of public opinion and severely censured by every respectable institution in the land.¹⁷

The above quote is an excerpt from an article printed March 9, 1883, entitled "Only Contempt." The language used clearly displays the author's as well as the general public's position on the marriage. Senator Tabor "defiles society" in his act of marriage to Baby Doe, and he needed to be punished with the "scorpion tongues." Needless to say, the union between Baby Doe and Horace was frowned upon by society, and created an outrage among the citizens not only of Denver but also around the country, for Horace was quite famous. The age difference was scandalous in itself, as was the fact that Horace had divorced a faithful wife merely to take another younger one. However, the greatest outrage occurred because Baby's history was well-known, which was seen as quite outrageous.

Another excerpt from "Only Contempt" continues with the tongue-lashing, the author set forth with, "The man, Tabor, whose name was a power throughout Colorado, has lowered himself to that despicable position in which few of his friends will ever recognize him again, as they have always done heretofore."¹⁸ Not only has Tabor become a marked man in the eyes of society because of his marriage, his choice of wife, and his divorce. He had also lowered himself in the eyes of his friends. The marriage between

¹⁷ Colorado Prospector: Colorado History from Early Day Newspapers. Volume 19, #4. "Only Contempt" March 9, 1883. Rocky Mtn Herald, reprinted in Denver Republican

¹⁸ Colorado Prospector et al.

Horace and Baby Doe escaped no scandal, their union affected everyone, and in turn it was expected that the Tabors be shunned because of their actions.

The wedding itself was also attacked. The Tabor wedding was not safe even though it was held far from Colorado, in Washington DC. “The records of his unsavory divorce suit are scarcely dry when he is married, with vulgar display, in Washington city, the marriage having been celebrated on Thursday last.”¹⁹ By all historical accounts the wedding was not vulgar, it was a quiet simple ceremony in the parlor of a Washington hotel. The use of the word “vulgar” clearly demonstrates the disdain felt by the public for Horace and his choice of a new bride. This new bride also came under fire,

He didn’t pay a dollar to be Senator, but he paid \$250,000 to enable the belle of Oshkosh to marry a Senator. Oshkosh belles come very high, but the millionaires of the Senate and of the country must have them.²⁰

The implication here is obvious as is the sarcasm employed by the writer; that a woman such as Baby would only marry a powerful Senator. It wasn’t good enough that he was wealthy; he had to have the power.

¹⁹ Colorado Prospector: Colorado History from Early Day Newspapers. Volume 19, #4. “Pity Rather Than Contempt” March 8, 1883. Cincinnati Enquirer, reprinted in Denver Republican

²⁰ Colorado Prospector: Colorado History from Early Day Newspapers. Volume 19, #4. “Must Have Her” March 8, 1883. Globe Democrat, reprinted in Denver Republican.

Newspaper articles were not the only place in which the verbal barbs appeared. Books on the subject, whether written about Horace, Augusta, Baby or their story in general, verbally diminished the wedding between Horace and Baby. “Mr. Tabor had sacrificed his social status, when social status was indispensable, for his youthful bride. To the wealthy, aging Silver King it must have seemed a small price to pay.”²¹ Edward Blair, the author behind this quote is telling the reader that a woman such as Baby Doe, who created scandal that by today’s standards seems minimal, was clearly an unfit bride to share in the glory of the Tabor name and status. “It was not just the fact that he remarried that stunned Coloradoans, but she whom he took as his new wife.”²² Perhaps if Horace had chosen a more “respectable” higher-class woman for his bride he might not have undergone such criticism. Or maybe it was just the lack of a “white” wedding so to speak that infuriated people. However, he was in love, and cared not for what others thought. When the invitations had been sent out prior to the wedding, the women of Washington and Denver society were appalled. How could Tabor, who had divorced a faithful first wife for a second, younger, questionable wife, have the gall to invite society’s elite? Sure their husbands attended the wedding, not willing to risk losing the great financial support that Horace provided. However, “No women were present except members of Baby Doe’s family. The blackball was cast by Denver society.”²³ This shunning of Baby Doe by society’s female elite would continue throughout their marriage.

