

### Elizabeth Báthory

It's 1560 in Slovakia. The Báthory family rules most of the kingdom and they are the richest family for miles. The family has just received their newborn baby girl Elizabeth. She lives among rich knights and powerful men, so it is not undeniable that the young girl sees things that no child should ever have to see. It is said that young Elizabeth was witness to a captured thief being sewn into the stomach of a dying horse and was left to perish. Although her distinguished family included kings, cardinals, knights, and judges it was said to be composed of some very disturbed kin. One of her uncles was supposedly instructing her in satanism while an aunt was telling her all about sadomasochism. Since the family condones such violence it is easier to understand why she grew up to be such a heartless killer. By the age of 12 she was engaged to Ferenc Nádasdy and married by 14, in what was likely a political arrangement within the circles of the aristocracy. She was known to have several affairs with people of the lower class after their marriage. Her husband died in 1604 of either a battle wound or a disease, she was 43.

Her killing sprees were estimated to have taken place between 1585 and 1610. This means she would have been approximately 25 when she began. All of her victims were servant women, and there were estimated to be between 30 to 650 victims. The discrepancy lies in the fact that this did take place in the late 1500s and that there were a lot of different accounts of what took place behind the castles closed doors. Most of her victims were girls from lower class families who could not afford to take care of them, and they thought sending them to a rich castle to become a maid would improve their life, but it did the complete opposite. To please his wife Ferenc made her a torture chamber in their vast estate. Although her husband most likely participated in his wife's cruelties, he may have also restrained some of her impulses; when he died she became much worse.

She was a torturous cold hearted killer, that is something that historians all agree on, but the kinds of torture may be debatable. One claim says that she bathed in her virgin victims blood because it would keep her looking youthful. However this story likely came from the media many years later. Others say she drank her victims blood for the same reason, and this is a more likely scenario. Witnesses told of her stabbing victims or biting them in various locations, cutting them with scissors, sticking needles into their lips or under their fingernails, and burning them. Some were beaten to death, but others were starved. She tied them down and smeared them with honey to be attacked by bees and ants. One unfortunate girl was even forced to cook and eat her own flesh.

Elizabeth was not the only one in on these horrific activities. She had three elderly women maids, and one disfigured boy servant helped her torture her victims. The boy was less involved in the events than the others when they got found out so he got mercy after the sentencing. He was decapitated then thrown in a fire. The three older women had their fingers torn off and then they were thrown into the fire *alive*, nothing like good old fashioned medieval punishment.

The blood countess herself was incarcerated August 26, 1610 by Count Gyorgy on orders from King Matthias. He discovered Countess Elizabeth Bathory directing a torture session on young girls upon his arrival. Elizabeth had began finding her victims among the daughter of the noblemen in their kingdom, and this is what drew the attention of the king finally. Bathory was already infamous in the area for her torture and murder of servants and peasants, but her title and high-ranking relatives had, until this point, made her untouchable. In January 1611, Bathory and her cohorts were put on trial for 80 counts of murder. Elizabeth herself was not put on trial, because of her family's standing, but she was confined to a tower in Čachtice Castle without any windows or doors. A trial and execution of Elizabeth would have caused a public scandal and disgrace the noble family, and her considerable estate would have been seized by the crown. King Matthias was successfully convinced that bringing Elizabeth to trial would negatively affect the nobility, so the trial was abandoned instead. Her partners were tried and ultimately charged and executed as described previously.

There was only two forms of evidence found against her, but there was a lot of it. There were over 300 witnesses who testified against the Countess. Some of the testimonials were so vile that they actually became legend. Elizabeth is believed to be a primary inspiration for Bram Stoker's Dracula, and other forms of literature and entertainment. The number of charges that were brought up by the testimonies was so long that it takes up to ten pages single spaced. One witness reported that Bathory had kept a book where she had a list of over 650 victims. The location of this supposed diary is unknown. The other form of evidence was what the authorities found when they went to investigate. When they arrived she was reportedly in the middle of one of her torture sessions and had found a freshly-buried corpse and a cowering servant, badly beaten but still alive. After investigating through the night they found the bodies of dead or dying girls strewn about, all having suffered from torture: beaten, flogged, burned, and stabbed. Within a few hours, additional bodies and victims would be found within the castle itself. There was barely any evidence that could even consider her innocent, and with the villagers knowledge of her crimes there were no other suspects.

After Elizabeth was locked away in solitary confinement she lived about 4 years in the tower she died August 1614 at the age of 54. The Blood Countess herself is said to be one of the most prolific female killers in history and is only outnumbered by Dracula (Vlad the Impaler) himself. Her countless murders were so horrific that Hungary created a law that forbade anyone from saying her name. Her demonic legacy will most definitely go down in history as one of the most cold hearted, bossy, and powerful women to walk the earth.

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