

## I MUST BETRAY YOU

By Ruta Sepetys

319 pp. Philomel Books. 2022.

[Ruta Sepetys](#) (1967 Michigan—) writes historical novels for young adults (YA) that pile up [awards](#), and are translated widely and adapted for [film](#). *I Must Betray You*, her sixth book, is about the Romanian revolution, December 1989, that ended the brutal, twenty-four-year Communist reign of Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife and accomplice, Elena. The narrator Cristian Florescu is a seventeen-year-old high schooler and aspiring writer, the only son in a three-generation household in a concrete apartment block in Bucharest. Food, electricity, and other essentials are rationed. Kents are currency on the black market, and an estimated one in ten citizens are informers. Cristian traffics in both cigarettes and secrets for medicine for his ailing grandfather, Bunu, who warns: "trust no one" (49). Cristian trusts only his notebook, recording his observations, his outrages, and his passion (her name is Liliana Pavel)—a tell-all that he plots to secret out of the country to the free world. Romania, a Johnny-come-lately to the Revolutions of 1989, finally unleashes its call for "Li-ber-ta-te!" in Maria Square in Timisoara, and it spreads to Bucharest. Cristian joins the street battle, and learns of the sticky web of betrayals between family members and among neighbors. The army ultimately betrays the regime, and the fight is won. Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu are executed. Sepetys' signature is "seeker of lost stories." In eighty-one chapters whirring with action and suspense, the author has recovered Cristian's secret notebook of "empty promises" (48) and "[s]pectacular hope" (283). —Lisa Thaler (author, *Look Up: The Life and Art of Sacha Kolin*), 12 June 2022