²¹ Edward Blair, Leadville: Colorado’s Magic City (Boulder- Pruett Publishing Co., 1980), 173.

²² Duane A. Smith, Horace Tabor: His Life and Legend (Boulder-Colorado Assoc. University Press, 1973), 227.

“Denver’s social elite turned its collective back on ‘that woman’ and dashed any aspirations she might have had.”²⁴ No invitations for parties were sent to the Tabor household, nobody came to call. The Tabors became isolated unto themselves. The disdain the nation had felt at the relationship and subsequent marriage morphed into a blackball of the Tabors.

²³ Edgar C. McMechen The Tabor Story (Denver- State Historical Society, 1951), 28

²⁴ Duane A. Smith Horace Tabor: His Life and Legend (Boulder- Colorado Assoc. University Press, 1973), 246.

The strongest negativity towards Baby Doe and the marriage is that in the books written about Augusta. By all accounts Augusta was a hard working, New England woman, who was faithful to Horace throughout their marriage. Despite their fortune, she still desired to live the simple quiet life, whereas Horace wanted to paint the town every night. It is in the books and quotes about and from Augusta, where the painful side of the scandal is exposed. “For years Augusta hoped that Baby Doe would tire of Horace and, crestfallen, he would come back to his first wife. She thought that when the money was gone, the young hussy would flit.”²⁵ Until her death in 1895, Augusta believed that Baby Doe was merely a phase that Horace would work through, and he would inevitably return to her. This however, was not to be. “But Augusta was wrong. She had underestimated her rival. When the Silver Panic of 1893 reduced the former millionaire to poverty his pretty blonde wife stuck like glue.”²⁶ The aforementioned quotes all come from authors who based their statements from the real interviews taken with Augusta Tabor.

Augusta took the opportunities given to her to throw barbs at her rival. When visited by a reporter she stated the following:

She is a blonde, I understand, and paints [wears makeup]. Mr. Tabor has changed a great deal. He used to detest women of that kind. He would never allow me to whitewash my face, however much I desired to. She wants his money and will hang onto him as long as he has got a nickel. She doesn’t want an old man.²⁷

²⁵ Caroline Bancroft Augusta Tabor: Her side of the scandal (Boulder- Johnson Publishing Co., 1955), 15.

²⁶ Caroline Bancroft, et al. 17.

²⁷ Evelyn E. Livingston Furman My Search for Augusta Pierce Tabor, Leadville's First Lady (Denver-Quality Press, 1993), 123.

Augusta clearly believed that the marriage was destined to be a failure and she fully expected Horace's return. "I cannot bear the thought of this woman in my rightful place. She reaps the benefits of my labor and basks in the glory of the Tabor fortune."²⁸ Augusta had a right to be upset, she had worked and lived in broken down shacks to help Horace in his quest for riches, and then she was passed over for a younger woman. "To think that he now shares it all with another woman is humiliating! How could Horace leave me for that blond hussy!"²⁹ Despite her intense dislike of her successor, Augusta, it can be debated, had the last laugh. Although Horace and Baby died as much in love as the day they met, they were both penniless. Augusta was alone, but she was a millionaire. Unfortunately for the woman whose role was usurped, money did not give her happiness.

The strongest support of the Tabor relationship predominantly comes from letters left by Horace and Baby. Adoring letters sent by Horace to Baby were carefully preserved in her scrapbooks. Evidence to the love they shared, aside from all the scandal, theirs was a true and deep love as shown in this letter from Horace to Baby; "My dear, brave little Baby, so trusting, so hard-working- and always so cheerful! Your love has been the most beautiful thing in my life."³⁰ What woman wouldn't melt upon receiving a letter such as the above? This letter dispels the myths about whether or not they really loved each other. Truly they did and it was not merely a marriage for money on Baby's

²⁸ Evelyn E. Livingston Furman, et al. 119.

²⁹ Evelyn E. Livingston Furman, et al. 119.

