The Historian by Elizabeth Kostova

I had run across this book several times on the library shelves and picked it up due to the title, because I like reading historical fiction, but after I read the description on the inside cover which described the book as a search for Dracula, I always quickly returned it to the shelves. Dracula is not anything I was interested in reading about. Then last month it turned out that The Historian was one of the suggestions for this month's book club theme, "Gothic Fiction," so I thought, why not, and began to read it.

The plot begins with a teenage girl finding an envelope full of old letters behind books in her father's library. The letters were written by her father's university professor and mentor. The professor's letters chronicle information he has learned about Vlad the Impaler, better known as Count Dracula. The letters warn the reader about the danger that comes with that knowledge, because Dracula is still alive.

The professor's discovery has put not only the teenage girl's father's life in danger, but now, also her own, because they both now possess this knowledge. When she asks her father about the letters, she can tell by his reaction that he is suddenly seriously stressed because of her involvement.

The storyline and the way it was written caused some confusion to me because it jumps all around with different characters living in different decades in time and different locations in Europe as they search for the clues about Dracula. It didn't help that it is written in the first person and I was sometimes confused which character the "I" was referring to. Sometimes it's the father in the past and sometimes it's the daughter in the present. As father and daughter travel around Europe separately seeking information about the burial place of Dracula, they encounter resistance and murder.

One of the characteristics I seek in novels is believability, it can be a pretty far fetched story, but if it is written in a logical way I can often accept it, but if things happen that strike me as implausible, the story quickly loses all credibility to me and my interest in the novel wanes.

That is what happened in this novel. The father and a woman are both seeking information in a library about Dracula. A man with two scabs on his neck who has been following them, attacks the woman and bites her on the neck before being fought off. The father who sees her getting bitten, asks her if she's okay, and offers to go get help. She declines saying she is okay, and he just says no more about it even though she always wears a scarf around her neck thereafter.

This seemed too ridiculous an action for someone who had dedicated his life to studying Dracula. It was difficult for me to get too serious about the book after that and I
started seeing other things that didn't really seem logical.

I was suddenly irritated by the "letter," supposedly written to the daughter to explain what had happened in the past. This letter goes on chapter after chapter and was supposedly written the night before the father disappeared. The letter is so detailed, full of descriptions of the cities, crowds, nuanced actions, and rooms. It was way too far fetched to believe this was what the father quickly jotted off to his daughter the night before he left to go out and find Dracula. I just couldn't accept such a long "tome" as being a realistic letter.

By this time I was halfway through the 640 page book. I felt no compassion or interest in any of the characters, and could care less if they all got bitten by vampires, so I cut my losses and quit reading.