I like to think about how my characters would fare in real world situations sometimes, and today, I'm thinking about what the conversation would be like if I tried to tell Katsa that she won an award. I think she'd be extremely confused. People knew her story and thought it was a good one? Really? People *voted* for her? Why would they do that? To be honest, I'm not sure I could get Katsa to understand it. Maybe Po could help explain. I don't expect he'd be particularly surprised by any of it.

I myself was both surprised and delighted to learn that *Graceling* had won the Florida Teens Read Award. It can be hard for a writer to finish a book and have to let go of it. The book is suddenly no longer hers; it belongs to readers. It feels like a personal loss to the writer, and it can be scary too—what if her book gets beaten up in the big bad world? But now I realize that I needn't have worried. *Graceling* found its home and the place where it belongs. Florida! Thank you so much, readers, for loving this book and taking such good care of it. You are a comfort to the author's heart.

Thank you also to the tireless media specialists of Florida who make this program possible. I hope you're proud of the work you do.

I'd like to mention, before I close, something for Florida readers to watch out for in my next book, which is called *Bitterblue* and is coming out soon. When I began writing *Bitterblue*, I lived in Jacksonville, Florida. Every day, I took a sunset walk along the St. Johns River and watched the long-legged birds preening themselves and napping and squawking at each other on the pilings. I'm from Pennsylvania. The birds of Florida were a revelation to me; we don't see birds like that up north and inland.

Then I moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, and finished writing *Bitterblue*. Readers of *Graceling* may remember the character of Bitterblue, who is ten in *Graceling*. She's eighteen in the book that bears her name. Her castle sits on a river that I describe as being "wide as a bay," and there's a scene where she stands by that river with Po, watching the long-legged birds preening themselves on the pilings.

In my heart, those birds are Florida birds, that wide river is the St. Johns, and those pilings are the ones I saw on my walk every day. When a writer misses a place, she writes it into her books. Do you see why I feel a special connection to the readers of Florida?

I thank you for this honor, with all my heart. And I think that once Katsa came to understand that people actually did decide to give her an award, she would be proud.

-Kristin Cashore