³⁰ Caroline Bancroft, Silver Queen: The Fabulous Story of Baby Doe Tabor (Boulder- Johnson Publishing Co., 1950), 63.

part and a youthful bride on Horace's. A letter dated February 24, 1883, immediately prior to their wedding, espouses Horace's undying devotion to the beautiful Baby Doe:

Now comes the crowning event of my life domestically and that is my marriage to the woman I love to death. Ah babe, you are all mine forever and what joy it is. It seems almost as if it is too much happiness for mortals but it belongs to them...and have full right to love and give ourselves to the one we love and to that we will and to the last day of our lives and after death we will love each other in spirit.³¹

Some kind responses to Baby Doe could be found in the media as well.

³¹ Colorado Prospector: Colorados History from Early Day Newspapers. Volume 19, #4. Letter from Horace Tabor to Baby Doe, February 24, 1883.

Mrs. Tabor has proven herself, under the most trying condition, an exemplary woman and a loving and model wife. These virtues should secure her immunity from the shafts of political venom, which our bilious contemporary is so constantly shedding. It is cowardly to fight a woman.³²

There is no author credited with this, however it remains one of the only kind responses to Baby Doe, calling her an “exemplary” and “loving woman” surely shows the authors kind regard for a woman scorned. Baby Doe also received praise from her former town, Central City. *The Central City Register* printed the following article about Baby Doe at the time of her wedding:

...and her plump form and vivacious ways made her the object of great admiration from the masculine sex and a corresponding amount of envy and jealousy on the part of the females. She was recognized while here as a woman of many strong and worthy qualities. She knew the right and dared to do it. She is at last rewarded by becoming the bride of the richest man in the Silver State.³³

Strong praise for a woman so looked down upon during her time there. However, it was praise nonetheless, something that Baby Doe did not receive often short of that coming from her adoring husband.

Some contemporary authors praise their love story as well. Author Duane A. Smith is one.

Gossips whispered that the infatuation would soon end and, after running through his money, she would leave him for greener fields. They, like Augusta, misjudged Baby Doe. Such speculation proved idle: their love deepened and they remained devoted to each other through the trials that were to come.³⁴

³² Colorado Prospector: Colorado's History from Early Day Newspapers. Volume 19, 34. “A Model Wife” No date, no paper named.

³³ Gordon Langley Hall, *The Two Lives of Baby Doe* (Philadelphia- Macrae Smith Co., 1962), 151.

³⁴ Duane A. Smith *Horace Tabor: His Life and Legend* (Boulder- Colorado Assoc. University Press, 1973),

247.

Their love was not one sided, Baby loved Horace very much, as evidenced in many ways, especially her lonely vigil at the Matchless Mine following his death, a fact we will examine in the next section. Baby knew Horace was her one and only true love; “It was as if instinctively she knew ‘no later light would ever lighten up her heaven...’ For the next 55 years all the Jakes and Harvey’s of this world were to be forgotten in her passion for this man of 49, so many years her senior.”³⁵

³⁵ Gordon Langley Hall, et al. 95-96.

“So fleet the works of men, back to the earth again, Ancient and holy things fade like a dream.”³⁶ Those are the words inscribed upon the curtain in the Tabor Opera House. How eerie and foreboding those words seem when one considers the saga of the Tabors and the bleak end to Baby Doe’s life. That simple statement perfectly exemplifies the reality of the Tabors. Following Horace’s death, Baby Doe removed herself and her two daughters to Leadville. Legend has it that immediately prior to his death, Horace told Baby; “Hang onto the Matchless, it’ll make millions again.” During the eighties, the Matchless was producing anywhere between 2,000-10,000 dollars a day in high-grade ore. It had been Horace’s biggest moneymaker. However, by the time he died, the Matchless had been leased to settle debts. There is no historical document to prove that Horace told Baby to “hang onto the Matchless,” however it is hard to imagine her staying there for so long without that command having been said. Later a former colleague of Horace’s, J.K. Mullen, would take over the lease on the Matchless at the request of Baby Doe. He allowed her to maintain her vigil at the property. Predominantly, Baby’s vigil at the mine is perceived in two ways: the first being one of pity, that Baby was an old, crazy woman who fiercely guarded a worthless mine. The second is one of respect, that she was a proud woman who fought hard for that which she believed.

The first view that we will address is that of Baby Doe as a creature to be pitied, for in her later years it was said that she began to go crazy after years of isolation at the

³⁶ Caroline Bancroft, Silver Queen: The Fabulous Story of Baby Doe Boulder- Johnson Publishing Co., 1950), 80.

mine above Leadville. The Matchless Mine is located about 1 mile outside of town. Being without a car, and continually snowed in by the fierce Leadville winters- Baby's life was constantly a struggle. Many authors on the subject, view her with pity. Why would a woman subject herself to such hardship? Surely there were other options. A common view that accompanies pity is that of Baby as a poor crazy recluse:

Now alone and in her seventies, Baby became more eccentric, reclusive, and religious. During her lonely months on the mountain, she immersed herself in mysticism. She believed that she could communicate with the dead. In moments of clarity she would admit to friends that the Matchless would never produce again, but she never wavered in her loyalty to her husband's memory.³⁷

One story supported by Baby's own calendar entries is that she saw visions to accompany her great mysticism: "The calendars attested to a tumult of demons mingled with kindlier spirits, gigantic red horses, visions of gold and purple, and what must have been a very small dragon nestled in her coffee cup."³⁸ The evidence of Baby Doe's visions, which can be found in her calendars and diary notes, available for study at the Colorado Historical Society, adds to the pity given by authors to her,

³⁷ Gayle C. Shirley Remarkable Colorado Women (Guilford-The Globe Pequot Press, 2002), 93.

³⁸ John Burke The Legend of Baby Doe: The Life and Times of the Silver Queen of the West (Lincoln-University of Nebraska Press, 1974), 223-224.

What must it have been like for Baby Doe with her memories of former grandeur, as she lived out the final years of her desperate life here in this desolate place, amid the abject poverty that plagued her, and bitter family tragedy and estrangement that burdened her down.³⁹

Evelyn Furman the owner of the Tabor Opera House in Leadville and a knowledgeable historian on all things Tabor expresses the overriding belief that Baby's bleak vigil is a thing to be pitied. "Abject poverty", "desolate place", "desperate life", strong statements such as those provide visuals to the situation in which Baby kept herself.

David Karsner, the author of Silver Dollar, a book written about the Tabor's in 1932, was published while Baby Doe was still in residence at the mine. He states in his book:

I attempt no interview with Baby Doe. It would have been folly to do so. The story had been told to me many times by numerous people, probably with more clarity and authenticity than she could remember it and piece it together after passing nearly 30 years in the terrible silence of a solitary shack beside a skeleton mine on the summit of the Rockies.⁴⁰

Truth be told, he did attempt an interview and was turned away at the door by Baby Doe; she did not desire publicity and therefore had no interest in helping him write about herself. In this quote, he doubts her clarity of events that happened to herself, believing those who recorded them second hand. He also uses dramatic language such as, "terrible

³⁹ Evelyn Livingston Furman My Search for Augusta Pierce Tabor: Leadville's First Lady (Denver- Quality Press, 1993), preface.

⁴⁰ David Karsner Silver Dollar: The Story of the Tabors (New York- Crown Publishers, 1932), 347.

silence,” “solitary shack,” “skeleton mine.” to paint a very lonely and dramatic image of Baby Doe Tabor’s surroundings.

Another author that portrays Baby as a solitary mystic alone with her memories is Gordon Langley Hall. In his book The Two Lives of Baby Doe, he elaborates on what those who were close to Baby Doe must have thought:

Then she tells me of the finery that once was hers. She likes to talk of the old days when Tabor was at the height of his fame and the Matchless was pouring forth its \$2,000 a day. The years seem to fall away from the faded old-face. I wonder how it can be possible for one who once had so much, to now have so little and yet want to live. Then I realize that she lives not in the same world as I, but in a world of her own creation- a world carried over from the past, peopled with the memories of those who have passed on. And in this world is one magnificent figure-Tabor.⁴¹

He, using Sue Bonnie, a friend of Baby Doe’s, as the courier, relays that Baby Doe preferred to live in a world of her own creation, where things are still as good as they used to be, and her family does not lay in tatters. This fact can be seen in the title of his book as well. The Two Lives of Baby Doe, he is interested in separating the two lives, the good from the bad.

⁴¹ Gordon Langley Hall The Two Lives of Baby Doe (Philadelphia- Macrae Smith Co., 1962), 231.

Two other authors also convey narratives of what the people surrounding her in Leadville believed. David Karsner who visited the area while writing his book on the Tabor saga states; “People turned and stared at her, many to laugh.”⁴² Baby changed dramatically in appearance following her removal to Leadville. She wore old baggy miner’s clothes, burlap sacks around her feet, and an old cap covering her long hair. Quite a switch from her days in satin dresses and diamonds. “It was difficult to believe the tiny woman was the once-glamorous Silver Queen.”⁴³ She had become a spectacle. Theresa O’Brien was a child during Baby’s residence at the mine and she remembers; “We children were afraid of Mrs. Tabor’s unusual behavior.”⁴⁴ Not only did the adults point and laugh, but also the children went out of their way to avoid the curiosity that was Baby Doe. “Mother often commented: ‘Isn’t it strange, children? Mrs. Tabor wanted to be famous. Look! Now she is famous the world over, and the elite are gone and forgotten.”⁴⁵ Her implication here is obvious, Baby Doe had become famous due to her reclusive behavior, not for her past glamour. John Burke best puts this idea into perspective,

She considered the Matchless a legacy of inestimable value. It was the obsession that would grip her for the remaining thirty-six years of her life, and if Baby Doe Tabor is a legend to match Horace Tabor’s it is not because of her dazzling beauty but because of her quest, full of loneliness and privation, for that ephemeral fortune under Fryer’s Hill.⁴⁶

⁴² David Karsner Silver Dollar: The Story of the Tabors (New York- Crown Publishers, 1932), 315.

⁴³ John Burke The Legend of Baby Doe: The Life and Times of the Silver Queen of the West (Lincoln- University of Nebraska Press- 1974), 212.

⁴⁴ Theresa O’Brien The Bitter Days of Baby Doe Tabor and Memories of the High Country (Pamphlet- no date, no publisher), 5.

⁴⁵ Theresa O’Brien, et al. 7.

⁴⁶ John Burke, The Legend of Baby Doe: The Life and Times of the Silver Queen of the West (Lincoln- University of Nebraska Press, 1974), 181.

There are authors who view Baby's devotion to the mine in a far more flattering light. They view her as a woman full of pride, holding onto hope of a better future. They acknowledge that even if her mind failed her in later years, she was still a powerful figure and deserves respect, not pity. Baby persevered and survived many years in isolation, Gordon Langley Hall again dictates this perfectly; "Yet still Baby Doe struggled on. Rain, snow, temperatures falling to twenty below, rotting timber shafts and mountain rats- nothing could stop that gallant spirit."⁴⁷ Baby did manage to survive harsh winters and an empty belly for many years, her strong belief in Horace as well as in the Matchless giving her the strength to continue on for so long.

⁴⁷ Gordon Langley Hall The Two Lives of Baby Doe (Philadelphia- Macrae Smith Co., 1962), 235.

When she visited the many small grocery stores of that day, she would purchase enough food to keep body and soul together. She would say in her proud way, ‘Please charge this, and I will pay you because I am Mrs. Tabor.’⁴⁸

Helen Skala gives the reader the opportunity to see how much belief Baby truly had in the Matchless. During her lonely vigil, she sought no aid from others. She charged things at the stores, believing someday they would be paid in full, but in fact her bills were paid out of the town charity fund, a fact that if known by Baby, would have infuriated her. “Food and clothing bundles sent to her cabin by sympathetic friends were most often sent back to them un-opened.”⁴⁹ She wouldn’t accept charity; she purchased minimal food from the town stores. Even those who were her friends in the good old days were not permitted to aid Baby, at least with her knowledge.

Baby’s lonely death at the Matchless evoked powerful emotions in those who wrote about the event, even in contemporary authors like John Burke,

One Denver newspaper rather sensibly commented that Baby Doe ‘exemplified a pride unparalleled in the romance and hardships of the Old West...Her pride was in herself and her memories...Men and women are horrified at her ‘queer existence’ and lonely death. Don’t feel sorry for Baby Doe. She who sought no sympathy in life would want none now.’⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Helen Skala and Dora Krocesky Leadville’s Tales from the Old Timers (Gunnison- B&B Printers, 1972), 9-10.

⁴⁹ Helen Skala and Dora Kroesky Leadville’s Tales from the Old Timers (Gunnison- B&B Printers, 1972), 7.

⁵⁰ John Burke The Legend of Baby Doe: the Life and Times of the Silver Queen of the West (Lincoln-

This paragraph is so powerful, and so true to Baby's life. John Burke uses statements from friends of Baby Doe to construct logic behind her devotion to the mine:

University of Nebraska Press, 1974), 225.

‘I’ll never let the Matchless go while there’s breath in my body,’ she replied. ‘I have no reason for living if I do not have faith in the Matchless. No dear one is left to me. I have only this one legacy of my great love. It is my mission and my life.’⁵¹

Baby’s quest to save the Matchless was also a quest to save her past. Her memories were dear to her, all she had left really, and the Matchless was the foundation upon which those memories were built.

It was only a lonely shack to other people, but in her cabin she was surrounded by the evidence of a glamorous past; the walls were papered with yellowing newspaper photographs, and there were trunks and boxes filled with other souvenirs.⁵²

However lonely her home may have been, it was a shrine to her glory days, to Horace, to their daughters, as well as to their long gone riches. The strongest support of Baby’s vigil came from the primary sources of her time, especially newspaper articles written after her body was discovered. A letter from Silver Dollar while she was still living with Baby Doe to Lily who had relocated to Chicago shows Silver’s diluted yet devoted idea of Baby.

The mine will be saved, mamma is the most wonderful in the world, the most magnificent intellect, fearless and with powerful strength of character that she risks all to do the right thing. She is so respected, honored and loved by the good citizens of this state for the honorable way in which she has lived that they

⁵¹ John Burke The Legend of Baby Doe: The Life and Times of the Silver Queen of the West (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974) 210-211.

⁵² John Burke, et al. 220.

scream at her across streets and stop elevators in midair to wish her God's blessing and success.⁵³

⁵³ Evelyn Livingston Furman Silver Dollar Tabor: The Leaf in the Storm (Englewood- Quality Press, 1982), 105-106

Baby's seemingly martyr like death caused great fascination in the media. She was found on the floor of her cabin, frozen. It gave the world the final sensational chapter in the Tabor saga. "All was silence and peace. They broke a window to enter. Lying on the floor was the body of Baby Doe Tabor, Silver Queen of Colorado, frozen in the shape of a cross."⁵⁴ Baby's body was discovered by friend Sue Bonnie and miner Tom French who grew concerned when they did not see smoke rising from the chimney of Baby's cabin. Together they waded through 6' snow banks to get to her home. There they saw the end to the Queen. History says she was frozen into the shape of a cross. Truthfully the coroners report said that her death was altogether unpleasant, she had scratched herself bloody, pulled her hair out in clumps and died contorted on the floor. But the belief in the former shows authors and readers need to believe Baby had some purpose for her vigil.

'Her lonely 35-year vigil was a dedication to the man she loved and expiation for past sins,' said Caroline Bancroft, who wrote a biography of Baby. 'The Matchless was an altar where, with her life as a lighted candle, she held perpetual service- and upon which she finally sacrificed herself.'⁵⁵

Baby's vigil could be understood better when put into religious context. Religion being a place where devout devotion is expected, Baby epitomized this devotion. Her however was, devotion to a force nobody else understood.

Her long vigil extended through a World War, the giddy Nineteen-twenties, into the black years of the depression, and past the making of a movie about her own life. At long last, it was ended on March 7, 1935. There, in the Matchless

⁵⁴ Gordon Langley Hall, The Two Lives of Baby Doe (Philadelphia- Macrae Smith Co., 1962), 236.

⁵⁵ Gayle C. Shirley More Than Petticoats: Remarkable Colorado Women (Guilford- Globe Pequot Press, 2002), 93.

Cabin, she was found, frozen, her arms flung out to make her body the shape of a cross. Her spirit was gone to be reunited to her cherished Tabor in death.⁵⁶

Bancroft, the author of the above quote, gives us historical context to go along with Baby's vigil, the war, the 1920s, the depression- all things which merely happened, and didn't matter to Baby who sat alone through all of them at the mine. Following her death, her spirit could truly be free. She had protected the mine for many years, and now she could retreat to be with her family. Although she was considered a societal outcast prior to her death, she as the outcast has made Colorado history. One author comments on this fact in an article entitled Death of Two Queens:

⁵⁶ Caroline Bancroft, "Tabor Luck" no date, no magazine title.

Two Silver Queens: Lena Allen Soiber dies in wealth and luxury at her villa in Stressa, Italy. As graciously as she lived, she disposes of her immense fortune among friends, relatives, persons who had served her. There are few stories in the papers, that's all. Baby Doe Tabor dies in poverty and squalor in her shack at the Matchless. Her death literally sets the reading world aflame with its crescendo of tragedy, its requiem of a great and beautiful love. Two silver queens: one dies in riches, one in utter poverty.⁵⁷

Baby Doe despite her poor end captivated the media. She became this timeless figure through her devotion to her faithful husband Horace. Baby easily could have gone another way after Horace's death. Yet she chose to remain in Leadville alone for 36 years. In doing so, she became immortalized:

The memory of B.D. Tabor and her strange, almost unbelievable life will live as long as there are persons to pay honor to the heroic men and women builders of the west. More than any other woman, she typifies a romantic and glamorous era. She accepted wealth with all its pleasures and powers as her just due and she was courageous and independent in the face of poverty and hardship.⁵⁸

The unknown author of this quote personifies Baby Doe perfectly. She took what came her way, and accepted it as her bit. Because of this she remains legendary and a key figure to western storytelling. Again John Burke's puts this into perfect perspective,

⁵⁷ Eva Hodges, Collection of Baby Doe Tabor Clippings (Denver Public Library- April 12, 1935)

⁵⁸ Eva Hodges, et al. (DPL- April 18, 1935) "Will Live as Heroic Example"

Time has not darkened the Baby Doe legend. Along with the Unsinkable Molly Brown, another reject from the old Capitol Hill society, she is an integral part of that legendary Colorado which has been cleaned, gilded, and buffed to a glittering sheen for the tourist industry.⁵⁹

Baby Doe Tabor, Molly Brown, Silver Dollar Tabor, these strong women who cared not for what others thought of them, they went about their own way, and that is what they are remembered for. Whereas the Augusta Tabors and Lily Tabors who followed the rules and stayed under the radar, are, tragically forgotten. Baby Doe, in spite of all the tragedy in her life, is a symbol of the West, whether pitied or admired one cannot help being fascinated by the legend of Baby Doe.

Caroline Bancroft, the leading Tabor historian of her time, best puts this into perspective,

Despite the dazzling chapters and the stories consistent flamboyance, hers is a tragic tale. Although she epitomized a roistering era and a swashbuckling way of life made possible by the mining frontier of Colorado, the granite gloom of those powerful mountains has forever lowered the curtain on her dramatic period and on the valiant, if mistaken, spirit of Baby Doe Tabor.⁶⁰

Baby Doe has remained an integral part of Colorado history. She is mentioned in textbooks, has a store named after her at CU, her face is immortalized on the side of the State Historical Societies building in downtown Denver, the Matchless Mine is open to

⁵⁹ John Burke The Legend of Baby Doe: The Life and Times of the Silver Queen of the West (Lincoln- University of Nebraska Press, 1974), 227.

⁶⁰ Caroline Bancroft Silver Queen: The Fabulous Story of Baby Doe Tabor (Boulder- Johnson Publishing Co., 1950), 80.

tourists now and one can see where Baby Doe kept her vigil. Tourism has made her famous, and her stories continual retelling has kept her alive. She is timeless and an important figure to study whenever Colorado is the topic. She is the image of the West, of the bang and bust economy that was supported by many. She took everything that came her way, and lived with it, whether it was good or bad. And her memory will live as long as there are those who look to Colorado's history.